Title
Choreographing [in] Pakistan: Indu Mitha, Dancing Occluded histories in "The Land of the Pure"

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Choreographing [in] Pakistan:
Indu Mitha, Dancing Occluded histories in “The Land of the Pure”

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

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

by

Feriyal Amal Aslam

2012
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Choreographing [in] Pakistan:
Indu Mitha, Dancing Occluded histories in “The Land of the Pure”

By

Feriyal Amal Aslam
Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance
University of California, Los Angeles, 2012
Professor Janet O’Shea & Professor David Gere (Co-Chairs)

This critical biography of Indu Mitha, a Pakistani dancer and choreographer, lays out an alternate, creative history of sixty-four years of post-Partition Pakistan. Her life and work enable choreographing an occluded space on stage and beyond, which I call space of hope — a space of alterity, a place where narratives countering the nation state boundaries enforced by the 1947 Partition of British India into the three independent states of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh (1971). This space is not a post-colonial one, but is based on a longer shared historical specificity of South Asia. Indu Mitha’s life and work enable this journey into occluded spaces, into an alternate history of sixty-four years of post-Partition Pakistan. These spaces of hope are foci to probing broader questions about the place of the outliers, i.e. Muslims in India, and non-Muslims and “non-Pakistanis” in Pakistan (Post 1971), in the aftermath of the 1947 Partition of India. This dissertation stages the untold history of these minority voices of classical dancers and musicians in Pakistan, and in the process questions whether their marginal statuses are due to factors connected to the
aftermath of Partition, or to a redundant pre-colonial baggage, or both.

By taking a creative approach to writing a shared history of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh beyond Partition, this dissertation presents controversial, contested histories that are closer to the ground realities of people in the region. Methodology involved triangulating Indu’s bharata natyam, kathak and Uday Shankar choreographies with her life history, parallel to key moments of South Asian history from the early twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century. This new “creative approach” brings together, for the first time, cutting edge work in the fields of post-colonial histories and Partition aftermath studies with dance history scholarship, in particular critical bharata natyam studies. This project uses the rich lyric mode and story-telling tradition of bharata natyam, syncretic aspects of kathak, and the creative style of Indu's Uday Shankar repertoire to narrate alternative histories that have been silenced and/or ignored in official narratives. These histories call for a rethinking of the occluded inclusive and secular vision of founding father Jinnah as protector-general of the minorities.

Key words:

Indu Mitha life history, bharata natyam dance, South Asian dances, Occluded history, India – Pakistan Partition Aftermath, Feminine and minority spaces.
The dissertation of Feriyal Amal Aslam is approved.

Susan L. Foster

Nile S. Green

Janet O'Shea Committee Co-Chair

David Gere Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012
Dedicated to

\textit{Abu Jaan},

for lessons to always turn to my \textit{maN kii adalat} (court of the heart)

\&

\textit{Sayangku Wilmar},

for making sure I follow its verdict
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

[Based on Linguist Gyanam Mahajan’s Introductory Hindi-Urdu Reader, Fall 2011, UCLA]

Vowels: a aa i ii u uu e o ai au

Nasalization: M (indicates that the preceding vowel is nasalized)

Consonants (C):

be b ب  shin sh ش
pe p ب  suaad s ص
te t ت  zuaad z ض
Te T ت  toeM t ط
sc s س  zoem z ظ
jiim j ج  ain a/i ع
ce c ج  Gain G غ
he h ج/ه  fe f ف
xe x خ  qaaf q ق
daal d د  kaaf k ك
Daal D ذ  gaaf g غ
zaal z ذ  laam l ل
re r ر  miim m م
Re R ز  nuun n/N ن
ze z ز  vao v/w و
siin s س  ye y ن

Aspiration: C+h
I use Dr. Mahajan’s system of transliteration for all except some popular names. This system based on C.M. Naim’s approach to teaching Urdu, works best for me due to the oral and embodied nature of my data, i.e. dance and music traditions. I also chose Dr. Mahajan’s system due to her unique teaching approach as a Linguist towards teaching Hindi-Urdu as primarily the same language, and her efforts to not get taught up in nation-state politics in language and culture teaching.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I come to the culmination of this dissertation, which is a decade long process as it started years before my actual PhD, I am filled with gratitude for all that I have received on all levels of my being: guidance, friendship, love, inspiration. Alhamdulillah. I have met teachers at every step of this journey, of this world and other worlds. In my first anthropology masters at the Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad I am thankful to my mentor the late Ahmad Hassan Dani who set up the first anthropology department in Pakistan in 1974, he was one of the most generous teachers I know and to his students he always emphasized Pakistan’s Central Asian links and ties as opposed to the Arab one pushed forward as the “Islamic” connection. My masters’s advisor Tariq Rehman for his guidance on my dissertation on “The Rubabis” which I can now see was a beginning to questioning the unfinished business of 1947 Partition. I am thankful to Grace Clark at United States Educational Foundation of Pakistan (USEFP) for continued support for this project from my first masters in Social and Cultural Anthropology in the United States to early years of my PhD at UCLA. At the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UH) my advisor Geoffrey White who urged me to see Indu ji’s life history parallel to story of the nation. At the East West Centre (EWC) I continue to learn from generous scholars like Rick Trimillos, Aslam Syed, Ned Bertz. At the EWC life long friendships which nourish my personal and academic life which are to name here. In particular I want to thank apumoni Raana Dilruba Yasmin for helping me conduct proxy interviews in Islamabad with Indu Mitha’s male students while I was writing my final chapter in Los Angeles.

Starting my PhD at WAC/D I was fortunate to have two committee chairs Janet O’Shea and David Gere which combined for me expertise in dance history scholarship and activism. David and Janet gave me ample space and expert advice needed to grapple with my complex context. I am so thankful for Susan Foster’s incredible support and faith in my project, and her inspiring

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scholarship and mentorship. My external member Nile Green was only too willing to read my work at every stage of the process something I am today so grateful for. Thanks to Peter Sellars my reader for insisting I bring more of my voice and my story in the dissertation. Amongst WAC/D faculty many thanks for their support at different stages of this project: Judy Mitoma, John Bishop, Allen Roberts, Victoria Marks, Angelia Leung, David Shortner, Anurima Banerji, Aparna Sharma, and to Arsenio Apillanes, Sylvili Thomas, Lilian Woe in the staff. Thankful to all WAC/D friends especially CedarBough Sacji, Lorena Alvarado, Yehuda Sharim, Jose Reynoso, Kat Williams, Cristina Rosa, Angeline Shaka, Mathew Sandoval, Ana Paula Höfling, Rosemary Candelario, and outside WAC/D Farzana Nayani, Shafiq Meyer, Hyeon Ju Lee, and Joan Scanlan who have been there for me at every stage of this journey.

Since day one at UCLA I have been truly blessed to work as Urdu teaching assistant with a generous nurturing mentor like Gyanam Mahajan. Mahajan ji went out of her way to ensure that I was adequately nourished both financially and on all aspects of student life throughout my PhD. Constant support of my dear mother Zahida Aslam, from her expert Urdu, Persian language skills to a push to excellence and her prioritizing of studies before everything else. Thankful for my brilliant and loving brother and sister Rehan Sheikh and Savera Khan for their encouragement for my dreams. All my extended family and cousins who pray for me and urge me to finish so I can return back to Pakistan. I could not be at this stage of completion without the love and full support of my dear husband from day one and my parents-in-law, Mama-Papa, especially during my year of writing in Indonesia. In Los Angeles my spiritual family at Nur Ashki Jerrahi especially Sheikha Ashegul Ashki, Khan have given me strength and patience to endure all the ups and downs of this arduous process of dissertating. And last but not the least I express my gratitude to all my teachers especially my first dance teacher and inspiration for this topic Indu ji and her daughter Tehreema ji through this dissertation.

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CURRICULUM VITA

FERIYAL AMAL ASLAM
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RESEARCH INTERESTS  Asian (South and South East Asian) performing arts, cultural history, gender, Sufi Islam and mysticism around the world, cultural policy and representation, tourism and politics of heritage preservation, creative history writing.

EDUCATION

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<td>2012</td>
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<td>Culture &amp; Performance</td>
<td>University of California at Los Angeles</td>
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<td>Aug 2006</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Social/Cultural Anthropology</td>
<td>University of Hawaii at Manoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2000</td>
<td>MSc.</td>
<td>Social/Cultural Anthropology</td>
<td>Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HONORS & AWARDS


_East-West Centre Awards:_ East West Centre affiliate (2005-6), Offered East-West Centre Graduate Degree Fellowship 2006-10 but declined. East-West Center’s video project.

Gold medal for “Best All Round Student” at O.P.F Girls College, 1995 batch.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

_Urdu/Hindi_ (Urdu/Hindi TA at Asian Languages & Cultures Department UCLA 2006-08, Winter 09, Winter-Spring 2012) Spoken _Punjabi_, and reading _Arabic_, beginner level _Bahasa Indonesia_

TRAININGS/SKILLS/DANCE TECHNIQUES


Ethnographic filming and editing training.


RECENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

_Summer Session 2012_  Co-Teaching course _World Dance Histories at WAC/D, UCLA_.

_Jan-June 2012_  Teaching Fellow course Hindi-Urdu, Department Asian Languages and Cultures, UCLA.
Jan-Mar 2012  Teaching Fellow course “World Dance Histories” at Department of World Arts and Cultures (UCLA).

June 2010-July 2010  Teaching Associate course Hollywood, Bollywood and Westwood at Asian Languages and Cultures department (ALC), University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA).

April 2010-June 2010  Teaching Associate course “Art as Moral Action” at Department of World Arts and Cultures (WAC), UCLA.

Jan 2010-June 2010  Urdu Teaching Associate for the Hindi-Urdu Program at the Asian Languages and Cultures department (ALC), UCLA.

Sep 2009- Dec 2009  Teaching Assistant course “Art as Social Action” at Department of World Arts and Cultures (WAC), UCLA.

Jan 2007- June 2009  Urdu Teaching assistant (TA) for the Hindi/Urdu Program, ALC, UCLA.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AND PERFORMANCES
-Chew on This (COT) colloquium series at WAC/D, UCLA. “Choreographing Inclusivity: A Dancer, A Tree and a City, May 29, 2012.
-“A Creative Approach to a People’s History of South Asia”, at Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore December 2011.
-December 2011: Conducted workshop and performed bharata natyam at opening night of Urban Arts Festival, ISI Bandung.
-November 2011, Pakistani bharata natyam at National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta opening the exhibition “Dreams stiched in color”.
-“In the Garden: Choreographing a historical voyage from Pakistan to Colonial India”, 9th International Graduate Student Conference, East-West Center, Honolulu, Feb 2010.
-Chew on This (COT) colloquium series at WAC/D. “Choreographing (in) Pakistan beyond Partition: Nation, Gender and Bharata Natyam” at “Chew on This”, Dec 2009.
-“Partitioning Cultures: Change and Continuity in a South Indian Classical dance form through the life history of a Pakistani Bharata Natyam teacher”, 7th International Graduate Student Conference, East- West Center, February 2007.

CHOREOGRAPHIC COLLABORATIONS
Classical Sundanese choreograph with Indra Poerwo Lukman, Contemporary Indonesian dance with (ISI) Bandung choreographer Alfiyanto and Contemporary Indian dance with Meena Murugesan.
INTRODUCTION

Salaam (Peace and Blessings)

“Salaam is a greeting of peace and blessings, a first hello you must say to anyone and everyone you meet,” my mother told me since I was a child. She said you must take initiative and say salaam even to strangers on the street. It is part of Islamic tradition and every good Muslim should greet another Muslim in this manner.¹ Then one day in the year 1999, I met a petite, graceful, elderly woman who, though not a Muslim, would help me gain a deeper understanding of this greeting of Salaam. Her name was Indu Mitha and she was an invited guest speaker in my South Asian Anthropology class at Quaid-e-Azam University’s Anthropology department where I was a student. She gave a lecture demonstration on the classical dance tradition bharata natyam. I was taken by the stories she narrated through gestures, her body, and voice, and I knew I wanted to be her student. Instead, my dear mother subtly discouraged me, and urged me to focus on my vocal classical singing lessons. Some years later I finally became Indu Mitha’s student and although she was not a Muslim, and the dance she taught had no established Muslim background, the first thing I learned was the greeting of salaam but in dance language.

Ahead I greet you all with a salaam, a greeting of peace and blessings using the language of the dance form of bharata natyam the way that I first learned it with Indu.² Since then I have learned

¹ There is a little different ending of the greeting if you happen to greet a Non-Muslim.

² For the purposes of this dissertation I refer to Indu Mitha by her first name “Indu,” as this is her preference. The primary reason for this is that Indu is uncomfortable being referred as “Mitha” due to the fact that her husband was referred to as such by his colleagues, especially those giving him a tough time for it sounding “Hindu,” rather than
slightly different versions of the *salaam* in bharata natyam from a Buddhist Japanese teacher, Izumi Sato³, and from a Hindu Indian teacher, Viji Prakash⁴ under whom I trained briefly, but the movements except for the slight variation in the ending are primarily the same. The *salaam* is a good example for me to show how Indu has made subtle changes while staying within the structure of the dance form of bharata natyam (and kathak) both to suit her nature and vision and for its survival and relevance in its new context of Pakistan. I was unaware of the scale and importance of Indu’s contributions to these forms while I was her student, until I left Pakistan to pursue further studies in Anthropology and came to the East West Center, Honolulu. In Izumi Sato’s bharata natyam in the dance department of the University of Hawaii at Manoa I learned the Sanskrit version of the hand gestures that Indu had carefully translated into Urdu and became aware of the work that Indu had put in to make the dance accessible to her students, who were mostly, like me, Pakistani, Muslim, Urdu speakers with no context for Sanskrit. Viji Prakash at UCLA’s Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance helped push me into a productive uncomfortable space as I became aware of resistance to bowing before the guru at the end of *salaam* and touching the feet of the teacher, something Indu herself is uncomfortable with and never encouraged her students to do. Plus in the Muslim context where one only bows before God, Indu changed that ending of the *salaam*.

³Izumi Sato training in bharata natyam in Indian in the Ganesa Natyalaya under the guidance of Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan in New Delhi, India. I was her student while she was a graduate student at the Dance department of the University of Hawaii at Manoa 2005-6.

⁴Viji Prakash has been trained in Tanjavur tradition under Gurus Kalyansundaram and late Guru Mahalingam Pillai, of the Sri Raja Rajeshwari Bharata Natyan Kala Mandir, Bombay. I first took classes with her at the department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance (WAC/D) where she has been adjunct faulty since 1999. Later I also joined in her Shakti School of Bharata Natyam. See the official website of her school and company for more details (http://www.shaktidancecompany.com/index.php/viji-prakash/about).
1. Dancing Salaam

I stand upright feet together and hands in a titli (butterfly) mudra, which is made by holding three fingers, thumb, and two forefingers together but stretched out tightly. My other two fingers spread out from there. Both hands are held at chest level and face each other, almost but not touching. Elbows are up. Once ready in this position, feet are lifted to stamp in the first position of bharata natyam, where all of your body, including the legs, is held straight. First the right foot, then the left, is lifted and stamped to the beat of one and two. Next the hands and arms are stretched out in front of the chest with thumbs facing down. Bring them first away from the body in front center and then back closer to the chest towards the center, thumbs down. From this center position the hands start turning in a small circle with the thumbs slowly coming towards the upper side. The downward thumbs become upwards thumbs at the same time as the elbows are turned in and out again. It ends with the hands stretched out palms up in a horizontal line, parallel to the floor. Next I move to the third position in bharata natyam, while the outstretched palms complete their semi-circle to the front middle of the body as the body moves down, knees stretched outwards as the hands. Once again palms are down, and the earth is touched in reverence. From the earth the fingers touch the center of the forehead. Finally I am back to the first position, but the hands and arms make a wider circular movement in the body’s kinesphere and end in an arch framing the head as the palms touch.

FIGURE 1 Author dancing Indu Mitha’s bharata natyam repertoire in East-West Fest of the East-West Center (EWC), Honolulu, March 2006. Photographer- Dr. Mark Kimbrell (used with permission)
Indu explains to me and her students as we finish that the *salaam* in bharata natyam dance is about sending peace and blessings to all round you, both the space and the audience, and also to ask forgiveness from the earth before we can begin to strike our feet on it. The *salaam* was Indu Mitha’s first lesson to me in her dance class in Islamabad. A woman culturally Christian, teacher of a dance form popularly associated with Hindu temple dance, taught me, a practicing Muslim, a deeper understanding and meaning of *salaam*, a word which scholars argue is at the core and is the essence of *Islam* (the word *Islam* comes from the root “salaama,” which is peace and thus the name refers to a religion of peace and security). Though I had repeated the word *salaam* countless times through my voice, its finer embodied meanings would take a whole decade to begin to unveil, as nurtured by my engagement with the body as a tool of analysis. This dissertation is an integral part of this unveiling and it pauses and lingers on the in-between spaces that borders fail to divide and that persist despite them.

![Indu Mitha with her back leading the *salaam* at start of dance class in Maznum-e-Shauq, Islamabad, Summer 2005. Picture taken by author.](image)

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5 Personal correspondence with Urdu teacher Zahida Aslam. For further discussion and nuances of the roots of “Islam” see Pal, “Islam” means Peace, 4-43.
This deeper questioning of the roots of the everyday greeting of salaam, leads me to interrogate Islam with the story of the nartaki, the figure of the female dancer which also narrates to me an alternate history of South Asia which has been occluded. This line of questioning has brought me today to what I call a “creative approach” to an occluded people’s history of South Asia. Before I enumerate my approach, please allow me to share how I arrived at this point as that is an integral part of the end process. For this I move first to occluded movement practices. Using the approach of dance history scholars who put their bodies on the line, I step into this newly explored scholarship of writing and reading dance to choreograph a people’s history of South Asia through dance. I will use the example of a classical dance piece that I learned to illustrate my approach as well as share the process of getting there. I will use this dance repertoire as my starting focus on the body and all the bodies surrounding it, as per my training as a dancer and dance history scholar.

1.1 The Dancer, Her Body, and the Body of History

The rhythms of the tabla begin along with the sitar and the harmonium as I enter the stage clad in a saree tailored after hours of painful explanations to a Pakistani tailor into what everyone knows across the border as a bharatanatyam dress. I am the woman in love, proud and fully dressed up walking along until I see my lover looking at another woman and the singing voice of this woman whose persona my dancing being has embodied, is heard through the lyrics of the chorus of the song and they are as follows:

\[
\text{saaRii } \text{sunaihri oRb ke cup cup ke dekhti thii vo} \\
\text{baa Maey naey xu} \text{d dekha bai} \\
\text{ab kya kabey ga tuu} \\
\text{saaRii sunaihri}
\]

Translation:
She wore her beautiful golden sari and was making eyes at you, discreetly
Yes, I caught it with my own eyes
Now what do you have to say about that?
(The same lyrics are repeated in three more consecutive stanzas)
The dance is titled *saaRii sunaihrii (golden sari)* and the text is in the voice of a woman in love complaining to her lover that she saw him looking at another woman. The second part of the dance enacts, through dance, details of the “other woman,” the *gorii* (fair maiden), a village woman undertaking her daily chores of milking the cow and preparing the butter and then the naughty hero coming and stealing the butter that she so carefully prepared and put in a high place safe from the cat. I will not go into a detailed plot analysis of content and context of the dance\(^6\) because it is the process of relearning this dance that is integral for my purpose here. Choreographed and taught by my Pakistani bharata natyam teacher, Indu Mitha, who learned it in pre-partition “Pakistan,” the story is a love triangle narrated in a woman’s voice, set in the context of a rural agricultural setting.

I learned this dance piece, which is in the classical dance form of bharata natyam, in Pakistan due to the genius of one woman’s efforts to choreograph space for it in Pakistan beyond the religiosity attached with this form of dance in India post 1947, and despite the ban on dance in the 1970s and early 80s. I argue that in this process Indu Mitha also subtly choreographs a more tolerant space in the increasingly exclusive Muslim public space that she had found herself in. Today Indu continues to present this work to select audiences in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan, where she has been teaching it for more than a decade at her institute *Mazmun-e-Shauq*. Indu is of Bengali lineage and, like many other of her generation, had been an “Indian” for the first fifteen or more years of her life before deciding to join the Muslim army captain with whom she fell in love in 1947 to relocate to the newly born nation state of Pakistan. In India she came from a highly educated and connected Christian family. Her father was a philosopher with close links to Gandhi and *Rudrab*, and her mother was from a *Singhas* family. But as a young woman she chose Hindu temple dance as her preoccupation. She learned this dance in Delhi and Madras, but being more secular and culturally

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\(^6\) I focused on *saaRii sunaihrii* in a paper for Susan Foster’s “World Dance Histories” class at WAC, UCLA. The paper details analysis of the plot, props used in the paper for answering questions of the different content and context of the story of the dance taught to me by my teacher Indu Mitha in Pakistan compared to similar stories danced in the present Indian context.
oriented; she translated the Sanskrit content into Urdu and also took the Hindu God stories and choreographed them as stories of everyday life of people regardless of their religious belief. Indu learned the dance titled sareega tungu in Telegu from her dance teacher Lalita Shastri in South India. Later she translated it into Urdu for her new Pakistani context changing the content accordingly to saaRii sunaihrii (golden sari). Like most of Indu’s repertoire, saaRii sunaihrii interrogates changes and continuities in the dance form and the body as it moves across the borders of time from pre-Partition to present day Pakistan. Bharata natyam was implicated in the Indian nationalist movement of the 1920s and ‘30s as a consequence of a myriad of identity, nationalist, and religious politics, which has been well written about in its Indian context. saaRii sunaihrii helps ask the unheard question firstly of the current place of bharata natyam in Pakistan and the meaning of the dance in its present context, and on the broader societal level raises questions of continuity of Pakistan’s occluded Indic past and the tough cultural policy question of its place in the “Islamic” Pakistani nation.

1.2 Partitioned Bodies?

The process of thinking and writing about movement has been a journey in self-reflection, and one in which I danced in and out of my body, sometimes feeling in tune to it and other times feeling alienated. To read my body and that of those around me brought to the surface complex levels of representations that the body goes through. These dancing bodies are narrating a story, one of deep love, of relationships that go back generations, stories that everyone is aware of but no one likes to talk about. As my project developed and I got deeper into analyzing Indu Mitha’s life history, I could see how she embodies Partition in her body and her work. Both her name “Indu”
and the name of her preferred dance practice *bharata natyam* are wrongly associated with Pakistan’s enemy nation India, also known as *Bharat*. Indu met her husband on the eve of partition and married soon after, moving to the newly created state with her army husband. While her basic *bharata natyam* dance training was in pre-Partition India, all her choreographic work has been in post-Partition Pakistan. I propose that she is the embodiment of what I am calling as a “Partitioned body” representative of most of the people of present day Pakistan and India who were affected by the 1947 Partition of the Indian sub-continent. In both Indu’s life history and dance repertoire, Partition speaks to bridging the two parts of her, and *saarRii sunaihrii* is one case study of that.

Coming to the United States for my graduate studies in anthropology, I became acquainted with Krishna stories in *saarRii sunaihrii*. Krishna is behind the scenes of the story of *saarRii sunaihrii*. This story I danced was based on tales of Krishna’s love life and his playful games of stealing butter from women in the village, and also on the love story of Radha and Krishna. Krishna’s stories show him as the strong, naughty hero whom all the women in the village seem to want, and he is generally shown as a flirt as well, which is part of his appeal. On the other hand, my sari clad Pakistani *bharata natyam* body dances through the contested history of *bharata natyam* pre-Pakistan. As my dancing body switches between the roles of the woman in love and the other woman, my writing and researching body finds itself dancing the rupture between my female Muslim identity and the performing arts dancer dedicated to a dance form which originally was dedicated to Hindu temples and gods. From this uncomfortable place I realize how I was writing from two different and at times “partitioned” positionalities: My dancing body as I learned and performed the dance piece, and then now reflecting back on it as a dance researcher with an anthropology background attempting to “tango” my internal disputes of positionalities in a way similar to what dance history scholar Marta

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7 Some dance historians and members of the public have promulgated a popular misunderstanding in South Asia, that *bharata natyam* got its name from the sage *bharata muni* as it is based on dance gestures based on his book on dance, and not the nation of *bharat*. Indu emphasizes repeatedly in her public and private interviews that this is a misconception that adversely impacts her work in Pakistan.
E. Savigliano does in her 1995 book on *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion.* Similar to Savigliano’s tango, bharata natyam becomes the symbol of the Indian nation abroad and in the diaspora owing to international negotiations involving issues of representation, legitimacy, and self-determination. More important than the answers to the numerous ongoing queries here that come out from this uncomfortable place, is how these queries continue to help me understand my post-colonial body as a site for resistance inscription, and re-inscription. Like Savigliano’s tango, bharata natyam is my way of challenging my body’s paralysis amidst contestations of Pakistan’s national identity, and ideologies and policies to establish itself in opposition to India, the other woman. My “Indian-ness” others me in the colonial discourse, splitting me further between my identities as a Pakistani-Muslim-woman and that of a South Asian classical dancer and the dance researcher anthropologist in me embodying the “Indian-ness” of a shared heritage of the Indian subcontinent.

As a result of a lot of debate among scholars of dance, history and mythology, both Indian and non-Indian, on the story of the iconic *devadasi*, a wealth of literature has been written about the journey of bharata natyam and its politics and historical investments (Allen, 1997; Coorlawala, 1992, 1996; Gaston 1992, 1996; Meduri 1998, 1996; O’Shea, 1998; and Srinivasan 1983, 1985). It is not possible to elaborate on that literature here but it is important to remember the point that the Indian nationalist movements in the 1930s and 1940s made the dance a symbol of Indian identity, which eventually further problematizes bharata natyam in Pakistan due to tensions between the two countries—the result being that the historical journey of Bharata Natyam in Pakistan today has

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9 This Hinduized representation of bharata natyam as national dance is problematic not only in Muslim majority Pakistan, but in India with Muslims the largest minority group with the second largest population of Muslims in the world today. What is the representative dance of the Muslims of India? Perhaps future work can look at the secularized version of bharata natyam in Pakistan to answer this query but that is beyond the scope of this particular paper.


11 Ibid, 16.
varied from being both a secular and a devotional dance of the devadasis to the “Brahmanized” or “Hinduized” form of the dance as it still exists in India today, and to the “non-Hindu” chiefly elite version of the dance as it exists in Pakistan today.

The body of the bharata natyam dancer has been a site for invasions of representations time and time again in the history of the Indian sub-continent. Bharata natyam has a long history of intersecting politics, and politics have shaped and de-shaped it, causing many different configurations of this dance form to emerge. For me, a dance repertoire like saaRii sunaibrii became a crucial case study to see how a particular dance style has embodied the migratory history of the people of Pakistan. This was the beginning of my journey to attempt to deconstruct the body in its present, unique home of Indu Mitha in Pakistan. This was through exploring how the female dancing bharata natyam body is produced or is dealing with Partition through analyzing one choreography, and the teacher’s treatment of the legacy of her teachers from pre-partition days. I found that while saaRii sunaibrii as learned by Indu Mitha was another one of Krishna and Radha’s love stories, saaRii sunaibrii as danced in Pakistan today speaks of the continuities of the stories, the language, and culture, despite the removal of religiosity from the dance. This continuation breaks the silences on the topic of “Partition” and this deafening silence was conspicuous until only this decade when writers on both sides of the border starting writing about the “P” word, Partition, and talking about it as the Asian Holocaust, thus breaking the silences of history. That’s what these dancing bodies are speaking out as well. In the process the dance performs a living history of spectral moments that create connection between the people of India and Pakistan.
2. A Creative Approach to Occluded People’s history of South Asia

This section documents the process of development of a new “creative approach” to the study of occluded histories. What are these occluded people and their histories? This dissertation ventures into the histories that are linked with the aftermath of the 1947 Partition of South Asia into what can be safely termed as Muslim majority Pakistan and a Muslim minority India. In this context of the “Muslim Question” I raise the question of the groups that get neglected on both sides of the border created in 1947, which includes not only non-Muslim groups like Indu’s Christian male students, or Buddhists and Hindus, but also begs the question of which Muslims are represented and which Muslims get occluded, for instance, the occlusion of East Pakistanis which led to the 1971 separation of, or minority Muslims like isma'ilis or ahmadiyas. In the aftermath of Partition and increasing tension between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, all shared histories become occluded.

I shared the journey that brought me here and it started for me in Indu Mitha’s dance class but has taken me through a journey to a broader interest in cultural studies, Third World feminist ethnography, Asian performing arts, comparative religion, and finally to the writing of occluded histories. My wide research interests found a home at UCLA in the interdisciplinary Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance (WAC/D), a department brave enough to attempt the unusual marriage of social cultural anthropology, performing arts, and cultural studies. My training as a social cultural anthropologist and dancer of South Asian classical forms, not a historian, frames my rendezvous with controversial South Asian histories. Thus I learned to engage with the dancing body as a tool to continue my quest for answers to ongoing questions. While anthropology grounded me in life histories and a people-focused approach to history, in the unique space of the WAC/D department I learned to use performance as my primary data and a dance history scholar’s approach to read out from dance into culture, history, and the politics that surround it. I continue to
creatively cross boundaries, both conceptual and disciplinary, while struggling to cross the geographical lines drawn between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

The questions that led to my bigger project started at Pakistan years before my academic engagement in the United States. Though born in a middle-class progressive household with a focus on both educational and creative pursuits, I was encouraged to pursue Indian classical music vocal training, but not classical dance—even though at the same time in the private setting of weddings in Pakistan I was learning and performing the accepted and popular “Bollywood-type” dance, which originates from the classical dance movements. Thus arose the simple question, “Why is it that a South Asian classical dance considered controversial in Pakistan, while Bollywood dance remains an integral part of Pakistani cultural life?” This simple question has ultimately taken me on a journey to discover both the occluded history of the “dancing girl” and her dance in Pakistan, as well as into a discovery of multiple “histories,” and eventually into my preferred framework of a contested history called a “people’s history,” borrowing historian Howard Zinn’s term. A question that arises here is, “Is not all “History” about people and so a people’s history?” I would like to focus on this important question to introduce my project, as it revolves around it, and also allows me to bring in how a nation-state perspective determines the different official narratives in South Asian histories.12

2.1 What Is The “People’s history” and What Does It Mean to “Choreograph” History?

Historian Howard Zinn coined the term “people’s history” and he was the first one in the United States to write a history book that challenged the “official national history” that students were reading, starting from Columbus and bringing in all the baggage that came with colonization of

12 In this dissertation I refer to official History used by governments and political interests with a capital ‘H’ and other counter versions of people’s histories with small letter ‘h’ and also plural.
that land and the destruction of the Native Americans. Zinn’s book is about history on the ground, about people one doesn’t hear about in usual American history books; people protesting on the streets behind the picket lines, people who are taking a stand against the Government, people who raise a voice for the underdog, the oppressed, etc. Thus it is no doubt a very controversial history, and was initially banned in many educational institutes. Today it is recognized as an important piece of groundbreaking work, and although Zinn passed away in January 2010, his words continue to urge many American youth to question their nation’s history.

My discomfort with official history led to my search for new approaches to a study of South Asian history that has taken me outside the confines of the traditional history department into two relatively new fields of studies in American academia: Comparative Literature and Dance Studies. Aamir Mufti professor of comparative literature, in “Faiz Ahmad Faiz: Towards a Lyric History of India” uses the work of Pakistan’s national poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz to show how his poetry uses “Hindustani,” a language composite of Urdu and Hindi words, to transcend the 1947 borders and narrate a different version of history. Indu too uses what Mufti terms as Hindustani content in her repertoire and Mufti’s model of lyric history encourages me to look for a creative approach to an alternate history of India through Indu’s dance repertoire.

According to dance history scholar Susan Foster, it is attention to the moving body that has been occluded within scholarship. In *Choreographing History* (1995) Foster brings up how the body has been neglected in the writing of history. For Foster, writing history is a process of negotiations and interactions between different bodies—bodies living in historical time coming alive and the body of the historian themselves. In other words, history is written by historians who have their own biases and are constrained by their own circumstances and their particular historical moments. The title of

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this dissertation is inspired by Foster’s usage of “Choreography” in her essay “Choreographies of Gender” (1998), where she urges examination of a performance’s choreography, with an emphasis on how an individual adapts to and around the “scripts,” or patterns, of culture. Foster argues that since there is no universal set of categories, the codes of representation that we engage to read a dance, which are culturally and historically specific, change as a given community of deciphering bodies agrees on categories. For Foster, these systems of representation, which are not biologically fixed but historically specific, once acknowledged, can result in a “choreographic call to action,” not only on one body, but on the social body as well. This paradigm has urged me to undertake an “interdisciplinary approach” to view the life of dance teacher/choreographer Indu Mitha and parallel moments of the history of the nation-state of Pakistan as choreography. How do the two adapt to the score or script—which is not fixed but changing constantly? As Indu and her dances cross borders, Pakistan’s borders get defined and reconfigured in the geography of time, space, and culture.

In South Asia, Indian classical dance and the dancing bodies that pursue this form, like myself and many others in Pakistan, use the movements to narrate stories of the people of that society and culture. Though it is not a story telling dance, its lyric mode transformed into linear narratives, and that is where Indu’s work comes in as unique innovation in Pakistan. Thus this dance in its present form in Pakistan narrates how beyond the level of divisions the story remains unchanged. What changes are only the characters. This becomes an example of a people’s history as choreographed in a dance as it counters the official history because its Hindu past is very problematic in the nation state of Pakistan—a land of the pure, a country carved out of India for the Muslims of South Asia. As far as the national history of Pakistan is concerned this Indic past, embodied in this dance form, is problematic and is disowned and occluded due to the aftermath and trauma of the 1947 Partition of the Indian sub-continent at the end of colonial rule in South Asia. Thus the existence of Indian

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14 See section “Choregraphing Gender”, Choreographies of Gender, 26-30.
classical dance in Pakistan, especially the dance form bharata natyam, that has been enthusiastically claimed after Partition with its Hindu representations as India’s “national dance,” ruptures the assumed “natural” transition to an Islamic identity for Pakistan as the homeland for the Muslims.\(^{15}\)

Let me state the official narratives of South Asia, as that will enable me to explain how a people’s history differs from the former, and then move on to choreographing occluded histories through dance. Some concrete examples to show what the different narratives of official history look like for South Asia are the heavily contested events of the 1947 Partition and the 1971 “fall of Dhaka”. As my purpose is not to repeat the already well-documented work on recording these official histories, I will put it simplistically. Starting with Pakistan, the official narratives of the “Two-Nation Theory” go something like this: Muslims were undergoing so many atrocities under the Hindu domination because Hindus and Muslims are two different peoples that can never live together. India on the other hand claimed to be a secular state and protector of all religions, and races, with rights for all. In the case of 1971 in South Asian history there are again two narratives, the Bangladeshi and the Pakistani narrative. What official Pakistani history calls a “separation” of East Pakistan from West Pakistan, Bangladeshi official history now calls “liberation” from West Pakistan. But we know that the story on the ground is more complex than these two opposing scenarios. Both Pakistani and Indian official narratives are ruptured, for the former by evidence of its Indic history and for the later by evidence of continuing communal violence.

2.2 Choreographing a “People’s history” through Dance

So far I have defined a people’s history as a counter history, since it is about people whose life, work and narratives don’t fit neatly into any one of these official narratives mentioned in last section and thus question them. I would like to stress here that such a history is not aligned with any

\(^{15}\) Similarly Pakistani bharata natyam in its non-Hindu form is problematic for India, as India wants full claim over the dance form.
nation state government’s politics. It is an important first step in an attempt towards a more inclusive history. It is not the answer but a quest born out of unsatisfactory answers in the current dealing of histories. My coming to this very different perspective than the history I grew up learning, allows me to narrate what in anthropological terms is called a reflective journey, my personal journey as the point of departure.

I started my journey to explore a better way to approach histories that are controversial and eventually led me to a “creative approach” detailed ahead. The stepping stones that brought me to this new approach are on-going questions about the ideology of the two Pakistans that I have encountered: one was the religion based Pakistan in my history textbooks, a “safe haven for Muslims,” versus questions raised at home by the inquiring mind of my father, a veteran journalist fighting for the freedom of the Pakistani press from repression, especially under martial law dictatorship, and about questions of Pakistan’s unique cultural, historical, indigenous identity. Today these questions in the Post 9-11 world where Pakistan has a most important geo-political position, have become crucial not only for a peaceful South Asia but on a global level as well. My initial reaction to the duality between the political scenarios in my Pakistan versus my parent’s Pakistan was my naïve efforts to stay away from anything to do with “politics,” and so I found myself drawn to the performing arts, and particularly classical South Asian music, and later into social and cultural anthropology. Eventually I discovered the performing arts as my agent for digging into contested histories. It was during my masters in Social and Cultural Anthropology that I came across first hand evidence of a particular occluded history that made me question the 1947 Partition. How and when did communal disharmony become the accepted reason for the 1947 Partition of India on communal lines?

My fieldwork was on a clan of Muslim musicians known for generations as the rubabis—the people who play the instrument rubab. For generations these Muslim musicians learned by heart the
words of the Sikh gurus with whom they sang along while playing the *rubab*, which earned them a prestigious performance space and place in the Sikh *gurdwaras*. This relationship cuts across communal lines in stark contrast to present South Asian relations between Muslims and Sikhs. It started at the human level in the form of a friendship between the founder of the Sikh religion, Baba Guru Nanak, and the ancestor of the *rubabi* clan, Bhai Mardana, a beautiful *rubab* player in the early fifteenth century. These two people collaborated to spread the word of the guru and thus generations of *rubabi* continued this tradition and generations of Sikhs revered and respected these Muslim custodians of their Holy book, the *guru granth*. This is an example of communal friendship unimagined by my generation of Pakistanis and Indians. But these beacons of tolerance had to move from Amritsar to Lahore in 1947, and thus became cut off from the work of their ancestor and the communal harmony that was their legacy for generations. What became of them after Partition is similar to the majority of the common people who made this move, cut off from their roots and livelihoods they struggled to find new avenues of survival. The *rubabis* present a unique example of a South Asian past of communal harmony between the Sikhs and the Muslims. Unfortunately only remnants of that harmony exist, through these people, their memories, through their songs and music. The independence movement was powered by a desire to create a better place for all in India at the end of the colonial era, instead while there was communal harmony in a pre-British history, today there are only glimpses of that harmony in South Asia at Sufi shrines, and through stories of such communities as the *rubabis*. So while the vision of the founding fathers of Pakistan was to fight for a better place for minorities, in this case it was the Muslims, and it is tragic to see the fate of both the Muslims that remain in India who either opted to stay or didn’t have a choice, and the ethnic discord amongst the different Muslim sects and ethnicities within Pakistani, as well as the sorry state of the religious minorities in both India and Pakistan.
2.3 Choreographing (in) Pakistan: The Methodology

The primary data for this project are dance choreographies of the renowned dance teacher Indu Mitha. She learned, created, rearranged, re-contextualized and continues to teach these choreographies from the 1950s to date. My methodology, which takes bharata natyam as a “dynamic method of engagement with a changing world” (O’Shea, 24), is structured on dance history scholar Janet O’Shea’s project, and also corresponds to Foster’s call in her 1995 book *Choreographing History*. My project, like O’Shea’s, draws “the idea of choreography as a methodology of organizing movement from Foster’s theorization of semiotics of choreography (1986) and of bodily practice as thought process (1995)” 16 It also draws from O’Shea’s usage of choreography as “strategy.” 17 The use of the term “strategy” acknowledges that although social, political, cultural, and economic forces may influence a dance tradition and shape it, they don’t necessarily determine it. Within the influence of political pressures on an individual in a particular cultural and historical moment, which presents limited choices before the individual, the latter still has agency to decide between choices. Thus I designed each chapter to start with narration of a particular choreography, and use it to springboard into a particular theme of the chapter. Thus my methodology is a detailed triangulation of Indu’s selected dances seen in the context of her life in India, East and West Pakistan, to excavate occluded histories: communal harmony, composite cultures, women questions and the minority question. To sum it up, my theoretical framework focuses on the lessons of history as seen through Indu’s lived history: a continued look at the most decisive event in the history of the South Asian region in relation to a contested history of a dance form.

16 Foster, *Choreographing History*, 180.

3. Bharata Natyam and “The Land of the Pure”

Benedict Anderson’s seminal work *Imagined Communities*, published in 1983, has had phenomenal influence in social sciences and humanities thinking around the concept of “nation and nationalism.” He proposes that “nation” is an imagined political community, both limited and sovereign simultaneously. He puts forward that the birth of the notion of “nation” was due to the move away from religious frameworks to secular ones, and the need for a replacement of the empty power spot created with new linkages to power. “Nationalism” for Anderson is thus developed and understood, not through political systems of power, but through cultural systems of production. Postcolonial writers like Homi Bhabha (1994)\(^\text{18}\) have taken “nation” and “nationalism” to task more aggressively than Anderson. Bhabha’s focus is not on the boundaries of nations but on “cultural difference” and so in what lies as the realm of the beyond and how it acts as the bridge to the beyond. He is interested in hybridity as through these processes something new is produced. Problematizing the historic certainty and settled nature around the discourse of “nationalism,” Bhabha wants to dwell in what he calls the ambivalent “temporalities” of the nation-space.\(^\text{19}\)

Interested in the formation of the “nation state border lines” and “the people,” he says that “the people” get defined as such within the discourse and confines of the nation boundaries thus being “historical subjects.”\(^\text{20}\) Simultaneously they are also subjects of a process of “contemporaneity,” which calls for delinking with pasts and origins associated with the former narrative as the later is about living people. Bhabha derives the narrative of the nation and its people at this in-between, a liminal site that interests me for Indu’s critical biography:

\[\text{In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitions, recursive strategy of the performative. (My emphasis). It is through}\]

\(^{18}\) Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, and *Nation and Narration*.

\(^{19}\) Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 200.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation (Bhabha 1994, 209).

Here Bhabha is elaborating on his discussion of the stasis in the dialectic. He urges that this is an important space to dwell on, even if it is a space of disruption. I want to take his advice and dwell on this liminal disruptive space that the performance of what is wrongly and unproblematically accepted as a “Hindu temple dance”\textsuperscript{21} and what it creates in the narrative of the nation of Pakistan as an “Islamic Republic”. My work particularly builds on O’Shea argument of bharata natyam as vehicle for imagining community through language and history. Previous scholarship on the history of the dance form (Allen 1997, Coorlawala 1996, 2005, Gaston 1996, Meduri 1996) was limited to looking at the bharata natyam revival basically as product and agent of Indian nationalist identity and thus only a part of that period’s (late colonial and early post-colonial) nation building project. For O’Shea bharata natyam in its present moment in history in the twenty-first century has emerged out of concert form of nationalist agitation to address the concerns of the local environment and its immediate historical moment. That is what makes it At Home in the World also the title phrase of O’Shea’s 2007 book, and where Indu’s Mitha’s work in Pakistan comes in. My work on Indu’s case in Pakistan builds and illucidates O’Shea’s point as Indu brings changes in her repertoire to adapt to her local Pakistani context. Thus if I follow Bhabha’s emphasis on staying in the dialectic then the binary that is disrupted in the Pakistani context can be that of Hindu/Muslim. Further allowing for the destabilizing of these binaries like Bhabha suggests can potentially extend an understanding of the complexity of the analysis of contemporary Pakistani culture. How does the discourse of the minority Christian-Hinduized Indu play a part in this disruption and ambivalence? The case study of Indu Mitha disrupts the narrative of Hinduism of bharata natyam. Bharata natyam in Pakistan carves an ambivalent space in an ambivalent context.

\textsuperscript{21} Here it is important to gesture to the vast body of literature available on deconstruction of the assumption of bharata natyam as a “Hindu temple dance” latest work (2012) is Danesh Soneji’s Unfinished Gestures: Desadasi, Memory, and Modernity in South India which raises the occluded secular aspect as well as some Muslim connections of bharata natyam as well. Previous work and selected others are (Soneji, Chatterjee, Meduri, O’Shea).
Bharata natyam in Pakistan seems to be an anomaly. This is due to Partition historiography and tense relations on all sides of the borders drawn in 1947 and later redrawn in 1971. This project is also a part of the relatively new scholarship within the first decade of the twenty-first century, which focuses on the aftermath of the 1947 Partition on modern South Asia, an event simultaneous with the end of British rule in the region. This new scholarship on Partition marks a shift from the previous historiography of the event, which though extensive, discussed first in earlier decades, why Partition happened, and moved later to questions of what happened at that moment in history. But still there isn’t much written about what happened afterward and whether that continues to impact cultural and social institutions in this region today. This project is thus the first scholarly attempt to write about bharata natyam in Pakistan. It is also the first effort to trace the aftermath of Partition on cultural and social life, and on the status of minority performers in South Asia. Consequently the bigger project that this paper is a part of further takes up the challenge to bring together two bodies of discreet literature on nach and bharata natyam history, and new scholarship on the aftermath of the 1947 Partition through the case study of Indu.

In my creative journey into occluded histories, Indu’s dance became the ideal metaphor for the nation of Pakistan, which has a shared history and culture but on an official level continues not

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23 Bharata natyam has a contested history in its Indian context where it has been reconfigured into a “Sanskritized” form in 1930’s where as before that it existed in both a secular and religious versions. Srinivasan Reddy’s bill of 1930 wanted to ban temple dedications, was only passed in 1947 pushed by both a class of elite and nationalist interests which also facilitated the entry of a new class of elite amateur performers, and the end of the original temple dancers, the devadasis and their dance sadir became reconfigured and arranged into “Bharata Natyam”. See Srinivasan 1985 for details of the devadasi era and the changes brought.

24 Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya (2000) published the first book that focused on the long-term consequences of the aftermath of the 1947 Partition. The authors argued that Partition has triggered a process that has deeply imprinted state and society in South Asia. Tan and Kudaisya argue that “bitter legacies of conflict which are engendered by partition and which have been festering like a wound ever since” (229). These “bitter legacies” play out in making India and Pakistan between 1988-92 rank first and seventh respectively among major arms importers in the developing world. Clearly, the size of their military arsenals is huge, and is a matter of grave concern to the international community (228). See also Tan and Kudaisya’s edited volumes 2000, 2007 edited three volumes on Partition aftermath.
to acknowledge that past and so that part of its history is silenced. For me to come to this counter, subversive place of questioning the history of South Asia, dance was the tool, the bridge for this breakthrough line of questioning: the dance and the culture that I learned is not that different from that of the so-called “enemy” across the border. Thus the culture I grew up in was greatly influenced by its Indic past. And it is the continuation of bharata natyam in present day Pakistan that becomes the evidence for me as to the continuity of the gestures, the movements of everyday life, the music, the sensibilities and the stories. It is in honoring these continuities that a deeper societal healing can occur, a much-needed first step to choreograph healing and peace in South Asia.

4. **FOUR VEILS---Chapter Breakdown**

Chapter one is the first of a series of four veils which together cover dance teacher and choreographer Indu Mitha’s life and the outcome of a decade long process of questioning for me, a process that led to the writing of this dissertation. In writing about this journey I am borrowing a sufi metaphor of “veils”. Sufism is also a rich shared heritage across the Indian subcontinent, now countries of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Unlike the orientalist or imperialist notion of a veil which gives one a glimpse but separates from a place that one doesn’t belong to or exoticizes, the metaphor of a veil in Sufism is something which temporarily blocks the aspirant of the Divine from union with the divine in the spiritual path. As the spiritual seeker strives to reach the Divine, and if the striving is accepted and blessed a veil is lifted. For those seekers blessed to complete their spiritual journey the realization also comes that there were no veils, no door. Sufi poet Rumi describes this process as knocking on a door and realizing that one is knocking from the inside. This sufi metaphor of the veil, which is there and not there at the same time works well for my
project which avails a “liminal space,” a “third space” beyond binaries—on the one hand beyond borders and boundaries, and on the other hand not a “new space” as hinted by Roy above.

This journey has been facilitated by spadework from elders like Foucault, and present day smart, liberated “scholar-activists” like Roy who attempts to verbalize this space.

There are, Foucault assures us, abundant spaces in which “otherness”, alterity and hence alternatives might be explored not as mere figments of the imagination but through contact with social processes that already exist. It is within these spaces that alternatives can take shape and from these spaces that a critique of specific norms and processes can most effectively be mounted. The history of such spaces, he asserts…, shows us how and in what ways spatial forms might connect to radically different social processes and so disrupt the homogeneity to which society (and by its extension its utopian antidotes) typically clings (Harvey 2000, 184).

What is happening in the world lies, at the moment, just outside the realm of common human understanding. It is the writers, the poets, the artists, the singers, the filmmakers who can make the connections, who can find ways of bringing it into the realm of common understanding…. It’s a new space that’s been offered to us today. A new kind of challenge. It offers opportunities for a new kind of art. An art which can make the impalpable palpable, make the intangible tangible, and the invisible visible. An art which draws out the incorporeal adversary and makes it real. Brings it to book (Arundhati Roy 2001, 32).

David Harvey’s notion of “Spaces of Hope,” also title the title of his 2000 book, has been most productive for this dissertation, to help lay out an indigenous, progressive, creative space which counters radical Islam in Pakistani society. This space remains unimaginable by the western world today due to Pakistan’s myopic media representation as the front-line state in the “war of terror” post 9/11. In particular my focus is on his model of “dialectical utopianism,” which, taken from Marx, focuses on social processes. Though it is certainly fair to label Harvey as a Marxist scholar—the first chapter of his book begins with a section titled “Marx redux”—I take his discussion of utopianism as a sign that he is an optimistic Marxist. Using Marx and the notion of “utopia” to frame his critique of contemporary globalization theory, Harvey attempts revitalization of utopia and, in so doing, defines a new kind of Marxist analysis, marked by an optimism of intellect and will. (He

25 Writer activist Arundhati Roy calls on civil society to articulate a resistant alternate space, which is “outside the box”, in her talk on “Power Politics in South Asia”, published 2001.
explains his model with reference to Foucault’s notion of “heterotropia,” though critiquing it for also missing the temporal element).

Though Harvey critiques Foucault’s “heterotopia,” the notion is nonetheless most generative for me to think through these spaces of alterity in the South Asian context and to dig into their history. Harvey refines this notion by returning to Marx and how he is even more relevant in the contemporary context by bringing in the missing focus on temporality along with social processes and context specificity. More importantly, Harvey proposes that Utopianism in the present moment in history needs to be galvanized and that now is that time in history when “alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change” (2000, 195).

This sharp political analysis opens up for me the possibility of a new model of hope for the future for South Asia, which is an exciting and radical undertaking, but at the same time not really new. I would argue that this space has always been with us in South Asia, hidden behind agendas of dominant nationalist political and ideological histories. In particular, Harvey’s approach helps me articulate a generative space in Pakistani society and a hope for its future, as read in and through the choreographies of Indu Mitha. For the present moment in Pakistan’s history, I argue that the spaces that Indu and others like her in Pakistan create exemplify Harvey’s “spaces of hope”—spaces where human qualities, powers in nature, and the dynamics of change bridge and reconnect discourses around the “particularity of the body” and its “embeddedness in socio-ecological processes” (Harvey 2000, 200). By reconnecting the discourses of contemporary globalization and “the body,” Harvey offers us the opportunity to exercise a collective “optimism of intellect,” to open up thinking that has remained closed for too long in Marxist readings of Utopia. What is crucial for this twenty-first century Pakistan is the importance of the optimism that Harvey urges here based on a particular historicity. For Harvey a lack of such optimism can be the biggest barrier to progressive politics and he attempts to redefine the political spaces open to us in today’s extraordinary times.
Roy’s call to action and Harvey’s concept, taken together, allow me in this dissertation to address the story of the aftermath of the 1947 Partition of India, narrating it in a way that re-opens the cartographic, mental, and psychological borders formed by the tearing of the South Asian sub-continent along religious and communal lines. As these borders are momentarily re-opened we are able to uncover a special space, which I call, after Harvey, a “space of hope,” and it is in this special space that this entire dissertation dwells. It is hard to describe a space, that’s why it needs to be experienced; one has to breathe into it. This dissertation uncovers the veils covering this space, which are a series of veils that have surrounded it since 1947 Partition.

In chapter one I invite you to join me on this journey through different moments in time using an embodied dance practice of *kathak* as our time machine, and the lived history of a dancer and choreographer’s early years in India as our reference point in this time travel. The first veil is the veil of communalism as it is intricately linked with the 1947 Partition of the Indian sub-continent. If Partition created two spaces, one Hindu, one Muslim, I am interested in positing a third space. By rendering Harvey’s phrase and book title *Spaces of Hope* in the singular (“space of hope”), I want to emphasize that it is not a utopian space to be gestured toward in the near future, as Harvey suggests, but an actual space, part of historical reality, which exists now and has existed in South Asian culture at least as far back as the bhakti movement of the 6th century. Though I argue that this space has existed for more than a millennium, it continues to be occluded in recent representations of the region, particularly in and of Pakistan. In common parlance, Pakistan is Muslim—a certain kind of Muslim. India is Hindu—never mind its large Muslim population. And understandings of the region are dominated by the conflict between the two. But is there no space beyond Muslim and Hindu? Is there no third space of hope? I believe there is and this dissertation will reveal that space.

The second, third, and fourth veils will be lifted in chapters two, three and four, consequently through an awareness of the respective chief characteristics of this space. So what are
the characteristics of a space of hope? First and foremost, it is not defined by the national
boundaries fixed in 1947. Understanding this space offers a new perspective on Partition because it
requires one to cross the Indo-Pakistan border, to blur it, or even to ignore it. Vazirza-Fazila
South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories, underscores the false solidity of these borders by
reconfiguring them as “moving boundaries.”²⁶ I propose that the permeable nature of these
boundaries is especially evident when illuminated by Indu’s work and life, steadily and inexorably
criss-crossing from India to Bangladesh to Pakistan, acknowledging and ignoring each of these
nation-states along the way. This remains just as true now, in the post-9/11 context, as it was when
she was a young woman and these nation-states were just being born.

This brings me to the second veil which would be lifted, the chief characteristic of this space
of hope, as hinted by Roy, that it is a non-violent counter space—put forth by South Asian civil
society—to counter the agenda of the fundamentalist elements in society. The first decade of the
new millennium is over, and with its end has come dramatic changes in the global geo-political
scenario. Pakistan is now a frontline state on the United States’ “War on Terror,” commissioned to
fight the fundamentalist groups consolidated as tahrir-e-taliban (commonly known as the Taliban
movement). An article by prominent Pakistani intellectual and scientist Pervaiz Hudbhoy explains
the serious threat that the Tehreek-e-Taliban in Pakistan presents today:

What exactly do the Pakistani Taliban want? As with their Afghan counterparts,
fighting the United States in Afghanistan is certainly one goal. But still more
important is replacing secular and traditional law and customs in Pakistan’s tribal
areas with their version of the sharia. This goal, which they share with religious
political parties such as Jamat-e-Islami, is working for a total transformation of
society. It calls for elimination of music, art, entertainment, and all manifestations of
modernity and Westernism (Pervaiz Hudbhoy, All Things Pakistan blog, posted June
15, 2009).

²⁶ Zamindar, Long Partition, 237-239.
It is clear from this passage the direct threat that music and dance traditions and performers face in South Asian society, particularly in Pakistan post 9/11. Hudbhoy’s statement of the Taliban’s goals and its impact on Pakistani culture expresses the opposition of a certain class of intellectuals, artists, particularly middle class and upper middle class, who are resisting the fundamentalist elements plaguing Pakistani society today. In the case of Pakistan, the “optimism of intellect” that Harvey argues for has already been displayed by a small section of the educated class, by artists, intellectuals, and educators who counter the politics of difference and discrimination through their work, whether in opposition to the state or to extremist agendas. These artists and others, working together, are creating a non-violent counter space of hope.

Thirdly, this space of hope draws its energy from artists and allied intellectuals—and relies on a syncretic notion of Islam. I argue that this syncretic, border-crossing, counter space is fed by both those who are inclined towards a Sufi interpretation of Islam as well as progressive secularists and in particular artists, intellectuals, and activists who belong to both these groups. Access to this space is blocked by the second veil of nation and nationhood and it blocks the vision of a shared composite culture that I get into chapter two using Indu’s Uday Shankar repertoire.

Farzana Sheikh, a political scientist from Columbia University, suggests that this space of hope, which she terms an “emerging trend” in her recent book *Making Sense of Pakistan*, is currently being enacted by the following groups:

An emancipated media, a newly galvanized legal fraternity, an astonishingly vibrant artistic community, [and] a clutch of combative historians and human rights activists…. Although their voices are far from being dominant, they seek nothing less than to restore to Pakistan its identity as an integral, rather than an exclusive, part of the South Asian region (Shaikh 2009, 210).

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27 The primary school Mazmun-e-Shauq started by Indu’s middle daughter Yameema is also a part of this struggle. According to Mitha the curriculum introduces “comparative religion” at a beginner’s level culture and history through drama’s. Unlike the “Islamiat: which is taught in the regular Pakistani curriculum, at Mazmun-e-Shauq the children learn and celebrate all festivals and religions.
Towards the end of her book, Sheikh gestures to the unique syncretic model of Indian Islam, which historically has created common ground between Islam and India’s indigenous religions, as a possible solution to the present crisis (Sheikh 2009, 211). Chapter one is about this syncretic model of Indian Islam, also a characteristic of my model as embodied in Indu’s kathak choreography baGhiicay maEm (In the Park), which I call—after Harvey—a paradigmatic space of hope. In the trajectory of Indu’s life, In the Park is especially significant as the piece most influenced by her early training in kathak, a form of dance that emblematizes the mixing of Hindu and Muslim that has characterized the culture of South Asia for hundreds of years. Unlike Harvey, who proposes that spaces of hope will arrive in some future time, I argue that the syncretic space of hope—as exemplified in Indu’s choreographies—has always existed in South Asia through time and is unique to the historical reality of the culture of this region.

Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, when evaluating the legacies of Partition in the concluding chapter of their book, The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia, wonder about the potential of cultural exchanges to interrogate the borders in this region. Tan and Kudaisya issued a call for the rise of South Asian civil society even before 9/11, and their call is even more important today. They ask the question:

Will concerned citizens rise to the challenge of overcoming narrowness and prejudice and strive towards a genuine South Asian identity? Only the early decades of the new millennium will reveal the answer (Tan and Kudaisya 2000, 243).

I get into this question towards my final chapter when the third and the fourth veils of the authoritarian patriarchy and religion are lifted in chapters three and four. These veils work to block access to the space of hope which reveals a reality counter ad towards the genuine South Asian identity that Tan and Kudaisya refer to above.

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28 Current events of “Citizens for Peace” and “people to people” and inter-religious faith seminars are a focus for such an “inclusive” South Asian culture. I will discuss such initiatives in concluding chapter.
So now let the show begin. The first choreography created around the end of the 1990s, when Indu was in her late 60s and regularly teaching at her Islamabad-based institute, Mazmun-e-Shauq, allows me to access the occluded history of South Asia’s syncretic past. I will now introduce you to the particular components of her choreography that facilitate me to access this past. So let us go In the Park, journeying a decade back in time when a group of girls are about to enter, their dance being our portal for this time travel.

FIGURE 3 Indu announcing beginning of performance of her students at Islamabad Club, 2010. Picture by Fauzia Minallah (used with permission)
CHAPTER ONE

Choreographing Beyond Partition:

*baGhiicay meM (In the Park)* with Indu Mitha’s *Kathak*

1. *baGhiicay meM (In the Park)*

*(Year 2000, National Library Auditorium Islamabad, International Women’s Day Celebration)*

*dba kir *dba tuna *kat*

[1-2-3-4]

*dba kir *dba tuna *kat*

[5-6-7-8]

*dba kir *dba tuna *kat-kat-kat* *dba*

[9-10-11-12] [13-14-15-16]

The beats of the tabla are synchronized with the movements of a group of six girls, three of whom enter the stage together from the right and three from the left. With the first rhythms of the tabla (two drummed instrument used in south asian classical music), *dba-kir-*dba-tuna-*kat*, they move their baskets from one side to the other, waist height, turning their bodies half circle and gradually moving closer to center stage. They gracefully bend down and put their baskets in a circle, arranging themselves in an arc facing the audience.

The dancers’ colorful flowery dresses, the baskets they carry filled with petals, and the verses of a woman chanting in the background all confirm to the audience that they are outdoors surrounded by flowers. Next the voice of a woman describes the ambience of the place where the girls have arrived and they elaborate with corresponding arm and hand movements in the following chant:

*niil aasmaan-caman sar* *sa-* *- - bz* [Blue Sky/Garden is lush]

*Shax aur kyaraii meM (3)* [In the branches of trees and flower beds]
khilacy phul  

[Flowers are blooming]

The dancers gesture to the blue sky making a triangular shape in the air in front of their faces with both hands moving up and down, then to their chests and then out to the right and left to indicate the spread of greenery in the Park. They then turn their forearms vertically first right and then left and with the opposite forearm in a horizontal angle beneath them to depict the branches of trees where flowers are blossoming. The blossoming is depicted by both hands together with fingers spread out while palms cupped together are held above the head as the body turns in a tihai, the three repeated tihas (repetition movement in sequence of threes) in a cakr dha.

In this dance there are several torahs to depict flower picking while the dancers rearrange themselves and cross the stage in different floor patterns. In all of them the hand gesture used is in Indu’s words the Urdu word \textit{bilkul} (sign for exactly or perfect), and it is the \textit{mudra} for \textit{humsasya} in Sanskrit, made by holding the index finger and thumb together, to make a circle, while the other three fingers extend outstretched. Now the dancers continue to gesture that they are picking flowers from the branches of the trees with delicate finger and wrist movements, showing that they are collecting them in their baskets. The second flower picking is on the following chanting of the torah (rhythmic arrangement) that we hear in the background:

\begin{verbatim}
tat- tat- 1-2-3 4-5-6

tigab- tumag tat- 7-8-9 10-11-12
dhiige dhiige 13-14 15-16
\end{verbatim}

After a repeat of this torah and the gesture of picking flowers higher in the trees and putting them in their baskets on the right and then the left side, the girls now pick flowers before them at the chest level on the following tora:

\begin{verbatim}
ta-ka-ta-thungab-ta-dhiige- dhiige- theii 1-2-3-4 5 6-7-8-9 10-11
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{29} Indu’s group choreography that she uses here, like most of her dance dramas, was influenced by her training in Uday Shankar dance style, which I will discuss in chapter two.
Next they start to walk backwards in a typical kathak type chaal (walk) which starts on their left foot “1-2-3 Heel”\textsuperscript{30}, and with the next 4th beat starts on their right foot till they are further back in the stage and in place for the final flower picking torah. This torah is performed in two parallel lines facing each other after the dancers cross lines in between and through the other lines. They then proceed to pick more flowers on the following beats with the \textit{tihai cakrs} (three circles) in double beats, repeated three times:


It is the year 2000 and I am watching Indu Mitha’s \textit{BaGhiicay meM (In the Park)}. I know this choreography well today in 2011, but back then, at its debut, I was serving as backstage lighting assistant. I had just become involved with Indu Mitha’s performances as a new student in her dance classes at Mazmun-e-Shauq. My dance teacher was already seventy years old. Later I would become a regular student of Indu’s academy and perform \textit{In the Park} in Islamabad and Lahore. But the choreography in my head is the version I see from side-stage on that first night, as I helped dancers get dressed and as I awaited my assigned task of turning the lights off at the end of the dance.

The choreography depicts women enjoying themselves in a public space, a garden, until they are harassed and driven away by a group of men. The theme is “Eve-teasing”—as such female teasing or harassment by men is called in South Asia—and the message that Indu wants to highlight here is that there is a dearth of public spaces in Pakistan for women’s creative expression, to enjoy art and aesthetics in a manner that they please, without harassment. The garden could invoke any physical place, such as a public park, but it is also an abstract space, a metaphor for a space in society where aesthetics and beauty thrive. As I toil on the audience side of the curtain, and take my position near the light switches awaiting the end of the piece, I view the garden as a microcosm, a space in Pakistani society for the performing arts and aesthetics, especially dance, to thrive, a space that Indu dreams of and strives to create. A decade after my first view of this dance I will read more

\textsuperscript{30} This is how Indu would call out during rehearsal time.
into it, and this chapter is structured around the growth in my understanding, from when I first saw the dance in 2000 to a decade later, when I began writing about it as part of this dissertation. This chapter thus traces the piece from representing a singular narrative of history to a more complex and controversial history of South Asia.

I begin by revisiting the introductory bols or chants which describe the garden space, with their rhythmic patterns that I performed in March 2004 as her student in the opening night of a first Indo-Pak combined theatre festival titled Zanani (women). The chants have been translated into the Urdu language by Indu to fit a particular structure and to an old rhythm. Yet it is the temporality of these chants with their very long history that have the power to rupture the present moment and take us on this chapter’s journey, from the year 2000, when I watch this performance for the first time, to year 2004 when I performed it, and eventually to a long lost past from which to access the space of hope in a long ago pre-colonial syncretic India.

* * *

March 2004, Alhamra auditorium, Zanani Festival, Lahore

1-2 / 3-4 / 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 / 9-10 -11 -12 /13-14-15-16
niil aasmaan- caman sar sa - - - bz
[Blue Sky / Garden is lush]

1-2 /3-4 5- 6- 7 - 8 /9 - 10 - 11 /
Shax aur kyaraii meM/ khilaey phul
[In the branches of trees and flower beds/
Flowers are blooming]

12 - 13 - 14 /15 - 16 - 1
khilaey phul/ khilaey phul
[Flowers are blooming (2)]

31 “Zanani” festival was organized by Ajoka, a Pakistani theatre group. The festival celebrated women and, brought together theatre artists from India and Pakistan. Indu was committed to the cause of women and also especially made sure to travel with her students to attend this event as because her dance teacher Zohra Segal from India was also taking part in the festival. Ajoka was premiering a play around the lives of the two sisters, Zohra Segal and Uzra Butt, who were separated at Partition and subsequently reunited.
The chant above describes a bright sunny day in a *caman*, a garden where flowers are blooming. That is all I knew when I first saw and also when I learned and performed this dance for the first time in this festival. It will be much later that I would learn the significance and rarity of the form that they represent and the work that Indu has put in in what appears as just a simple poetic description of a garden scene in spring time. I would learn much later that as Indu translated the original Hindi chants into Urdu she had to deal with differences in the sound and flow of Hindi and Urdu poetry, and had to create what she calls *kavita bol toRey*. The first portion of the piece, the *niil aas maan torab* or movement set piece, starts with flowing graceful movements which Indu tells me later, in email correspondence, is similar to “legato” sounds in Western music. But in the later part of the dance movements like the *cakrs* or kathak’s circle are more quick and snappy. The dancers are using *hasta mudras*, hand gestures common to kathak, but the particular chant tradition that accompanies these smooth gestures is unique to Indu’s repertoire because in Pakistan, what Indu describes as the “recited *Shloka* type chant,” has virtually disappeared. Other teachers I have worked with leave it out completely. *Shlokas* are poetic verses or couplets, usually religious or “sacred”, recited in time to the rhythmic beats played by tabla drums. This particular *Shloka* is distinctive because it is a *kavita bols*, which reinforced the beats of the *tabla* exactly.

Indu says that these *kavita bols* are traditionally associated with depictions of the Hindu gods. Years later, Indu will comment on how even the best known kathak dancer of Pakistan, Naheed Siddiqi, a dancer who is internationally known as well, eschews this particular rhythmic arrangement. Indu, however, considers this type of *Shloka* to be essential and teaches it to us in class so that it can be included in the performance of this piece. Indu is adamant about maintaining

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32 Indu Mitha, email correspondence, August 2009.

33 Indu Mitha, email correspondence, August 2009.
the *bols* not on religious grounds but on account of aesthetics, variety and to honor their history.

Indu explains this characteristic of these *bols* as follows:

Dance *bol* and *tabla* or *pakhanaj* *bol* and *tarana* *bols* also are classed as “mnemonic”= meaningless sounds. Sung lyrics for *abhinaya* are meaningful and basically musical. *Kavita* *bols* are meaningful words but basically accentuate the rhythmic quality of the words. Since they are “recited *beht-ul-lafq*” i.e. not sung instruments continue playing but only softly in the background.  

On the surface this would seem to be of little consequence. One artist performs the *kavita bols*, another doesn’t. So what? I argue, however, that including or omitting these *bols* is actually hugely significant. From the perspective of many practitioners and observers, if the *bols* are maintained the dance is undeniably Hindu. If they are dropped out the dance is rendered non-Hindu, with the possibility of being rediscovered as Muslim. Thus, by using the *bols*, Indu is operating in a territory beyond the specifically Hindu or Muslim.

So let us allow the rhythmic resonance of Indu’s selected *bols* to access this territory and for this purpose I refer to her life and a travel back one step at a time. Let us start with Indu’s childhood in Lahore, a historic and central city for Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs amongst others, and to the decade of the 1930s, a crucial decade in history of the Indian sub-continent. In 1930 the historic city of Lahore is in India but will be in Pakistan in the next decade of Indu’s life as a consequence of 1947 Partition of Indian sub-continent.

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*Year 1934, Lahore (India), Indu’s Age: 4*

Indu Chatterjea is four years old and her cousin Maya Rani, who is visiting from Delhi, is performing kathak dance for the family. Indu has never seen anything like it and she immediately

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34 Indu Mitha, email correspondence, 2011.
falls in love with the classical dance. The Chatterjea household is focused on intellectual pursuits as fostered by her father. Education and academic life is in the air that Indu breaths as she grows up as in the “University town” of Lahore’s famous Government College where she is born and lives in one big extended family of children of the faculty who go to the same school and play in Gāl Bagh. Her mother is very keen that her children be provided a strong music and dance education. Soon after this event Indu’s mother will pick up on her daughter’s dance inclination and will arrange for a kathak maharaj, a master dance teacher, to come from Delhi to Lahore at the YWCA. And that is how Indu’s first kathak dance lessons will begin.

I must pause for a moment here to note the complexity of what is already occurring in Indu’s young life, which is directly connected to the discussion of religious syncretism. Her mother is a Christian, a prominent member of the Young Women’s Christian Association. At the same time, the mother is perfectly comfortable engaging a traditional Hindu maharaj to teach dance to her daughter. Thus, Indu is already being taught that dance transcends religion. Or perhaps more generally, she is learning that the arts and culture transcend religion.

Indu is learning this as a child in Lahore, since in North India during the 1930s there is only kathak dance. In 1942 her kathak lessons continue with gaps as one maharaj leaves and her mother arranges for another one. Later Indu will also be introduced to Zohra and Kameshwar Segal and in time will learn the Uday Shankar dance style from them. I will get into that moment in her history and its impact on Indu’s repertoire in the next chapter. After her childhood kathak lessons she will also start bharata natyam classes with Vijay Rāghav Rao at Sangeet Bharati School of Music and Dance at Cannought Place in New Delhi, after which she will attend a bharat natyam performance for the first time and be transported by it, deciding that this is what she wants to pursue.

35 Now called Nasser Bagh in Lahore.
Coming back to her kathak training in the 1930s and moving ahead a few years, Indu is about to learn the basic kathak technique called *cakra-dha* in Delhi from the maharaj teaching in her school, as her bharata natyam guru Vijay Ragaroy is on leave. This basic kathak sequence in its original form will travel long and far. It will be repeated in multiple moments in Indu’s history. These ten lessons of kathak will have a long-term effect, carrying over to the bharata natyam repertoire of her daughter Tehreema Mitha in her work with her dance company in Washington, D.C. more than 60 years later. Let us see how Indu herself applies these childhood lessons as an adult teacher and choreographer in Pakistan during the twenty-first century.

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Year 2000, Islamabad (Pakistan) Indu’s Age: 70

Indu has incorporated her childhood kathak training into her repertoire, which she now uses to get beginners warmed up to the basic rhythms of classical dance. I suspect she also uses kathak to check out what level the student is at, and to see where they will fit, in her intermediate level or in the beginners group. Her childhood kathak lessons have influenced three technical aspects of her kathak teaching, all of which are manifested in *In the Park*: 1. Usage of *cakra dha* which in kathak is when a dancer takes a full circle or *cakar* in place, swiveling on the right foot for the momentum to return to the beginning position facing the audience. Repeating this two more times makes the move *cakra dha*, 2. Usage of certain *mudras* or hand gestures is unique to Indu’s kathak repertoire in Pakistan though common in Hindu kathak, including hand gestures called the *kapidha* and *bhanvara*, 3. And thirdly—and most importantly for our purposes—the inclusion of *kavita bols*, rhythmic poetry which

36 As *car-dha* or *nun-pallie* toras in Tehreema’s bharata natyam choreographies.
forms the beat for the dancers in kathak, replacing the beat of a tabla or pakhavaj, instruments commonly used for rhythm in Indian classical dance. Indu now uses this kathak taal (rhythm) technique that she learned in her childhood lessons to invent her own toras\(^37\) and bols in her kathak and Udhay Shankar choreographies, the latter I will take in detail in the next chapter. In this chapter I will now use these kavita bols that Indu learned and later would use in her choreographies, to travel further back in time to excavate the history of the dance form kathak. These kavita bols thus will be the chief mechanism for this transience of time and space. I will use kavita bols to travel from kathak in present day Pakistan to particular important moments in its pre-colonial past in the eighteenth century, in order to access a rare hybrid history of kathak beyond communal boundaries of Hindu or Muslim established today. Let’s take an example of these bols that Indu talks about:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{lacak lacak ke} \\
&\text{lacak lacak ke} \\
&\text{maTak maTak} \\
&\text{mukh man haMsat} \\
&\text{man mohat baani maadhav} \\
&\text{man mohat baani maadhav} \\
&\text{man mohat baani maadhav}\text{\textsuperscript{38}}
\end{align*}
\]

Here Indu gives an example of bols, which would describe the bodily movement of god. In the example above Indu quotes lacak and matak, which are words used to describe the bodily flexibility and the movement of the hips that are made when madhav walks. She highlights here the tihai, the ending formula of the rhythmic cycle, in which the final bols are repeated three times. She also reminds of the hasta mudras that are suitable to it. The entire passage is meant to evoke Shiva,

\(^{37}\) An arrangement or movements set to rhythmic beat of the instrument either tabla or sitar.

\(^{38}\) Indu Mitha, email message to author June 2009.
she suggests, by evoking his strength. One such section utilizes the mime for Jatt Jooth, meaning the topknot of unruly hair atop Shiva’s head.

The important point for me is what she does with these bols in her context. She uses the kavita bols in her present day choreography in Pakistan as an attempt at “reviving a tradition in a way suitable in Pakistan which none of the kathak experts have cared to do.”39 “Suitable” here refers to the work that she has done to invent her own bols in Urdu, the official national language of Pakistan after Partition. She explains that these bols do the work of keeping rhythm just like a tabla or pakhawaj bols, and thus become the rhythm of the feet. This typical kathak form called kavita bol is rhythmic poetry whose themes were usually about the gods, describing them or their miracles or about heroes raised to the Godhead. Indu gives one example of renditions of these bols below in an email correspondence on the topic. “My friend used to do simple ones describing Radha, Krishna, or their stories,” she writes. “I remember only bits.”40 Indu raises important questions about omissions and what is lost by the absence of these bols in Pakistan today in her correspondence to me on the issue:

All the pre partition trained ustaads (teachers) of kathak taught these. One of Azuries’41 students, Zareen/Panna recited this one at PNCA’s evening in her honor. She recited the whole long piece but did not dance it as all of them were also old and out of practice. So why did the ustaads (teachers) who knew and taught these drop them from their syllabus? Obviously because as in mughal times the audience was not conversant with the stories or believers in those deities. So how i ask did they not feel the loss of such a beautiful and meaningful versification in dance and rhythm and abhinaya, or nritya as they call it?

In discussing her kathak choreographies Indu asks the question above: Why did the kathak ustad drop certain parts of their repertoire after Partition? In particular this question refers to kavita bols. Indu uses these kavita bols from her childhood lessons in her contemporary dance dramas in

39 Indu Mitha, email correspondence, November 2009.

40 Ibid.

41 Madam Azurie was known as one of “Pakistan’s classical dance pioneers”. Born in Bangalore 1906 she moved to Pakistan at Partition as well and opened the first academy of classical dance in Pakistan. More details in chapter two.
Pakistan and in this kathak choreography in particular to revive a tradition long forgotten. Highlighting Indu’s reviving of these traditions allows me to write this integrated history of kathak. Indu’s innovations and influences from her childhood kathak training allow me to excavate the present South Asian culture which has been partitioned along communal lines in the aftermath of Partition.

Her act of inclusion opens up artistic territory that would otherwise remain closed. For her, as a Christian agnostic, this is possible because she lives outside both of the two dominant religious systems. For me, as a scholar viewing Indu’s work in a larger frame, she gestures toward a pre-colonial moment that I want to suggest was not fraught with the sort of Hindu-Muslim religious tension we have witnessed especially in the post-Partition era. Instead, it opens up the possibility of a heterogeneous syncretism, loud and un-reconciled, between Hindu and Muslim. This syncretism, too often invisible, is part of the everyday experience of every person who lives in South Asia. The Muslim crosses the Shiva Temple. The Hindu awakes to a muezzin’s (the one who recites the prayer) call. The Christian dances the stories of the Hindu gods. This experience is commonly ignored or erased in recent times. And yet it is formative, intrinsic even, for South Asians regardless of geographic location. It exemplifies what I am describing as a space of hope—because it allows a dance historian to access the syncretic history of kathak and the South Asian region.

The dancers sit in a semi-circle facing the audience with their right leg crossing over the left one. They are now busy picking flowers from their baskets with their right hands and using a delicate kathak mudra (particular hand symbolic movements in ‘classical Indian dance’), which bring the thumb and two fore fingers together while the little finger and middle finger next to it are stretched, to move the flower over an imaginary thread and then tie a knot at the end of their garlands. This is done with the right hand in kataka mukha or the titli (butterfly) mudra, with the thumb and index finger and middle finger meeting, and the littlest finger and the ring finger upright. The left hand uses the same mudra to pull the imaginary flower down the thread to
make a flower garland. Now the garlands are ready and its time for them to adorn themselves with these flowers. They put on their flower bracelets, earnings, necklace and tekah\textsuperscript{42} and place them in their braids.\textsuperscript{43} They all have their own imaginary mirrors in their baskets, which they pick up with their left hands and look into to admire themselves.

As I watch Indu’s students dance to the beautiful notes of the classical \textit{raag bhar}, a raga of springtime, I feel transported to another time and place. In a recent email correspondence about the piece Indu commented on the above section of her choreography as “a good picture of feminine grace in the style of earlier times”.\textsuperscript{44} Now let’s allow the music and the rhythms of the keherwa taal (ten taal 16 beat rhythmic cycle) on the tabla combined with the chanting of these bols carry us back to a specific time in South Asian history that has been neglected in mainstream historiography of this region post Partition. I invite you to let these bols take you there too and for this part I switch to the description as taught to me by Indu as a teacher referring to the female dancers as “girls” and the male dancers as the “boys” due to her seniority in age.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{42} Popular South Asian jewelry headpiece, always worn by a bride or by women at formal social occasions.

\textsuperscript{43} A very common practice of a bygone era in Indian history now a less common practice in the every day lives of South Asian women.

\textsuperscript{44} Indu, email correspondence, 2011.

\textsuperscript{45} In Pakistani school system especially in English medium school still influenced very much so by the British educational system teachers refer to their students as “girls” and “boys”. I found myself referring to her male students as “the boys” a term she often used, I suspect a matter of habit.
2. The Entry of the “Bee”: Critical History of Kathak and Syncretism

One girl, dissatisfied with what she sees in her hand mirror, gets up to pick “just one more flower”, and in doing so disturbs the bee that was in the flower. Fearing that it will attack she tries to beat it off. Her friend comes to help her and successfully beats it off and stamps (thrice in a tihai) in an attempt to kill it, but gets stung herself. Another girl and the first friend bend over the other who sits examining her stung foot. This trio forms a small “traditional” group of three figures as historically depicted in miniature paintings. The dance sequence, including the entry of the bee, is all in the happy mood of spring and confirms that the sun is out and nature is in full bloom. There seems to be a lot of laughter and fun. The girls are enjoying each other’s company and it gives the impression of a perfect little world of beauty, aesthetics and nature all in unison; a self-sufficient ideal world. The honeybee for Indu was to introduce an “invader”, a warning sign of the trouble that is about to disrupt this beautiful world.

46 This part of the dance piece (The Bee and the Girls) as an ordinary garden scene in spring was not so for Historian Vinay Lal. During discussion of this dance, he revealed to me that the bee immediately linked a bhakti connection for him. As a result of this, I am including this section in Chapter One of my dissertation, because it brings bhakti (devotional) references into kathak and thus writes the hybrid Hindu-Muslim history that we don’t hear about in Pakistan or India.
FIGURE 5 Second part of dance baGhiicay meM, when the girls try to escape threatened by the boys (Picture printed NewsLine magazine, March 2004).

In the scene, two of the girls in the group have moved to play on the right side of the stage and a bee makes an entry into the park”. I have played the part of the girl who comes to rescue her friend from the bee, which in Indu’s choreography is a prelude of impending danger. Little did I know then that this bee would alert me to questions that make me a “vulnerable observer” of my life. Queries that would disorient me from beliefs that I grew up with, forcing me to change and lose my way in the desert, but only in the hope to find the higher way. This questioning began following my first interaction with a “Hindu” bharata natyam and during my time as a student at the University of Hawaii living with Indian friends at the East-West Center. I was not able to recognize and articulate the core of my discomfort till a South Asian history seminar at the University of California at Los Angeles. That was when the “bee” officially entered my life and stung me for good.


48 I describe this in detail in my introduction.
Year 2009, University of California at Los Angeles, (USA)

I am taking a South Asian History seminar with historian Vinay Lal. When I write about the choreography for Indu Mirtha’s In the Park and I simply narrate the above scene, I am surprised by Lal’s reaction. The bee and the girls sequence for him indicate traces of bhakti start for me a new journey as though I have learned kathak from Indu and interviewed top Pakistani kathak dancer Naheed Siddiqi a few times but have never heard of any bhakti connection. Further on in this journey I would learn that the word bhakti refers to devotion and it originates from a Hindu religious movement which is based on the premise that religious experience should be all consuming, in the relationship of the devotee with god. But until then what I knew was that the discourse in Pakistan emphasizes the Mughal patronage and the Sufi Islamic connection alone. My interviews with Pakistani kathak dancer Naheed Siddiqi and some of her students revealed that kathak was the means of Siddiqi’s mystical and Sufi journey. The bhakti connection comes as a surprise to me, as it would for anyone familiar with kathak as practiced across the border in Pakistan.

Why were this kathak choreography of Indu and my experience of the dance as her student not about either bhakti or Sufi expressions? Why is it that the bee’s attraction to the honey in the flowers becomes a bhakti trope for an Indian historian? What sort of space does the kathak that accommodates such seemingly opposing interpretations occupy? Are these interpretations opposing or somehow in alliance? These questions fuel my journey to a history that seems to summon me.

Indu’s choreography evokes for me a more complex tale of kathak than the ones found in most history books about the dance form, or than the different accounts of the dance on both sides of the border in India and Pakistan. The agreed history is that kathak evolved out of the storytelling...
traditions of South Asia. According to Shovana Narayan (1998) the word *kathak* refers to the *kathakai* and *katha* which is the story and the storyteller respectively. In the Sanskrit dictionary *kathak* is a person who preaches stories through the medium of acting. She describes the origins as devotional:

Kathak as the name suggests, originated in the Indus-Gangetic belt where the Brahmins (priests) while recounting the stories based on Hindu mythology reached the point of ecstasy in their devotion which manifested itself through the medium of dance.

Narayan also mentions the 13th century text Sangeet Ratnakar by Sharangadeva, and in the seventh chapter of the text reference to the kathaka’s is made as such:

*Kathaka bandinaschatra vidyavantah priyamvadah*

The Kathakas, the devotees, the enlightened etc. who recite sweetly, win the hearts of..

Then Narayan also mentions that there was a distinction in the *Aine-e-Akbari* between the professional dancers and the Brahmin dancers, with the former called *natas* or *natvas* and the later termed as *kirtaniyas* or *kathakiyas* (Ibid, 10). Narayan quickly passes over the Mughal court context of the dance with this one line. Here it is important to pause and look into the changes that the new court context is bringing in. He mentions that with the entry of the Muslim patrons now there is a need to distinguish Brahmin dancers from professional dancers. Meanwhile as kathak is brought into the Mughal courts a big shift is happening. What is this shift?

The establishment of Muslim rule in India witnessed a religious renaissance: the bhakti movement. With the rise of *Vashnavism* as a consequence of the bhakti movement, the Gangetic belt witnessed a spurt in literature, poetry and dance….The themes based on verses of poets including the *ashtachhap* poets from the bhakti movement namely *Haridas, Nam dev, Surdas, Nand Das, Parmanand, Kumbbadas, Krishnadas, Chaturbhuydas, Govindaswami* and


50 Ibid.


52 The Aine-e-Akbari is a detailed gazetteer of Akbar's empire (1556-1605). It has been published as an 1800-page book (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1939-49) ([http://www.sibal.com/aineakbari.html](http://www.sibal.com/aineakbari.html)).
Chittaswami were sung in the Dhrupad style and enacted out in mime and dance involving simple toras-tukras or rhythmic patterns in a simplistic kathak (Ibid,17).

These references raise two main questions for me: What is the impact of the bhakti movement on the arts, particularly dance and culture? And secondly, how does a secular non-temple context impact the form and the status of the form and its performers? Pallabi Chakrovarty in her 2008 book Bells of Change: Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity in India, addresses this gap that I am also raising:

The quest for origins by modern scholars generally links the dance to Sanskrit sources and the Brahman kathakas but the Persian influences and the courtesan contributions, while often unacknowledged are undeniable. It is interesting that renowned dance historian Kapila Vatsyayan (1982:90) recently claimed that kathak originated with the Sufi trance dance of the Islamic dervishes. However, it is largely accepted that the dance we are today familiar with as kathak flourished in the Mughal and Hindu courts of Lucknow and Benaras in Uttar Pradesh, Jaipur in Rajasthan and Raigarh in Madhya Pradesh and these locations now exemplify the gharana tradition in kathak.53

Chakravorty reminds me to revisit the court of Mughals where kathak is thriving to answer the first question that I have put to myself. How does the Muslim court context impact the dance repertoire and performers? Or does it? But I realize that even the questions that I am asking assume an established tension between the Hindu performers and the new Muslim rulers. What if there wasn’t such a tension? In the quote above it seems that in the Indian context of kathak after Partition it comes as a surprise to Chakravorty that dance historian Vatayayan would make a link between kathak as Sufi dance of the dervishes. It is possible that the importance of cakkers or turns is a point of influence.

Indu describes the mudras or hand gestures that have been used in the above scene while picking flowers. The mudras are her addition to the commonly “Muslim kathak” scene in Pakistan.

...the katha-kabani and the hamsapaksha/hanspankh, are the commonly used ones in all Muslim Kathak (for technical items i.e. tatkaar, torah, chaal, and in dances like kathak

53 Chakravorty, Bells of Change, 26.
The mudra we actually use is *bilkul/hamsasya* in Sanskrit. But it is NOT the one we call *bhanwra/bhramaram* in Sanskrit, which means bee/honey bee.\(^{54}\)

Indu’s use of hand gestures *titly* has also been dropped in the Muslim context for the bee. Indu is the only choreographer in Pakistan using this hand gesture, which can also represent a moth (*parwana*), butterfly, or any other flying insect. The honeybee is an important metaphor in bhakti Hinduism that refers to the relationship between the devotee and the Divine on the spiritual path. Could the “Hindu” connection be the reason behind this gesture’s disappearance in the Muslim context? Indian historian Vinay Lal would argue in the affirmative. At this point I realize that I need to delve into the subject of bhakti which seems so alien to me, a Muslim growing up in Pakistan decades after 1947 Partition. I discover that certain aspects of bhakti have been occluded on both sides of the border of India and Pakistan.

Historian John Stratton Hawley has written extensively on bhakti and he focuses on writing occluded aspects in the historiography of bhakti, especially how the “bhakti movement” means different things to different people. In his introductory chapter to the edited volume *The Bhakti Movement—Says Who?* (2007) Hawley questions what gets left out in the framing of the bhakti movement. I am interested in what Hawley points out towards a “deafening silence” (p.222) when it comes to the connection with regards to Islam. Hawley points out how most scholars have ignored it he gives the example of Ramchandra Sukhla’s extensive work on the bhakti movement which only in a revised (1940) version of his *History of Hindi Literature* mentions briefly as follows:

> The wave of the movement of *bhakti* (*bhakti ke andolan ki jo labar*) that came from the south created in the sensibilities of certain persons a shared *bhakti* path (*samanya bhaktimarg*) for Hindus and Muslims alike, as we appropriate to the situation in North India.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{54}\) Indu Mitha, email message, June 16, 2010.

Hawley uses this quote to emphasize his point of this very brief mention of this shared aspect and that too in a revised edition of a scholar who otherwise wrote very extensively on the bhatki movement. In the same volume Aditya Behl’s paper’s “Presence and Absence in Bhakti” particularly addresses this silence more extensively:

Bhakti religiosity, as devotional idiom is strongly weighted towards presence: the presence of the lord, the bearing of witness to this presence on the part of the devotee, the actualization of this presence in the company of good people, the sangat of believers….Yet the strong weight placed on presence in representing bhakti leads to a lack of attention to absence, to the silences and elisions on the historical record….The greatest gap or silence is the role of Islam and Islamic religiosity in the formation of the bhakti movement, assuming for a moment a singularity that I, like the other contributors to this volume would wish to overturn.56

Behl is basing this gap on his earlier work like in 2003 article “Desire and Narrative in a Hindavi Sufi Romance, circa 1503”57 where he discussed how bhakti poets of Braj Bhashan a North Indian dialect associated with god Krishna often were patroned in Mughal courts. By late fourteenth century Behl argues that bhakti poets were influenced by Persian mystical Islam and thus a combination of Persian and Indian vernacular tradition emerged which “marks the full indigenization and assimilation of Islam into an Indian cultural landscape.”58 Behal gives examples of the occluded Muslim background and influences in bhakti poetry and critiques present day narrow definition of bhakti movement as one single impulse. It is clear to Behal that narrow nationalistic and religious agendas are responsible for this occluded and he stresses that Islam needs to be represented to do justice to the complexity of the pluralistic history of bhakti.

Moving from the context of court poets to court dancers dance history scholars are now picking at the gaps in the histories, but in case of kathak the combined Hindu and Muslim influences

56 Hawley, Bhakti Movement—Says Who? 320.
58 Ibid. See also Eaton, India's Islamic Traditions, 180.
are easy to see. According to Margaret Edith Walker in her PhD dissertation titled *Kathak Dance: A Critical History* both the repertoire and the movement vocabulary of the dance form display a syncretic history:

- Its repertoire and movement vocabulary show its syncretic origins—it is a dance that is both Muslim and Hindu, both devotional and entertaining, and both male and female. Histories of kathak dance, however, claim that it began as a temple dance, originally performed by a clan of Brahman storytellers who recounted the Hindu epics with expressive gestures. The dance is still largely disseminated by hereditary dance families from the kathak caste, who are said to have preserved the ancient form while migrating to the Muslim courts. Difficulties arise, however, when one attempts to discover the early form of kathak and to trace its development through the courts. The history of kathak, as it has been written until now, contains numerous gaps, contradictions and paradoxes (Walker 2004, ii).

- Walker’s dissertation questions the Hinduization of kathak, and complicates this history by discussing how kathak reflects the amalgamation of orientalist, nationalist and colonial frameworks present in India by the turn of the twentieth century. Chakravorty’s recent book (2008) also shows that the “syncretic traditions of sufi-bhakti philosophy found a sophisticated expression in the dance that emerged in the royal courts” and that kathak was influenced by a mix of sufi-bhakti philosophy (Chakravorty 2008, 37).

- By using kathak in its syncretic flavor Indu’s kathak choreographies also subtly question the ostensibly exclusive Muslim heritage of kathak by reviving the traditions of its pre-Partition and pre-colonial past. The bee and the bhakti trope raise for me these productive questions on this journey: What is at stake in these different narratives of history and most importantly what is the history that gets occluded? These questions propel me to go beyond this Hindu-Muslim binary into the history of kathak and focus on the syncretic model that is hinted by different scholars to understand and explore the potential for its relevance in contemporary South Asia.
The concept of “Syncretism” in the South Asian context according to J. J. Roy Burman\(^5\) doesn’t refer to the notion of an eclectic religion, in which religion results from a synthesis of several religions. Instead the term refers to a “mutual acceptance” of elements of the two religions. Burman emphasizes and I quote:

The idea of syncretism in no way does convey the message that the process obliterates religious identities. It rather underlines the tolerance and flexibility inherent in different religions towards other religions operating within the same time and space. It is opposed to the idea of orthodoxy and fanaticism.\(^6\)

Such efforts to call on a South Asian syncretism are not a product of the twenty-first century alone. One of the earlier efforts to bring attention to the shared spaces between Hinduism and Islam can be seen in a much quoted and used text Majma-ul-Bahrain or the The Commingling of the Two Oceans by Dara Shikoh. He was the crown prince to Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and his was one of the first treatises written which addresses common spiritual and religious worldviews. Tara Chand writes in the introduction to Majma-ul-Bahrain that after extensively studying both Islamic and Hindu mysticism Shikoh came up with a treatise called Majma-ul-Bahrain where he displays how the origin of both is one and the same thing. Chand says that Shikoh lived in a time where the glorious reign of the Mughal Empire was coming to an end. Shikoh, who spent considerable time with scholars of both Sufi and bhakti traditions, compiled this treatise to highlight the commonalities that he found to be abundant and found no difference in their perceptions of truth.

I. H. Azad Faruqi’s book Sufism and Bhakti discusses how the concept of Divine Love “Ishq” which is the ultimate goal in Sufism is called “Bhakti” by bhakti followers.\(^6\) He studies Divine Love as the common denominator through the lives of two great saints of both traditions, Mawlana.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Burman, Hindu-Muslim Syncretic Shrines, 7.

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Azad, Sufism and Bhakti, 36.

\(^6\) Persian refer to him as Mawlama, English speaking audience know him popularly as “Rumi”.

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Rumi and Sri Ramakrishna. In both traditions love is a way to God. Bhakti-marga emphasizes devotional approach to the deity and a monotheistic concept of the object of worship. This approach differs from the Brahmanical tradition of the Rig Veda. Most kathak dancers in Pakistan claim this Mughal lineage and claim the Sufi resonances for the dance form. I argue that this is an important liminal space which has been neglected Post-Partition due to the colonial impact and post-colonial regional tensions. Thus the bhakti references in this dance piece allow me to reconstruct an intertwined past of the dance form in Pakistan and India, which is a pre-colonial past of syncretic traditions that includes both Sufism and bhakti. Consequently, I argue here that the history of kathak dance is neither exclusively Sufi nor Hindu nor secular, and that it also helps narrate a hybrid and intertwined history of the sub-continent.

While there are more examples of a shared space beyond religious bifurcations, I bring up Shikoh’s work as it is called on today by a certain group of people in Pakistani and Indian civil society that dream of a space of hope that South Asian culture allows for. In an online book review of Shikoh’s book Yoginder Sikand, a well-known intellectual in the field of Islamic studies and history, wrote on September 25, 2007:

Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, provides rich resources for developing theologies of inter-faith dialogue and solidarity, an urgent necessity in today’s world where talk of a global ‘clash of civilizations’ threatens to become a frightening reality. In this regard, the works of numerous Indian Sufis is particularly significant because they lived and wrote in a multi-religious context, addressing and attracting people of different faiths—Muslims, Hindus and others. Some of them developed understandings of Islam and other faiths that went beyond narrowly constructed communal boundaries, defying the empty and soulless ritualism that served to divide communities from each other…… The “two oceans” referred to in the title

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63 Azad, Sufism and Bhakti, 36.

64 Ancient Sanskrit collection of vedic hymns roughly between 1700-1100 B.C. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigveda)

65 Aslam, “The Rubabis”, 1-20. This study is one of the rare academically documented evidence of a shared Sikh-Muslim space that I experienced directly in my masters’s anthropological dissertation of a clan of musicians called rubabis, who were Muslim musicians for generations since their ancestor Bhai Mardana and Baba Guru Nanak’s friendship, and they generations continue to be responsible for learning and passing on the words of Sikh Gurus with their music in the Gurdwaras.
of the book denote Islamic Sufism, on the one hand, and the Vedantic thought as contained in the Upanishadic tests of the Hindu tradition. As the title suggests, Dara sought to argue that, essentially, the two were the same thing, although bearing different names. In this way, he sought to craft an innovative approach to inter-faith relations, and one that can provide interesting ideas for similar efforts in our own time.\textsuperscript{66}

As pointed out by Sikand about Shikoh’s work in the multi-religious context it is so important to go beyond narrowly constructed communal boundaries, as the goals and principles of Islamic Sufism and Hindu bhakti were one and the same. Shikoh’s approach and its particular revival today in the twenty-first century form an integral part of my model “Space of Hope”.

I am not alone in my call to access a different history of this region. Historians, writers, poets, and artists have also been dissatisfied with the present bifurcations. My questions are reinforced by the work of historians too, who struggle to go beyond the category of “religion”. “Religion” as a category was reified during British attempts to understand and control the Indian sub-continent. Amongst historians there is now considerable new scholarship, namely the Manchester School, which argues that the category of “religion” is no longer useful for understanding the situation on the ground in South Asia.\textsuperscript{67} They argue for a “cross-tradition”\textsuperscript{68} approach in order to really understand the situation in this region. Historian Nile Green from the Manchester school\textsuperscript{69} has written extensively on Sufism in India and the unique nature of Indian Islam that he terms “Other Islams”, which are different from Middle Eastern Islam. I agree with Green fully on the need to not universalize Islam and instead to focus on the local flavor of Islam. In India and Pakistan this regional character of Islam can be seen in the shared spaces of the two

\textsuperscript{66} Sikand \url{http://indianmuslims.in/dara-shikohs-two-oceans-book-review/} accessed April 27, 2010

\textsuperscript{67} See also Asad, \textit{Genealogies of Religion}, 27-54; Jacqueline Suthern and Zavos, “Riding a tiger? South Asia and the problem of ‘religion’”, 3.


\textsuperscript{69} Similar to the Manchester group Pemberton and Nijhawan Pemberton in \textit{Shared Idioms, Identities}, 54 critique syncretism as a model and discuss “shared idioms” and “sacred symbols” in their search for common ground and critique the prior usage of model of “syncretism”.

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communities, and there are numerous examples of this in shared saints that people of both religions revere and go to for healing prayers.\textsuperscript{70}

In this section we established that a critical history of the dance form of kathak unveils that this dance form embodies a syncretic space in a pre-Partition and pre-colonial past in the Indian sub-continent. The next section moves further in the story \textit{In the Park} and discusses the changes that colonial administration and rule brought to the social structures of South Asian society through the example of the music and dance traditions and performers. Today these have led to nationalist alignments of certain forms and the so-called religious identity of the nations of Pakistan and India as “Muslim” and “Hindu”. As a result, it is argued that the Indian side of the border kathak has lower status than bharata natyam due to its secular context and connection with the courtesan culture of the Mughals.\textsuperscript{71} To some extent kathak has also been reinvented, as have some other classical forms, distancing it from a hybrid past as much as from a courtesan tradition. This reinvention is not distinct to dance alone, but can be seen in the music world as well. As discussed in the previous sections, Indu’s modern kathak choreography makes space for a syncretic history of South Asia that is occluded today. The next section will delve into the colonial context in order to understand the process of how this omission happened, as well as its impact on music and dance traditions and performers like Indu today as colonial structures persist. Indu’s choreography once again will lead us to this shifting scenario in South Asian history.

\textsuperscript{70} See Assayag \textit{Confluence of the Two Rivers: Muslims and Hindus in South India}, and Flueckiger \textit{In Amma’s Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India} for case studies of these shared spaces.

\textsuperscript{71} Lal, personal correspondence, December 2009.
3. Colonial Communal Discourse

The scene and mood of the dance completely changes with the entry of the boys on stage along with a switch to a faster tempo and the taal from a ten taal (3 beats) to a faster keherwa (4 or 8 beats). There are five boys and two of them approach politely all in time to the beats, three of the girls who are near centre stage, while the other three await their outcome in the back of the stage:

ta taii tat tat taii
aa-taii tat tat taii

And the girls react away from them in sync with the beats, coming together to form a circle in response

tat taa thaa taa traam
tat tat thaa (three chakars)

The girls try and escape in time with the beat of the tabla chanted diga diga diga diga taa taii/ taa taa/ taa taa but can’t seem to get far. Wherever they run the boys seem to surround them.

FIGURE 6 The girl is trying to escape (Indu’s male dance students Iftikaar and Nasir in picture, see chapter four for more about them).

72 Subject to availability of dancers she would have five or six at different performances of this piece.
The whole mood *In the Park* is transformed as the boys enter the stage and the music changes. The different beats and an increase in tempo add a dramatic element as the homo-social space of the women is invaded. All is altered: nothing is the same. Janaki Bhakle in her book *Two Men and Music* traces the two hundred years of British colonization in the sub-continent from the mid 18th century to the mid 20th century. She discusses how it affected every aspect of Indian culture, focusing on the reinvention of Indian music. In the domain of music this change was seen in the classification of court music as both “classical” and “national”.

A modern history was authored for music. The authors of this history aimed to restore to music its ancient origins and address colonial denigrations of it as native caterwauling.

Bhakle argues that colonialism “marked the ideological and epistemological beginnings” of the transformation of Indian music at this time. She uses the example of an article written by Sir William Jones in 1784 titled “On the Musical Modes of the Hindus” to make her point. For Sir William Jones, a colonial and Orientalist scholar writing in 1784, the development of all Indian knowledge was from the Vedas. There hadn’t been critical examination of Jone’s pretext in the subsequent writings that followed. Categories of “Hindu” music were accepted even though referring to North Indian music performed by musicians (Bhakhle 2002: 166-180). D.P. Singhal, a professor of History at the University of Queensland, describes that Indian society went through shifts with the British colonial experience in his 1972 book:

The establishment of British rule in India was accompanied by radical changes in the political and economic structure of the country as well as in intellectual life, having important repercussions on society. Radically akin to one another, the vast majority of both Hindus and Muslims were either peasants or artisans and craftsmen. The British wrestled power from Muslims and Hindus alike. They disrupted the Mughal sovereignty and replaced the old landed aristocracy, mainly Muslim, with a new commercial class of bankers, speculators, and moneylenders. The new structure of economy harmed Muslim craftsmen as much as others (Singhal 1972, 37).

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73 Bhakle, *Two Men and Music*, 3.

74 Ibid.
In particular the Muslim civil and army officers were replaced with European ones, which adversely affected the Muslim feudal aristocracy who had held those positions for generations. Western ideas and the replacement of the Persian language with English as the official language created discontent amongst Muslims, whereas many Hindus were eager to learn the language of the new powers to be. It seems that the British played on the differences between Muslims and Hindus at this juncture in history by creating the new class and suppressing the old “monarchy” of Muslims. According to Singhal, “It is this uneven development of the two communities that was ultimately responsible for much of the mutual communal tension and distress that finally led to the Partition of India” (Singhal 1972: 39).

A number of scholars, including Bernard Cohn (1996), Nick Dirks (2001), Partha Chatterjee (1986, 1993), and Gyan Pandey (1990) argue that the communal politics in modern South Asia could not be fully understood without understanding the colonial experience. More than just material exploitation, the colonial experience entailed a profound reorganization of power and social relations with long lasting consequences. While pursuing its centralizing ambitions, the colonial state sought to systematize and divide the population into distinctive categories of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, and their further sub-divisions (sects and castes). The devices used were census, maps, and codification of law, among others, and were informed by certain political rationalities of the colonial state, which were based on certain liberal-legal notions of rights, identity, boundaries, and community (Foucault 1991, Scott 1999). These political rationalities led to the politicization of local cultural identities. I will elaborate on the theme of mapping of the empire as these mapped structures continue to be core of South Asian institutions and spatial world view today.

75 Muslims ruled India from 711 A.D with Arab invader Muhammad Bin Qasim’s conquering Sind, to Turki-Afghan invaders to the last Mughal ruler (1526-1857 A.D) Bahadur Shah Zafar’s removal by the British in 1857 A.D.
3.1 Mapping an Empire

What role did this very British scientific activity of cartography in India play in the partition of the land? 1818 British military strategy took the entire subcontinent even without having conquered it. The British created the geographical unity of India through mapping of the British Empire (Edney 1997: 16), and then they disunited it with their policy of divide and rule. What is the strategy that is still in disguise? There are two different eras here: the policies of the empire as it was expanding in India, and the policies in the advent of the empire’s departure from India in 1947. In both eras I am arguing that cartography of India was an integral part of the policy and race is the methodology through which that policy was implemented, thus disguising economic and capitalist interests in the process. Edney quotes Edward Said’s comment on the connection between geography and cultural domination that is important to discuss here. He quotes imperialism as follows:

…an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, chartered, and finally brought under control (Edney quotes Said 1997, 24).

The imperial power thus recreates the empire in its maps, subsuming all individuals and places within the map’s totalizing image. Military conquest, geographical conquest, and cultural conquest are functionally equivalent (Edney 1997: p. 24).

Edney argues further that each geographical space conquered in the space of the map constituted what he calls a “geographical panopticon”. Maps of India homogenized India, by a “European panopticon”, providing a disciplinary mechanism, a means to control, which was integral to British authority in this region. Enlightenment discourse of science and rationality had long excluded the Indians from British scientific activities of cartography. There was a distinct hierarchy of labor in the British surveys in India based on race. The top of the hierarchy was the British East

76 Edney, Mapping India, 24.

77 Ibid, 209.
India Company’s covenanted officials, followed by Eurasians in the middle level jobs, and the bottom of the hierarchy were the Indians.

The imperial significance of the Great Trigonometrical Survey depended in part on the survey’s configuration of the British rule of South Asia as being scientific, rational, and liberal, in active opposition to Asian rule, which it stereotyped as being mystical, irrational, and despotic (Edney 1997: 309).

It didn’t matter in British cartography to pay attention to political territories bound by physical features or feudal interrelations; the areas were reduced to a mathematical space according to the British “rule of law”. They created a geographical myth of an empire (p. 332) and refused to conceive of it as anything other than a “natural entity”. British India was thus naturalized to be a constant, timeless and uniform geographical and political state and cultural nation.

The creation of British India thus entailed the forced and, at root, ambiguous coincidence of two spatial concepts: “India” and “empire”. By mapping the subcontinent, the British defined a conception of a natural and eternal geographic entity called “India”. This India was the site of an orientalist’s enthusiasms, an India that stood in marked opposition to active and dynamic Britain. Even as the British justified their domination of South Asia in terms of the cultural superiority evident in such an opposition, they sought to improve India; they sought to change the landscape, to make its economies more dynamic and rational. The imperial disciplining of space was thus at odds with the passivity of India’s disciplined space. The fundamental contradiction of British India—how can a “liberal democracy” also be an imperial despot?—thus found expression in spatial conceptions. The distance between the two sides of the contradiction steadily widened until the ideology of British India—of rational, disinterested power and cultural superiority—finally cracked down and British power in South Asia collapsed in the twentieth century (Edney 1997: 335).

Edney’s research shows the connection between the mapping of the British Empire and the part that it played eventually in the spatial and eventually cartographic division of India. The distance between the colonizers and the natives provided the impetus for a movement of resistance towards the middle of the twentieth century, and Indu’s family played a key role in this resistance. Her

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78 Ibid, 333.

79 Ibid, 334.
choreography plays with the contrast between the first parts of the dance where all seems perfect and the second part where the boys enter the garden and the girls put up a resistance.

4. Indigenous Resistance

tai-tai-tram
1 2 3 4
tai-tai-tram (slow beginning of resistance)
5 6 7 8

(Now in double tempo)

tai-i ta-tai, taii ta-tai - i tram
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
tai-i-ta tai, tai-i-ta tai - ii tram (this bol is all off beat)
8 1 2 3 4 5 6

tram taii ta taii, tram taii ta taii, tram taii ta taii
7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1

FIGURE 7 The Author played the part of the bold girl. Above performance was for anniversary of organization for alumnis of Kinnard College (OAKS), Islamabad, 2003.
On the above beats during the second tora of the dance, one of the boldest girls approaches a boy who was about to approach her friend, and chases him away with mighty and strong movements, stamping her feat and moving her hands back and forth to the rhythm. The boy has to take few steps back, moves his body inwards, and turns his head away with hands and arms in front of his face. Stepping backwards and contracting his body to protect himself from her advancing striking band movements, the boy is defeated.  

The other three boys are successfully blocking the way of two girls on the left side of the stage. At this point in the performance there is some going back and forth as two of the girls attempt to escape. They go up and down the stage in contrary motion while turning repeatedly to confuse the boys who continue to slowly close in on the girls to trap them. Just when you think these two are trapped the girls manage to escape through a gap in the circle that the boys are attempting to make around them. The other girls assured, that their friends have escaped, join them and all the girls exit the stage running one after the other.

March 2004, Zanani, one of the first joint theatre festivals between India and Pakistan, was held in Lahore. At that festival I had the opportunity to play the part of the girl who puts up a resistance as just described, and temporarily succeeds in defeating one of the boys who had approached in her direction. Compared to some of the other women-centered dance dramas participating in the festival, Indu’s choreography was much more subtle in depicting women’s resistance since her chief goal is not to portray female activism. It is important to note here that Indu choreographs resistance but also depicts a more near to life situation by showing that despite this the girls have to exit the park, and this for me is another unique feature of Indu’s choreographic goals (I take this in more detail in chapter three with regards to gender issues). What is important for me to excavate in this chapter is the family background which foregrounds Indu’s

80 I have performed it twice with Indu’s group, once in the role of the girl who kills the bee and later in the role of the boldest girl who beats up one of the boys successfully who was harassing another one of the girls as I describe further.

81 More on initiatives of this type in chapter four.

82 Example: Odissi dancer Sheema Kirmani’s who heads a theatre group working for women’s rights “Tehrik-e-Niswan” performed a play ab jang nahi ho gi [Now there will be no war] based on Aristophane’s Greek classic Lysistrata about two tribes that gained independence from colonial rule through joint struggle and now were warring with each other because of their chauvinistic rulers. The women of the warring tribes unite and bring about a change by refusing the men their conjugal rights. The women take over the state coffers and force the men to see reason.
activism. At this festival I traveled and stayed with Indu, meeting some of her family friends and also learned more about her family background. Below is an excerpt from an interview session between Indu and me in 2004 about her family history starting from their involvement in the Brahmosamaj movement of the nineteenth century:

Before the British government took over when the British missionaries came to Bengal there was a big movement, awakening and reform movement among the Hindus called the Brahmosamaj movement. The leader of this was a man called Raja Ram Mohan Rai. One of the sad things of partition is that nobody in this country\textsuperscript{83} is interested to know, hamaraey yahah kehtaey hae apnaey girabaan maey dekhoe (they say here in our culture that), look at your own faults before you start blaming the other person, that is something that that whole generation and the people of that generation took up and people like Tagore later joined that movement his name at least is known. They were against sati, for women education, and widow remarriage and things like that and also they were looking to get away from the many rituals which were so entrenched in Hindu society which had lost all meaningful significance but which had just become a way of keeping up with the family next door, uss nayi inah kharch kiyah toe maey uss saey ziyadah (that person spends so much money so I will exceed that), instead they turned to the philosophic bases of Hinduism which whether they acknowledge it or not are not only monotheistic but pantheistic. Everything is ONE (capitalization Indu’s). Atama is Bhraman that is a single soul of the universe is all ONE. It is what yog is looking for and Sufi is looking for, it’s the same thing. They tried to get back to basic Hindu philosophy that is why they called it the Brahmosamaj because they say in Hinduism that the great God Brahma is the one that is most forgotten. It’s the other two of the trinity that matter more. There is literally only one still existing temple to Brahma in the whole of India. Brahma himself the God. Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiv the Destroyer. And we know from dance that it is the destruction that leads to creation so its all one cycle. You look at it from here or you look at it from there its one cyclic creation is continuous. Unlike Islam that says Creation is done with one word, kun faya kun.

This is my mother’s side, (i.e.) my mother’s nanaka. So after he became a Brahmosamajhi somehow this very technical philosophy was not enough for him and he finally became Christian looking as many human beings do for some kind of “muskil kusha” (helper in difficulty) some intermediary between this unknowable God and yourself. You see the parallels are always there between one religion and another because you see human nature is like that. So whatever great philosophies we give to ourselves basically the human being is searching for something. So that is what happened to him. This is my mother’s nana, Ishwar Chandar Sinha.

My mother’s father is Rudra and he is best known as the first Indian to become principal of a missionary college that is St. Stephen’s college, Delhi. He was

\textsuperscript{83} Indu clarifies that she is referring to Pakistan.
a close friend of Gandhi, in fact he was the person to send C.F. Andrews who was his colleague at the college to South Africa when this young lawyer who was fighting politically through non-violence. *Nana* (maternal grandfather) ji said to his friend, Andrews, “miM to naukarii meM huN (I am bound in a job), I have my children to look after (he was a widower by that time) and you are a young man without any responsibilities you go and talk to this man and tell him India needs him. Why is he, an Indian stuck there? Tell him to bring his theories here. Gandhi ji came to India. If you see the film “Gandhi” though my nana is not in it, it is very clear how Andrews called him and brought him and he came and he changed the whole idea of politics from grassroots upwards. He was a very close friend of my nana for years in fact there is a very lovely and beautiful photograph of Gandhi ji in my mamu’s book. I’m in a way very sorry that our generation didn’t keep any contact with him.

So the “Singha” family moved to the Punjab, this is the *per nana* (great grandfather) who had became a Christian through Brahmosamaj. They were also all in education because that is where the Brahmin background comes out. Ok? Puja puja to apnii jagab par karte thee but the *pujab* [they would do rituals of worship but the worship] was done like *aalims* [religious scholars] it was based on study. So they became educationists and they took advantage of this British education in the days when the Punjab had not yet been conquered. So when the Punjab was conquered by the British and they needed people to extend their system of education it was the people from Bengal and Madras who came to settle here and run the education department. So now my mother’s nana was a headmaster in a big mission school in Batala and we hear we get some idea as to what that family was like.\(^{85}\)

### 4.1 The Singhas and the Chatterjies—Conversion, Rebellion and Aesthetics

So I learned that Indu had inherited a very interesting legacy of resistance and change from both her maternal and paternal lineage. From her mother’s side, the family of *Singha*\(^ {86}\) had great contributions for the women’s movement in India. Her great grandfather was involved in the Brahmosamaj Movement, which was the first effort of its type urging abolishment of the Hindu custom of *sati* or widow burning, and advocating women’s education. This was in Bengal. Later he converted to Christianity. From her father’s side it was Indu’s grandfather coming from a Brahmin Kulin cast who ran away from his ritualistic responsibilities as Brahmin to personally slaughter animals for the temple. He also converted to Christianity. Indu’s great grandfather from her

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\(^{84}\) Respectful way to address elders in Urdu-Hindi is to attach “ji”

\(^{85}\) Indu, personal correspondence, 2003.

\(^{86}\) Her mothers’s lineage as narrated to me by Indu Mitha herself in one of the interview sessions.
mother’s side was the first rebel in the lineage. He resisted the status quo and eventually ended up converting from a Hindu Brahmin to a Christian. Both belonged to the Bengali community of educationists who came over and settled away from Bengal in Delhi and Punjab. There was only one university in Northern India. Delhi colleges, including St. Stephens College, were affiliated with Punjab University at Lahore.

Belonging to a legacy of teachers Indu’s grandfather Rudra was the first principal of a prestigious college, also active in politics, being a close friend of Andrews he worked closely with Gandhi in the Indian nationalist movement. As narrated previously, Rudra became a very important player in Indian history as it was he who conceived the idea that Gandhi should return to India since he was needed in India’s resistance against the British colonizers. My generation doesn’t realize the importance of this, and of the role that Indu’s family has played in shaping Indian history. Since she moved to Pakistan and after her father’s demise she laments that her siblings lost contact with his family, which also has become an occluded history. I want to pause here and think what this means and how it influences Indu that her father had close links with Gandhi, the non-violent leader for a “united India”, and her family was associated with St. Stephens College, an institute well-known for their secular orientations.

According to Indu it was from her mother’s maternal grandparents, nanaka, where her love for music and dance was nurtured, along with an appreciation for beauty. In short she summarizes these two sides of her mother’s family as:

The Singhas were the rang rangiila (colorful ones) and the Rudras were the moral lot although both sides are educationists.

So in the 1930s and 1940s, during the first decades of Indu’s life when separate regional dances came to Lahore and Delhi, which were both becoming centers of political activism against the colonial power, Indu’s mother made sure that her daughter learned to dance.

Indu describes her father’s side the Chatterjis as:
The Chatterjis with their philosophic bent were of the highest intellectual quality among them. My father and both his brothers were all university professors and educational administrators. 1930s my father is among eight philosophers in Cambridge University, Britain in “Contemporary Indian Philosophy”.

Indu’s family legacy of resistance and love for intellectual discourse laid the foundation for the philosophy of her choreographic vision. Nationalist struggles were at their peak when Indu was born in 1930. Indu inherited a legacy of resistance and change from both her maternal and paternal lineage. From her mother’s side, the family of Singhas made great contributions to the women’s movement in India starting from late 1700s and her great grandfather’s role in the brahmosamaj Movement, mentioned earlier. Indu says it was also her mother’s side of the family nurtured her love for music, dance, appreciation of beauty, and her intellectual background.

*Calling and Questioning Tradition:* The influences from the Singhas, Radrabs and Chatterji’s lay the foundation for Indu’s unique relationship with “Tradition”. On the one hand she understands the importance and respects the need for tradition in one’s relations to one’s roots and identity to the land one belongs to, but on the other hand she also values the virtue of questioning traditions that need to be questioned according to the changing needs of the times and modernity. For example, Indu mentions in her correspondence to me while discussing the theme of her choreography *In the Park* that it is essentially a “modern” theme and I quote:

> *cheRaa chaarRii* (teasing which is flirtatious) is often found in the youthful romance of Radha Krishen stories, but there 1) the play is symbolic of bhakti, 2) always ONE male only, even when there are many GOPIA/gopies 3) Radha always is anxious. Here the girls-challenge- or are frightened and reject and flee.

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87 Indu, email correspondence, 2009.

88 Her mother’s lineage as narrated to me by Indu Mitha herself in one of the interview sessions.

89 Indu, email correspondence, 2009.
Indu builds on her training and knowledge of the Krishna-Radha romance stories, an integral part of the shared pre-partition culture of the North Indian subcontinent that she grew up with during the 30s, but she adapts them according to her new context.

Indu’s kathak choreography uses kavita bols to revive an old tradition, which can be argued as her “strategic revivalism”. At the same time, she consciously takes the Krishna-Radha theme and adapts it to the contemporary context of a Muslim Pakistan. The theme that Indu uses is a modern one. Indu is aware of the comparison with the Radha-Krishna stories and her modern theme of the garden scene is consciously moving away from that and changing the traditional character of the females. As mentioned earlier the CheRaa Chaarii, or flirtatious playful teasing, is often found in the youthful romance of Radha-Krishna stories, but usually this interaction in these stories is symbolic of bhakti. Also there is always only one male, even when there are many gopis, and Radha is always anxious or coquettish but eventually submits to Krishna’s mood. In Indu’s choreography the girls challenge or are frightened and reject and flee. She takes the CheRaa Chaarii (flirty-friendly teasing) between lover and beloved in the traditional Radha-krishna love stories but changes the theme to a modern one of “eve-teasing” in which women are not just victims but protest, resist, and fight back. This mix of reviving and retaining some traditions, while modernizing the themes is the hallmark of Indu’s work in Pakistan. This fusion makes it unique and an anemology, and one of the many reasons why it is so important to write about.

In her choreography Indu moves in between two different spaces. One is the space she creates for the revival of the traditional dance form and also of particular components of the repertoire that she finds beautiful and thus makes an effort to retain. This is the space that facilitates a revival of tradition. The other space Indu creates is a place to critique and question certain societal norms that she finds problematic. This is the space for critiquing tradition. This double play

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90 Sanskrit word meaning a “cow-herd girl” and in Hinduism specifically the name gopi (sometimes gopika) refers to the group of cow herding girls for their unconditional devotion (bhakti) to Krishna as described in the stories of Bhagavata Purana and other Puranic literatures. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gopi)
introduces a unique aspect to the space that she creates through her choreographies. It becomes a space for multiplicity to exist at the same time. She opens the way for new spaces, for alternatives to emerge as she gives her audience agency to have access to multiple readings.

Her family’s syncretic religious history of Brahmin converts to Christianity, and now a mix of secular, Christian and Muslim (through her marriage), demonstrates her upbringing had of a very high tolerance for difference especially in matters of religious faith and practice. This was also the worldview of her generation who grew up in a very different world pre-partition. Her generation, i.e. those who became politically aware in the 1930s in the anti-colonial struggles, wanted to learn about different parts of India as the North and South were more different and unknown to each other than people from different religions. This is the spirit in which she was drawn to the dance form of bharata natyam, a story I’ll get into later. But unfortunately this spirit of the Indian nation uniting to get to know the other parts would by the mid 40s bifurcate into Muslim and Hindu regions for a Partition of the Indian sub-continent in a manner that would scar the region for life. So although India gets its independence from British colonial rule, it is a wounded and torn apart India, and the victory bittersweet. Just like the victory of the boys towards the last scene in Indu’s choreography when the girls flee in reaction to their advances; the boys have the Park to themselves but it is empty and so is their triumph.

5. Bittersweet Victory? 1947 Partition and “the Great Game”

The girls are fleeing after the third tora following the entry of the boys. The last of the girls, still trapped by the boys, runs on these beats and the two boys between whom she was trapped do a “high five” as she flees the stage.

diga-diga-diga-taii/taa taii/taa taii (2)
diga-taii/ta taii (2)
All the girls run off the right side of the stage leaving behind their baskets. Petals of flowers have spread all over the stage during the struggle, and the four boys look surprised and disappointed. Suddenly, after the build up of excitement and activity of Scene 2, there is absolute stillness in this scene. A sadness is also seen in their expressions, as one boy in the center of the stage, who managed to get hold of a scarf of one girl, takes a step towards the audience as he looks at the colorful scarf in his hands. He sits down on his knees with the scarf in his hand expressing his feelings by throwing it down on the floor in frustration. All the boys are standing with their heads hanging and spirits low. As the dupatta (scarf) hits the floor the lights go out and the piece ends.

There are a number of interesting places that this ending allows me to explore. As mentioned earlier for Indu the goal was to express what she calls a “fact of modern life” and that is that women have very little “public space”. Traditionally women are seldom go alone or unescorted at public places, especially those of pleasure and leisure, although she feels that this is changing now. For Indu the girls were enjoying an innocent pleasure and the boys were not wicked, they just wanted to be friends with the other gender but the “vibes” were not conducive. She clarified to me in her correspondence that both groups are nervous of each other’s intentions. Carried away by the moment the boys have become “chasers” and then are reminded in the end that they have lost what they wanted and spoiled the park. This was simply Indu’s “suggestion perhaps to those who deal with the young in our society”.  

When I discussed my reading of Partition in her choreography Indu compared the friendly intent of the boys that backfired with the British Empire’s attitude towards India:

Perhaps the “loss of original motive”/ or direction, is part of the political situation at “Partition”—where “to part” in peace into two new independent nations (if we couldn’t leave peacefully together) by the “sudden/preplanned winds of unleashed violence” led to

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91 Again traces of bhakti according to Lal. While according to Indu it is a symbol of modesty and honor.
92 Indu, email correspondence, 2010.
that dreadful violence and forced migration negating the original intention of “friendship” which the boys wanted, but ended in loss and a ruined garden.\textsuperscript{93}

On the topic of Partition Indu commented strongly that since the British needed to restore itself post World War II and saw an approaching civil war they ran away leaving the Indian people to deal with all the consequences:

RAN AWAY- leaving us to cope with the problems of Partition—not only riots-forced migration but all the administration of share of assets of the “central government” were never delivered. If Britain was praised for “handing over power”, (which it didn’t deserve) they were judge of assets but they did not carry out or delegate any “bailiff” as courts to carry out the orders of the judgment\textsuperscript{94}

With regards to the “handing over power” and acceding to Jinnah and the Muslim demand for Pakistan I would like to zoom out to the bigger picture of what the new emerging world order post World War II was bringing to the case of India for Britain and the Allies in 1947.

One of the latest works about Partition titled The Shadow of the Great Game: The untold story of India’s Partition, by Narendra Singh Sarila, a Prince who was a close witness to the Partition process from within the British administration, has left me with many unanswered questions. Sarila argues how the strategic geo-political positioning of the region comprising present day Pakistan was a big factor in the British agreeing to Jinnah’s demand for Pakistan, as they wanted to retain control over the specific North western regions. He argues the British felt they could retain that control with Jinnah and the Muslims better than with the Congress nationalists and their anti-colonialist agendas, which included their professions of “secularism” and “socialism” and close political association with the “Soviet block” in world politics in the early years after independence.\textsuperscript{95} He makes this connection to the current delicate situation of Pakistan today and I quote:

\textsuperscript{93} Indu, email correspondence, December, 2010.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{95} Sarila, Shadow of Great Game, 415.
The successful use of religion by the British in India to gain political and strategic objectives were replicated by the Americans in Afghanistan in the 1980s by building up the Islamic jihadis, all for the same purpose of keeping the Soviet communities at bay (Sarila 2006, 415).

Sarila argues that once the British realized that they would have to leave India sooner or later; they recognized that India could no longer be a profitable market for them considering their weak Post World War position. However, the North-western part of then United India was strategically very important for Britain and Western Allies to have a hold on in order to keep check on the advancement of Russia post World War II. The 40s saw this change in British policy. He argues that they thought through Jinnah there was a better cooperation channel with the Muslim League because they wanted Pakistan, versus the Congress who wanted the British out of Indian administrative affairs. The U.S. had been applying pressure on Britain to keep India united to avoid a Balkanization of India. But for both these imperialist powers the creation of Pakistan helped secure the strategic military base integral for keeping Russia in check.

U.S imperialist interests in this region and Pakistan’s status as the frontline state in the “war-on-terrorism” have been an impediment to the democratic process in Pakistan. Chomsky aptly summarized this tricky relationship (Chomsky, Feb. 3, 2008):

For Pakistan, its alliance with the United States, I think, has been quite harmful throughout its history. The United States has tried to convert Pakistan into its highly militarized ally and has supported its military dictatorship. The Reagan administration strongly supported the Zia-ul- Haq tyranny, which had a very harmful affect on Pakistan, and the Reagan administration even pretended they didn’t know that Pakistan was developing nuclear weapons. Of course they knew, but they had to pretend they didn’t, so that Congress would continue to fund their support for Pakistan, for the army, and for the ISI, all part of their support for the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, which was not intended to help the Afghans. We know that very well, just from what happened afterwards. It was intended to harm the Russians, so the Reagan administration was using Pakistan as a way to kill the Russians. Actually, that was the term that was used by the head of the CIA station in Pakistan that ‘we have to kill Russians,’ not that the poor Afghans would suffer, but who cares.
In this same article Chomsky’s finds Pakistan in a state of “grave crisis”.96 South Asian historian Ned Bertz argued that “in addition to poverty, the most serious issue in South Asia is state & social instability caused by terrorism and communal (usually religious) violence and to understand South Asia today, we need to comprehend the historical roots of terrorism and communalism”. So for Brent communalism is one of modern South Asia’s most serious and trenchant threats to political stability, economic prosperity, and human peace and he argued that communalism and terrorism can only be understood by examining their historical context; otherwise, we risk reducing all conflicts within India or between India & Pakistan to supposedly “timeless” Hindu-Muslim antagonism”.97 In this grave scenario it is all the more important to ask what are the connections of nationalism with capitalist projects in the case of India and Pakistan? It is time to learn from the lessons of history, and there are many lessons in the history of imperialist interests in the subcontinent, and I argue for dealing with all the demons in the closet. If Partition has privileged one-sided official narratives on both the Indian and Pakistani side it is crucial to write about the occluded spaces of inter-harmony and tolerance which have also existed and continue to co-exist despite so much crisis and opposition to the idea.

6. Conclusion

This chapter is part of the bigger project in this dissertation to offer a new perspective on Partition by crossing the Indo-Pak border by what Zamindar terms “moving boundaries” in her book “The Long Partition”. I propose that the permeable nature of these boundaries will be clearer when illuminated by Indu’s life story and by her artistic philosophy as she continues to contribute through her work in the first decade of the twenty-first century despite the looming threat of


extremist groups in the region post-9/11. For the present moment in Pakistan’s history, I argue that the spaces that Indu and others like her in Pakistan create are what David Harvey call “Spaces of Hope” (2000)—spaces where human qualities, powers in nature, and the dynamics of change bridge and reconnect discourses around the “particularity of the body” and its “embeddedness in socio-ecological processes.” It is such a space that this dissertation attempts to “bring to book.” This is where dance studies in their focus on the corporeality of the body have so much to offer. This is where the project will also be of interest to activists working for the rights of minorities in Pakistan. By minorities, I mean non-Muslims and artists and performers whose art has deep connections with the enemy state across the border. Such performers, I propose, can “choreograph” Pakistan’s present moment in history out of the shadow of Partition.

In the trajectory of Indu’s life, *In the Park* is especially significant as the piece most influenced by her early training in kathak, a form of dance that emblematizes the mixing of Hindu and Muslim that has characterized the culture of South Asia for hundreds of years. Unlike Harvey, who proposes that spaces of hope will arrive in some future time, I argue that the syncretic space of hope, as exemplified in Indu’s choreographies, has always existed in South Asia through time and is unique to the historical reality of the culture of this region. Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, when evaluating the legacies of Partition in the concluding chapter of their book, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, wonder about the potential of cultural exchanges to interrogate the borders in this region. Tan and Kudaisya issued a call for the rise of South Asian civil society even before 9/11, and their call is even more important today. They ask the question:

> Will concerned citizens rise to the challenge of overcoming narrowness and prejudice and strive towards a genuine South Asian identity? Only the early decades of the new millennium will reveal the answer (Tan and Kudaisya 2000, 243).\(^\text{98}\)

\(^{98}\) Current events of “Citizens for Peace” and “people to people” and inter-religious faith seminars are a focus for such an “inclusive” South Asian culture. I will discuss such initiatives in chapter four.
In the case of Pakistan I argue that this syncretic, border-crossing, counter space is fed by both those who are inclined towards a sufi interpretation of Islam as well as progressive secularists and in particular artists, intellectuals, and activists who belong to both these groups. Farzana Sheikh, a political scientist from Columbia University, suggests that this space of hope, which she terms an “emerging trend” in her recent book *Making Sense of Pakistan*, is currently being enacted by the following groups:

An emancipated media, a newly galvanized legal fraternity, an astonishingly vibrant artistic community, [and] a clutch of combative historians and human rights activists…. Although their voices are far from being dominant, they seek nothing less than to restore to Pakistan its identity as an integral, rather than an exclusive, part of the South Asian region (Sheikh 2009, 210).

Towards the end of her book, Sheikh gestures to the unique syncretic model of Indian Islam, which historically has created common ground between Islam and India’s indigenous religions, as a possible solution to the present crisis (Sheikh 2009, 211). This chapter is about this syncretic model of Indian Islam, also a characteristic of my model as embodied in Indu’s kathak choreography *baaGlīice meM* or *(In the Park)*, which I call, after Harvey, a paradigmatic space of hope.

This chapter is my small step to counter “the Great Game”; by tracing that neglected syncretic history of kathak and a culture it thrived in is to bring into the archive the shared common spaces of the people of South Asia. In this first chapter I have removed the first thick veil that has uncovered a syncretic space, a beautiful lush space like the Park in Indu’s kathak choreography which allowed me to discover it. Thus for the syncretic notion of Islam thrives in this space which is a part of the space of hope that I mentioned at length in the introduction, and is energized by artists and allied intellectuals which comprise a vibrant civil society in twenty first century South Asia.99 The next chapter will now attempt to lift yet another veil to this space of hope and that veil is of “national borders”. This time Indu’s choreography is in Uday Shankar dance style and her

99 Chapter four goes in more detail about these groups.
association with Shankar’s student’s Zohra and Kameshwar’s school will be the means for this next journey beyond geographical, physical borders to borders of style and form. The storm of partition came and left with a vengeance and as the dust settled the people of this land found their lives and everything they called home changed for ever. Ahead Indu portrays the story of disruption of one such storm through the life of a woman in a dance drama that she choreographed in Comilla, which was then part of East Pakistan.
CHAPTER TWO

Choreographing a Composite Pakistan (1947-1971):

Indu Creative Dance Dramas

tuufan- The Storm

In a small Bengali fishing village, two brothers live in a small cottage with their families and their mother. Both of them have wives but only one had children, and thus the childless wife is scorned and ridiculed by her mother-in-law for being bhand, barren. On one particular day at dawn the women of this household see storm clouds in the sky and forbid their men to go out fishing. The men, thinking the women’s warning silly, ignore their heeding and head out for their daily fishing chores.

Alas! The women were right. The storm brought by the dawn hit the village hard and created havoc all around. The women pray to God for protection of their men as they wait for the sun to set and the night to end, so they can see their men come safely home. As the colors of the sunset spread across the sky, the women gaze anxiously at the horizon where their men would return from a day at the sea every evening. Finally the fishermen slowly start to emerge from the sea, dragging their nets behind them and heading home. The women of the household see a hunched figure slowly making his way in the direction of their cottage. They anticipate and look for another figure to follow him as usual, but there is none. Only one figure is walking back home. Now each of the two wives start to pray to God that the man walking home from the horizon is her husband. They realize the meaning of one fisherman and dread to find out whose husband it is. The childless wife prays desperately, as her husband is the only one she has in this world. As the figure gets closer, they slowly begin to make out the features and the sadness and trauma on the face of the fisherman. It is the husband of the wife with the children. The childless woman has lost her husband in the devastating storm. Soon she will lose her home as well, because when he mother-in-law realizes what has happened to her son, in grief she will direct all her anger at her barren daughter-in-law and declare her manhoos, bringer of ill-luck to her family. She will kick her daughter-in-law out of the house, saying she was the cause of all the ill fortune that came to her house. The woman who had nothing lost everything. The woman will end up walking hopelessly on the streets, as she will have to leave her hometown due to the turn of events on this one stormy morning.
This sad story of *tuufan* (A Storm) was performed as a dance drama conceived and choreographed by Indu Mitha during her husband’s two-year posting in Comilla, East Pakistan (1966-68). Here Indu brings certain aesthetic elements of both East and West Pakistan together at a time of increasing tension between the two parts of the new nation state of Pakistan. I begin with this piece to highlight the chapter’s focus: the bridging nature and subtle activism of Indu’s work, particularly in her Uday Shankar-style “creative dance dramas.” Indu’s choreography *caaroN paibair* (the Four Time Measures) allows me to fully investigate her training in Shankar’s modern dance, which stands on the shoulders of the Bengali renaissance. I will attempt to access that history in this chapter, a history that was a part of Pakistan that has been largely forgotten. Further, I will argue that Indu’s creative dance dramas articulate an occluded composite history of modern day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In *tuufan*, Indu’s Bengali connection facilitates access into the context of East Pakistan, while her choreography, a unique mix of music and dance traditions of the pre-Partition Indian sub-continent, hint of an occluded history of this time when culture and identities were ethnically composite. To navigate the complexity of the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, and to access occluded shared histories, I use the temporal structure of Indu’s *caaroN paibair*. Indu starts with Uday Shankar dance style for this piece, followed by bharata natyam solos, then kathak (particularly kavita bols mentioned in the first chapter), and ends with a mix of all three dance styles. My journey in history too is structured around this choreography, which guides me in navigating through this time. To parallel the structure of the choreography, I have structured the history of the region into four time periods. The variation of light from each time period is equated to the degree of openness and flexibility of borders within these states. Thus whether the light is increasing or decreasing signifies less regulated or stricter enforcement of border controls between India and Pakistan (East and West). The following *saiber* (Dawn), *aaftaab* (Sun), *shafaq ke rang* (Dusk), and *mahtaab* (Moonlight) become the signposts illuminating the aftermath of the storm of 1947 Partition.
For the finale of caaroN paibair I use the story line, Indu’s unique kavita bols, and the selection of poetic verses combined with Indu’s explanation of the piece, to argue for Indu’s subtle rebellion in order to retain a shared South Asian identity through her art, i.e. her dance choreographies. In doing so I argue that Indu also presents a model of subtle activism for artists and for artistic citizenship beyond borders.

In tuufan Indu portrayed the storm symbolically. She dressed the three dancers who personified the storm in black with nets covering their faces to “dehumanize them”. She shared with me that she had specifically told the three dancers to symbolize creating havoc without actually creating havoc on stage. Their movements were in mime, which she describes as “folk, naturalistic movements”. Indu played the part of the childless wife deserted by her in-laws (see picture below). In the scene towards the end when the childless wife is all alone Indu used verses from Tagore¹⁰⁰, a legendary Bengali poet, to express her sentiments of loss and pain, of separation and homelessness.

\[meraa\ \text{man}\ \text{bhuulaa} - \text{re} \ \text{gaam se duur melaa paath re}\]
\[meraa\ \text{man}\ \text{bhuulaa} - \text{re}\]

My heart please forget far from this village there is a mela (festival) Oh heart forget those memories.

Indu used these verses of Tagore to evoke painful memories that the childless wife must try and forget. This theme of loss and nostalgia following a natural disaster, as well as Indu’s emphasis on the storm as a metaphor, urge me towards a deeper interrogation of the time and place when Indu choreographed this dance drama. This dance drama was created with a group of Bengali folk

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¹⁰⁰ Indu shared these verses with me, which she didn’t remember the original but according to a Bengali cultural enthusiast and Nazrul poetry specialist Raan Dilruba Yamine (email correspondence, 2012) these are from Rabindranath Thakur’s “Geetabitan” which is a collection of lyrics for RabindraSangeet. This particular song is from a section named Bichitra. Bangla version shared by Yasmine is: ~Graam ebhara oi ranga mair path/Amaar mon bholoYe` re../| ~..
dancers whom Indu met during her two years in Comilla, East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{101} Even though Indu’s ancestors were from Bengal, which is present day Bangladesh, on both her maternal and paternal side they had migrated and settled in Punjab, so this was the first time she had an opportunity to live and choreograph there and thus reconnect with these roots.

Interestingly Indu uses a bharata natyam solo earlier on in the piece, which she performs herself as the prayer of the childless mother for a child, as well as movements from her training in dance technique from teachers Zohra and Kameshwar Segal, students of the Indian modern dance pioneer Uday Shankar. Thus here Indu creates two different bridges: between East and West Pakistan by an interesting mix of East Pakistani artists, poetry and music translated in the Pakistani national language Urdu and between Pakistan and India by maintaining her links with Pakistan’s pre-Partition past through her classical bharata natyam dance piece, by then identified as Indian “National Dance”.\textsuperscript{102} What is key here is Indu’s context of performance, i.e. producing and presenting in East Pakistan in the army circles that she was a part of and promoting Bengali language, music, dance and poetry in the late 1960s, a time when tension between the Eastern and Western wing of Pakistan was at its peak. By the 60s Pakistan and India had already fought two wars, but despite these tense relations at the national level Indu maintained her Indian connection through her personal life and her dance repertoire. It seemed natural for Indu to do so as part of the legacy from her teachers Shankar, Zohra and Kameshwar, who were not afraid of crossing man-made borders of caste, class, or even religion in their life and work.\textsuperscript{103} Shankar was fearless in his

\textsuperscript{101} For the purposes of this chapter I will refer to present day Bangladesh as East Pakistan as the focus here is on the early decades of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971 when the region that became Bangladesh was the eastern wing of Pakistan.

\textsuperscript{102} See O’Shea’s chapter “Nation and Region” in book \textit{At Home in the World : Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage}, 2007 for the complexity of the configuration and emergence of bharata natyam as a national dance form in 1930’s, and the colonial and anticolonial politics involved in the process (p.78-92).

\textsuperscript{103} Zohra was from a Muslim family and she married Kameshwar who was Hindu but religion was not an issue for them or their families from what I read in her autobiography.
experimentation with Indian dance\textsuperscript{104}, whereas Shankar’s genius was that he was experimental while remaining committed to Indian dance aesthetics.\textsuperscript{105} Like Shankar, Indu availed the local Bengali tunes and themes as well as the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, a local poet. Towards the end of the piece she leaves her audience with something to ponder and also to question stereotypes and ideologies counter to what was surrounding them. Indu follows this trend in her choreography \textit{caaroN paibair} as well which I will get into ahead. This is legacy of her training in Shankar’s modern dance, which itself stands on the shoulders of the Bengali renaissance. I will attempt to access that history in this chapter, a history that was a part of Pakistan that has been forgotten. I argue that Indu’s creative dance drama articulate an occluded composite history of modern day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Here, Indu’s Bengali connection facilitates access into the context of East Pakistan, while her choreography, a unique mix of music and dance traditions of the pre-partition Indian subcontinent, provides an access to the occluded history of this time when culture and identities were ethnically composite.

A storm can bring great destruction; it is a natural disaster that can change the course of things in a most unexpected manner. People are separated and killed and may lose all that is of importance to them. This can change the whole order of things. The two moments—the 1947 Partition and later the 1971 separation/liberation—did just that: dividing of the land of India first into two states and later into three nation states. This “storm” caused severe damage to land and property, and most importantly caused the loss of lives of millions of South Asians. This trauma and devastation, which resulted as a consequence of the nation states that emerged after 1947 “Partition” and the 1971 “Fall of Dhakka”, is well documented especially as part of official history of the three nation states concerned. These twenty-four years (1947-1971) mark the first years of

\textsuperscript{104} At a time before the revival of the classical dance forms. This was a time in the early century when he gained popularity but he fell from favor after the rise of the revivals.

\textsuperscript{105} See Erdman, \textit{Performance as Translation}, 64-88.
Pakistan as a newly born nation state. These years were crucial to the core personality building of the infant nation state, and also marked with the rise of Bengali nationalism. The story of this time is more complex than what the conflicting official historical narratives offer, narratives that vary depending on whether the literature is from India or Pakistan or Bangladesh. In the process of aiding the nation-identity making, important aspects of cultures and their histories were occluded as they clashed with national agendas.

The symbolism of *tufan* or the storm speaks to the trauma and displacement of millions due to the 1947 Partition and its aftermath, which led to the 1971 disunion of Pakistan and Bangladesh. The scene of a storm and the separation of families that are reunited after decades is a common theme in South Asian stories in both literature and films of the 50s and the 60s. After the storm of the 1947 Partition, more storms followed, and the most crucial one in many ways for defining the crisis that Pakistan faces today is from the storm of 1971. This is called “separation” of East Pakistan from West Pakistan in Pakistani history books, yet it is known as “liberation” in Bangladeshi history narratives. While *tufan* helps me aptly depict the havoc of these moments, this chapter is not about this destruction that is already well documented, but about accessing an occluded history that is neither about trauma nor the supposedly smooth transition into new nation states. This is because most official narratives tend to either one version of this or the other. To attempt to get closer to people’s history of this time period during the early decades of Pakistan’s history, I need to move beyond these binaries. For a deeper investigation into contested people’s history, it is aesthetic practices, particularly dance, which comes to my rescue.

I will now proceed on this journey into occluded histories of the years 1947-1971. Indu’s creative dance drama, Uday Shankar choreography’s *caaroN pahair* or the “Four time measures”

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106 See Panday, *Remembering Partition*, 13. Panday’s illicits politics of language used in describing an historical event and gave example of 1947 and 1971 from perspective of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh with different use of term “Partition” in local vernacular and the complexities of the meaning and perspectives accordingly (13).
helps me delve deeper into the occluded “composite” culture of Pakistan that was most visible during these early years. Such an aspect of history can only be accessed through a people’s history and its contested nature, one that I argue is best handled through a creative approach to history.

1. caaroN paihair - The Four Time Measures and Chapter Format

From Indu’s theme of the storm, which provides the overall mood for the 40s, 50s, and 60s, I move to Indu’s theme of changing time periods to navigate these decades in history. caaroN paihair guides me to explore the uncharted territory of a people’s history of Pakistan. This is a period in South Asian history when Bengal was East Pakistan, i.e. years 1947-1971. This is a history that Pakistan shares with Bangladesh, as they were one nation-state. To access this occluded shared histories, this journey uses caaroN paihair’s temporal structure and is divided into roughly four decades. The plot of this piece is the four time periods in a day: dawn, day, dusk, and night. Indu starts with Uday Shankar dance style for this piece, followed by bharata natyam solos, then kathak (particularly kavita bols mentioned in the first chapter) and ends with a mix of all three dance styles. My journey in history too is structured around this choreography, which guides me in navigating through this time. Consequently, I structured the history of the region into four time periods. The variation of light from each time period is equated to the degree of openness and flexibility of borders within these states. Thus whether the light is increasing or decreasing signifies less regulated or stricter enforcement of border controls between India and Pakistan (East and West). So the following saiber, aaftaab, shafaq k rang, mahtaab become the signposts along my path to history as summarized below:
1. *saihar (Dawn)* 1940-1951: The dawn will take us through Indu’s life to Lahore before and after 1947 Partition.

2. *aafتاب (Sun)* 1951-1965: The day reveals a time period of Indu’s early years in Pakistan, when people to people linkages, love connections, and frequent cultural and social exchange cross flexible borders.

3. *shafaq ke rang (Twilight)* 1965-1971: The sunset begins the most visible process of “Long Partition”/policing following war of 1965 and leading to 1971, artists counter the enforced rigidity of the time.

4. *mahtar (Moon)* (Previously called raat or night) Post-1971: A dark period in Indu and Pakistan’s history but the pitch dark night is lit up by the moon and artists continue to counter the confined nation state identity post 1971. Good examples of this are Faiz and IPTA, and this resistance culture persists though hidden in the dark; works of artists like moonlight.

Part one of the next section will begin with the first time period of Dawn, the first ray of light, and an analogy with the frequent crossing of people despite the freshly made borders. Thus this part is about new beginnings for Pakistan and Indu. I will introduce Indu’s dawn as a dancer and woman, when she meets her first teachers and her love and the euphoria of independence is still fresh. The second part *aafتاب is the time period when the sun is at its peak (1951-1965) in Indu and Pakistan’s coming of age. It is a time marked by intense activities and exchanges between people in India and Pakistan, and Indu crossed the newly drawn borders for love. Things start changing Post 1965 and thus the third part *shafaq ke rang uses the decreasing light of the era (1965-1971) to raise Indu and Uday Shankar’s problematic “Bengaliness” or rather lack of it using reference to her choreography *tuufan*. Here I will delve into how Indu and Shankar’s creative dance dramas allow me to access occluded composite history beyond the current nation state borders of India, Pakistan and
Bangladesh. The concluding destination of the journey and the final section of the choreography is the time of darkness in Pakistan’s history (Post-1971) when the night is at its peak but the *maftaab* or the moon is also there. This fourth time period marks a dark period with 1971 marking the eventual re-making of Pakistani borders, creation of Bangladesh, and also severing the border between India and Pakistan as a consequence. But the moon is out, Indu’s choreographies allow me to read about resistance by artists like Indu who manage to avail the moonlight and continue their work.

Before we take the first step into this journey with Indu’s choreography, I first want to elaborate on works of two scholars whose work has been integral for these first steps: Aamir Mufti who has used poetry to discuss an alternate “lyric history”\(^{107}\) of Pakistan and India, and Susan Foster who has laid the foundation for dance studies scholars to tackle with counter histories with her approach of “choreographing history”.\(^{108}\) My two tier framework in this chapter and also in conceptualizing this dissertation is devised on the shoulders of that pioneer in South Asian comparative literature and the dance history scholar on whom I will elaborate in the coming passages.

### 2. Theoretical Framework: *Choreographing Composite Space of Hope*

Mufti “Lyric History of India” and Foster’s “Choreographing History”

In my search for a suitable framework for excavating the occluded composite history through Indu’s Uday Shankar choreographies, I found Aamir Mufti’s work most useful. My theoretical framework ended up using Mufti’s comparative literature approach alongside a dance studies’ one. Mufti uses literary sources towards similar ends, as I will avail Indu’s choreographies. I

\(^{107}\) Mufti, “Lyric History”, 245.

particularly found useful his usage of the poetry of Pakistan’s famous poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984) who is also importantly considered a national poet. But Mufti argues a very different perspective to Faiz’s legacy.

In Pakistan, Faiz has long been spoken of as a “national” poet, as the national poet during the first forty years of the country’s life. It is my contention that this cannot mean what it is usually thought to mean, that, in part, the accomplishment, the grandeur and ambition, of his work is precisely that it raises serious doubts about whether the nation-state form can account for the complexities of culture and identity in modern South Asia. (Mufti 2004, 251)

Mufti argues that the legacy of partition is the key theme of the body of Faiz’s writings.

Mufti argues that through Faiz’s poetry it is possible to have a different view of identity in post-partition South Asia apart from those “normalized within the shared vocabulary of the post-colonial states”.

I want to highlight here what Mufti refers to as “complexities of culture” and the composite culture of Pakistan that artists, poets, and writers of his generation felt compelled to narrate through their work, despite resistance to do so from the official narrative. Mufti highlights how Faiz’s poetry exemplifies some of the central dilemmas of Urdu writing in the aftermath of the partition with India at the moment of independence from British rule. For Mufti it represents a profound attempt to unhitch literary production from cultural projects of either postcolonial state in order to make visible meaning that have still not been entirely reified by being subsumed within the cultural logic of the nation-state system. This “unhitching” is what I am aiming for as well through Indu’s repertoire. Mufti eloquently unhitches a space independent of either nation state of India and Pakistan using Faiz’s poetry. Mufti’s example of Faiz’s work is in the field of lyrics and poetry, whereas in the study of a dancer and her dance, Susan Foster’s pioneering work which focuses on

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110 Ibid, 251.
the bodies that comprise history urges me to pay attention to Indu and my own dancing body as well as Indu’s body of work. So while Mufti writes a “lyric history”, I am using Foster’s notion of “choreographing history”111 which is about counter histories through a focus on the bodies that comprise history, i.e. the people that the history is about. Foster highlights the dynamic nature of this interaction of the bodies in history with what is written about this as a “choreographic process” and argues that “neither historian’s body nor historical bodies not the body of history become fixed during this choreographic process” (1995,11). Foster puts the body in the centre of the discourse of history and gives it unlimited potential to narrate its story.

Thus Mufti’s unveiling of Faiz’s subtle activism in his poetry in Post Partition Pakistan and Foster’s call to writing counter histories through bodily practices leads me to access a composite Pakistan. This Pakistan is one in which Indu’s Uday Shankar dance dramas can exist and be received. This composite Pakistan that I discover counters official historical narratives. Mufti counters these official narratives when he looks at Faiz’s poetry and his usage of words from a Pre-Partition time, when Urdu was not Pakistani yet and included both Sanskrit and Persian influences. In my case Indu’s work Post 1947-1971 in West and East Pakistan at that time avail her knowledge of a South Indian dance form, combined with North Indian music as well as Bengali folklore and themes. Thus I argue that Indu choreographs inclusiveness and this is in the composite culture, which is a part of this region despite Partition and newly made borders and boundaries. Analyzing her Uday Shankar repertoire in particular allows me to access the occluded composite spaces in South Asian culture and this space is a “space of hope”.

111 Foster, Choreographing History, book title.
3. *saiher* (Dawn)

New Beginnings, (same region new borders) (1940-1951)

Faiz’s poem “Sub-e-Azaadi, August 1947”

*Yaey Daagh Daagh Ujala, Yaey Shab Gazeedah Sabar*

*Woe Intizâar thab jiss ka, yaey woe saber toe nahee*

*Yaey woe saber toe nahee jiss kee arzue laey kar*

*Chalaey thaeiyaar keb mil jaey gay kabeey na kabeey*

“Dawn of Freedom (August 1947)”

This stain-covered daybreak, this night-bitten dawn,
This is not that dawn of which there was expectation;
This is not that dawn with longing for which
The friends set out, (convinced) that somewhere there would be
Met with,

Faiz Ahmad Faiz

Chak Shehzad, Indu’s residence 2001

I am excited and nervous as I make my way to the stage as one of the “Dawn” dancers. This is my first performance with Indu after a year of learning dance at her institute in Islamabad called *Mazmun-e-Shauq*, which means “the subject of one’s passion”. The stage for this dance performance has been set up for friends and families of Indu’s students at *Mazmun-e-Shauq*, on the lawn of Indu’s farm near Islamabad in an area called Chak Shehzad. I am one of seven dancers who are all wearing lemon-yellow dresses, the color signifying the early coming of dawn. We enter the stage diagonally and create a line spreading over the stage in a pattern which uses space in a non-symmetrical manner

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characteristic of Uday Shankar’s “creative dance”. Creative dance is the term Indu prefers and also the accepted term to refer to modern dance in India today. The *bols* or rhythmic chants of the piece start like this:

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\text{dhiin-naa –taa-ge-naa-tit-tat-taa/ dhiin} \\
\text{1--------2 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 -8 -9 - 1-----}
\]

On the first *bol* *dhiin*, the dancers who personify the dawn rays enter with their right arm outstretched, as if reaching for something in the sky, and the left arm towards the back, with both palms down. According to Indu the first syllable is *dhiin*, but it is prolonged from one beat to one and a half beats. The *na* above is on the second beat, but very short like a soft echo, giving extra importance to the *sum* or the first beat. To this first *bol* the dancers lift their bodies up on their tiptoes coming down on beats three to nine to take small and slow rhythmic steps in their diagonal line. The tone of the entire dance is gentle, slow and soft. Indu tells me that the *dhiin* or *dhee* is played on the *tabla* with the “heel” of the palm, which glides for one and a half beats over the top softly and ends with the short *na* at the off-beat, or the end of the second *matra* played only with fingers. Little did I know that when I began learning this choreography more than a decade ago it one day would guide me into both Indu’s life history as well as her pedagogical techniques that I will get into ahead.

*Dancing in Pre-Partition Lahore and Delhi*

*saibar* or Dawn allows me to discuss how Indu has evolved her teaching method as well as the unique choreographies of her dance dramas, which have been adapted from the style now popularly known as Uday Shankar’s style after its founder. The choreography *saibar* is an outcome of Indu’s training with Uday Shankar’s key students Zohra Segal and Kameshwar in Lahore in 1938 and again from 1943 to 45. Although Indu was just thirteen at the time, it was a training that greatly influenced her teaching methodology and her choreographies. After Indu’s childhood kathak lessons that I mentioned in chapter one, it was Zohra Segal (famous today in Bollywood for playing
grandmother roles) who was her next teacher in 1938 when Indu’s mother used her contacts to get Segal a job as a “Gymnastics Teacher” in Queen’s Mary College. Indu’s mother was very keen on her children’s education and artistic interests, and had realized very early on that young Indu had a strong inclination toward dance. In the 1930s Zohra had just returned from studying modern dance in Germany. Indu learned dance from her briefly but Zohra left soon in 1938 to join Uday Shankar’s Almora centre that he set up on his return to India after gaining fame in Europe. Initially, Uday Shankar received a lot of international attention for his “Indian” dances, which were well received back home in India, but fell from favor after the revival of “Indian classical dance” forms since Shankar’s work didn’t fit into any one category of the revived classical dance forms.\textsuperscript{113} Zohra Mumtaz\textsuperscript{114} and Kameshwar Segal became Shankar’s students at the Almora Centre and also trained and toured with him. The two dancers met and fell in love in Almora, marrying on August 14, 1942. Zohra was from a Muslim family and Kameshwar from a strict Hindu one, but their love became the bridge for both families to accept and be happy for them. The Almora Centre ultimately broke up in 1943 when Shankar headed into his first film venture kalpana. It was only when they left the Centre in June 1943 to start their own school that Zohra decided to move back to Lahore as she had contacts there. That is when thirteen-year-old Indu got a chance to reconnect with her teacher Zohra Segal.

Before I get into the particular influences and training that Indu picked up from her teacher I want to pause and take a brief look at the Lahore that Indu grew up in. She left Lahore due to Partition only to return to it when it would overnight become a part of the new nation state of Pakistan. It is important for my purposes to describe what Lahore of the 1940s was before the 1947 Partition, and I will get into the Post 1947 Lahore in the next section. Indu’s brother P. C. Chatterjee

\textsuperscript{113} The story of the revival of classical dance in India is mentioned in more detail with reference to the history of bharata natyam in Chapter Three as it is Indu’s initial bharata natyam training in India pre-Partition.

\textsuperscript{114} Her maiden name when they met, after marriage she would become Zohra Segal.
(Indu and siblings refer him to as Tiny Chatterjee) gives some of the description in his personal memoirs *The Adventures of Indian Broadcasting: A Philosopher’s Autobiography* in a chapter titled “Goodbye Lahore” about pre-Partition Lahore which he left for work in Delhi in 1943:

Lahore, it seems, was a place where different cultural and intellectual streams met. It was here that the Brahmo Samaj established itself towards the end of the nineteenth century and began the process of religious reform. The Samaj building was located in Hira Mandi, the red light district! Later came Dayanand Saraswati and the Arya Samaj took over. It was around this time that a Christian Mission was established by Forman, who set up a school which was to flower into the famous Forman Christian College. In recent times the most important Urdu and Persian poet who lived and worked in Lahore was Doctor Sir Mohammad Iqbal. He taught Philosophy holding the Chair at Government College till just five years before my father joined. [...] the young poet Hafeez Hoshiarpuri who had studied Philosophy under my father..when Dr.Iqbal dies in the early forties there was a spate of articles on him in Urdu and English. Hafeez translated my father’s articles from English into Urdu at that time. [...] On the Hindu cultural side, which Lahore is sometimes accused of having neglected, it is good to remember that it was an important seat of Sanskrit learning. [...] I was in Lahore as a youngster of fifteen or so that I went to Amrita Sher Gill’s first exhibition at Faletti’s hotel. Nicholas and Svetislav Roerich exhibited their works in the 30s…Sadhana Bose came and danced in Lahore and I found the ensemble of *jal tarang* fascinating. I don’t think I have witnessed the like since. Uday Shankar came too but I was not taken to see his show. Uma was the favored one and we were all jealous of her! (Chatterjee 1996, 54)

Chatterjee goes on to describe how bookshops were an important institution in Lahore. Artists and musicians performed there from around the world, and a cult of writers gathered around Khushwant Singh’s flat. Thus a picture emerges in the quote above of the high culture accessible to the highly educated elite class of Lahore to which the Chatterjees belonged. (After 1951 Indu Chatterjee would become a Mitha, another well-respected family of Sirdar Sir Suleman Casim Mitha).

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**Zoresh Dance Institute, Lahore**

The new institute was called Zoresh Dance Institute, a combination of the names of Zohra and Kameshwar, and was representative of their collaborative teaching style. They were co-directors  

115 He had a worldwide cotton business with ginning mills in Sindh and Khandesh and also large shares in Scindia Shipping Company (Mitha 16, 2003).
and all students had to take a class from Zohra and a class from Kameshwar. I will now discuss what Indu has taken up as her teaching methodology from Zohra Segal, and will get into some of the choreography influences towards the end of section two (2.2) when I discuss Uday Shankar in more detail. Indu feels that what she took most from this training was Segal’s teaching methodology in particular:

She’s a very methodological teacher she would teach you certain exercises one day and some simple steps and next lesson she would make it more complicated and so on. […] The other thing that I noticed that is very interesting in their teaching was that they held separate classes for professionals and separate classes for amateurs. Classes in the evenings were amateurs and I can understand that. I don’t think they got anything from the girls of the mohallah (referring to the Red light area), they were not interested in this kind of dancing.

For beginner students Zohra would start with kathak once a week, and during one part of class she would teach them pieces of a new choreography that she was currently working on. She would teach the students small pieces of movements as exercises before they would know the next day that it was part of a bigger step in a dance drama. This is part of Zohra Segal’s teaching legacy that Indu passes on to her students. I didn’t realize it initially when I was her student, but over the years I could see the dance that she was building up. It was always a big struggle for her because most students were not that serious about the dance and didn’t attend classes regularly, so some dancers would learn one piece of the dance and then miss the next class and thus the next part of the dance. Unlike a choreography in which all dancers are doing the same steps and where this wouldn’t matter much, this is a big problem for learning Shankar’s creative dance as each dancer has their own unique movement in the drama, which together when combined with all the other unique movements make the whole canvas of the choreography.

116 This was problematic for some parents as they didn’t want a man teaching their daughter but they didn’t compromise on that.

The problems of students skipping classes or not finishing their training for some reason is secondary of course to the primary one that Indu struggles with that many parents don’t give permission for their daughter’s to dance. This seems to be a South Asian problem and not just an issue with girls from Muslim families. Pre-Partition Lahore Hindu girls were struggling with this problem as well as Indu describes below:

And even then the only Muslim student learning was her own younger sister Sabra who was at that time in the teachers training college. We were two Christian girls, myself and another my father’s friend’s daughter she was teaching at Kinnaird college in those days she was also my father’s student of philosophy and the rest were mostly Hindu girls and when they first came they said to Zohra jee we don’t want to learn from your husband we want to learn only from you. Their parents must have said ke ye bameM accha nabiiM lagaa (we don’t like this). She said bamaare yahaaM seekbnbai to ek lesson meraa hogaa aur ek mere miyaaM kaa aur ye savaal bii nabiiMpaidaa botaa ke ye ham aap ke kahme par change kareM (if you want to learn with us one lesson will be mine and one my husband’s and there is no question that we make any changes on your request).118

While an older Indu appreciates these lessons, the young Indu who was a very quick learner and very serious about dance from a very young age, was disappointed with the pace of her classes as most of her colleagues were not as serious, which made the process too slow for Indu’s inquisitive mind. Indu narrated to me how once Zohra gave a scolding to all her students because she was tired of them missing too many classes:

I’m telling you about the dant (scolding) she gave us, she sat us down, coffee parties this and that the girls said, they didn’t take it seriously they were girls who were sitting around waiting for the right rishtab (marriage proposal) to come. And she saw me in the end of the class with tears coming down my eyes and she came and she put her arms around me and “I know you have never missed a class so this scolding is not for you.” But I was very hurt I was a little girl and I knew that I have no trouble picking up the steps. That was my only dissatisfaction with that teaching because there was nothing that I found difficult.119

On the plus side being Zohra and Kameshwar’s star student gave Indu opportunity at the young age of fourteen or fifteen years to dance professionally. Indu took part in all of their performances at the

119 Ibid.
newly inaugurated Open Air Theatre in Lahore. Indu especially fondly remembers how honored she was when chosen to perform a duet opposite her teacher Zohra as one of the sisters in the Maharaj’s court for dance drama “Shiv Sati” produced by G. D. Sondhi. But just when Indu finished her matriculation exam (tenth grade) her teachers Zohra and Kameshwar decided to move to Bombay. In Segal’s autobiography Stages: The Art and Adventures of Zohra Segal she mentions that it was due to the growing tensions from the Partition and she thought a Hindu-Muslim couple like them would not survive in the new Lahore. But Indu disagrees with Segal when she writes in her biography that in July 1945 on their return from their tours they found a lot of tension in Punjab due to the “impending Partition” to which they felt that there would be “no room for a Hindu-Muslim couple in the future land of Pakistan”. In Indu’s opinion they had to depart as the number of students never picked up after Segal’s return with baby Kiran and her involvement with “Shiv-Sati”. They closed their institute and moved to Bombay to try their luck. Kameshwar urged Indu to join them to Bombay and on their tour but for young Indu her studies came first and she wanted to finish her matriculation exams. Thus this was the end of Indu’s lessons in Uday Shankar’s repertoire. Still as I mentioned before about Lahore there were many opportunities for dancers at that time as it was a very lively Lahore in those days for classical dance and musical performances. Indu was now a first year student at the prestigious Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore, and learned what she calls Bengali semi classical dance at summer-evening extra-curricular classes. These lessons, in my opinion, later helped her in choreographing Bengali folk dance choreographies in tuñfan a decade or more later.

As mentioned earlier Sather (Dawn) is part one of a four-piece Uday Shankar style choreography and a good metaphor for new beginnings. This dance was a new beginning for me as

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120 Co-written with Joan L. Erdman.

121 Segal, Stages, 25.

122 Indu refers this as “semi-classical” which is inspired by classical but does not follow all the rules and regulations
Indu’s dance student, just like 1947 was for a young seventeen-year-old Indu when she fell in love with a new dance form and the man who later became her husband. The year 1947 also marked crucial new beginnings for the nations of Pakistan and India, a Tainted Dawn that Faiz refers to in his poem “Dawn of Freedom”.

August 1947

On the eve of Partition Indu met A.O. Mitha, an army captain, at her uncle’s home. This young man would later become a legend in his own right, a Major General in Pakistan’s army who was respected and revered by his colleagues and subordinates for his honesty and integrity, but who would be wrongly court-martialed as a consequence of the 1971 war. In Mitha’s book posthumously published by Indu, he describes this first meeting with Indu in these words:

I met Indu in October or November 1947. The first time I saw her was at a fairly big party at General Rudra’s house. Nobody introduced us, and both of us, I suppose, were busy talking to people we knew. A couple of days later, it was a Sunday, I dropped in at Leela’s place and Indu was reclining on a towel on the lawn arguing about something or the other with Leela. I took one look and my heart turned over, as it does to this day. I knew that this was the girl I must marry. I am not exaggerating. It did happen that way and I love her as much as ever to this day. We got married on 19th August 1951 (A.O Mitha 113, 2003).

But there is a lot that happened in the four year gap between that fateful encounter described above at the eve of Partition and their marriage on 19th August 1951. All of a sudden everyone had to make a choice as to what country they would belong- Pakistan or India. While Indu’s love, the young army captain, decided to go to Pakistan, her father chose to stay in India, choices that became a bone of contention between Mitha and Indu’s father who didn’t want his daughter moving to another country. And so the young lovers like millions of South Asians families at the time of 1947 parted ways. Mitha, from a Muslim family, became a captain for the Pakistani army and moved to Pakistan, as that was the place of his ancestral home and roots. Indu moved with her family to Delhi. Indu’s father seeing his determined daughter’s interest with Mitha tried to distract

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123 Liernan, Poems by Faiz, 288.
her and finally allowed her to go to Madras to pursue her passion to learn bharata natyam at Kalakshetra. So in 1948 Indu got a chance to learn briefly from Sri Lalita Shastri in Madras, an experience that she cherishes. But the couple kept in touch through letters and remained determined to be together and reunite as soon as Indu turned twenty-one, the legal age for her to marry without her father’s consent. As soon as she turned twenty-one and finished her master’s exam she left India to join her beloved in Pakistan and to get married. Thus in 1951 Indu first crossed borders for love to begin the sunrise of a new day in her life. The four years from 1947-1951 were crucial for Indu’s dance foundations. It turns out that her father’s decision to leave Lahore was most productive for Indu’s dance training as the move to Delhi introduced her to the southern classical dance form of bharata natyam, which she quickly decided was the dance form best suited for her.

Sangeet Bharati School (Connaught Circle), New Delhi

The biggest and most immediate change the Partition brought in Indu’s life was the move from Lahore to Delhi. This enabled Indu to first see bharata natyam (I discuss Indu’s work in this dance form extensively in chapter three). She found it so different from anything she had ever seen, as before this time it was not yet common in the North, so Indu had never had a chance to see it. Bharata natyam was for Indu something so unlike anything she was familiar with. There was also a nationalist spirit of that time which was to get to know every part of India and it was in this spirit too that Indu decided to start to learn bharata natyam for the first time. Indu joined a famous dance academy called the Sangeet Bharati School. There her teacher was Vijay Raghava Rao, an eminent flutist at the All India Radio (AIR)124 as well as a nattuvanar, which is a conductor of bharata natyam music125. She studied under him in Delhi from March 1948 till March 1950, and during this time got the opportunity to perform solos jathisawaram and tillana at the school’s parents’ day and also take

124 Specializing in both Southern and Northern classical music.

125 Indu explained that he would lead the classical musicians and chanting the dance bols but never demonstrates the steps.
part in group dances in folk, Uday Shankar, Kathakali and other style dances and dance-dramas at the Annual Public (ticketed) Performance by students.

Kalakshetra Style from Shri Lalita Shastrti, Madras

January 1950 Indian Independence Day celebrations proved to be a crucial point in Indu’s personal dance history as she saw dance troupes from all over India come perform in New Delhi. It was here that Indu got an opportunity to see the performance of Rukmini Devi and her students from the Kalakshetra Institute, and she knew what she was missing in her present dance training. When she saw Rukmini Devi’s students from Kalakshetra perform a bharata natyam dance drama she knew that she had to go to Madras, as this was the level of perfection at which she wanted to be taught. At that time she was doing her second year of college (FA), and since education was always the priority in her household and she was not permitted to go to Madras to pursue this dream. So she went to Madras the first opportunity she got during her three-month summer vacation in 1950 and met with Rukmini Devi. Rukmini Devi advised and recommended that Indu take lessons from Devi’s ex-student then known as “Miss S V Lalita”, and so began Indu’s private one on one lessons twice a day with Sri Lalita Shastri in Kalakshetra style bharata natyam.126

I did not take part in the annual performance of the school in the 1950 autumn due to my Masters examination, but this was rather an excuse as there was no proper bharata natyam teacher, one master came and tried to teach me some abhinaya, but after Lalita Ji’s demonstration type teaching, this was very unsatisfactory for me, as he was again a musician, in fact mridang player and the school dismissed him. There was no bharata natyam item in the big school show that year. But having finished my exam before the parents’ day show of 1951 (in Sangeet Natak Delhi), I performed the items I had learnt from Lalita, alaripu, saaRii sunaibri with the AIR South Indian musicians who of course know the items. Lalita ji was invited by Sangeet Bharati, again with advice and recommendation from Rukmini ji and arrived in May or June in Delhi. I started my lessons with her again but left in August for Pakistan on my marriage unfinished.127

126 Indu’s teacher Sri Lalita Shastri had to leave for a tour and though she started Indu off she passed her in to her musician master but that was not satisfactory for Indu. Indu wanted a teacher who could demonstrate to her physically. On the other hand my feeling is that Indu’s strong training from musicians enhanced her expertise at taal and composing her own music for her choreographies.

127 Indu, email correspondence, 2010.
Indu really found herself in those years. She met the man whom she decided would be her husband and for whom she didn’t hesitate to cross the borders of India-Pakistan and leave her family behind. She also found and started to learn the dance bharata natyam that she also fell in love with. Thus the whole tempo of Indu’s life changed from here on, just like in her present choreography signifying the end of the dawn.

4. *aaftab* (Sunrise)

**Coming of Age (1951-1965)**

*(Chak Shehzad, 2001)*

_Tai-bita hita tige tat_

_With this only tora in the saiber dance, the dawn girls form a diagonal across the stage and the top of the diagonal starts departing the stage from the right side while the bottom half turn and depart the stage from the left. The curtain that they had formed with their bodies opens to reveal a solo dancer centre stage both dressed in a way and holding a dance posture distinctly from the classical originally South Indian dance form of bharata natyam. Her sitting position is mandi, which bharata natyam practitioners know as the name for the rotated and bent-knee position with shoulders back. Her dress is carefully tailored out of a sari into six different pieces put together into a bharata natyam dress. From this position the dancer has her right leg in sitting bharata natyam position and the left one with her left arm out-stretched while the right arm is shielding her face, in a sleeping like pose thus depicting beginning of a new day. To portray a distinct new beginning, Indu shifts choreography from her Uday Shankar repertoire in Dawn to a solo bharata natyam rendition of a tillana—a technical item in the bharata natyam repertoire in raag multani and in an eleven beats cycle. The strong rhythmic emphasis typical of a tillana is well suited to depict the strong personality of the sun, as well as show the audience a fresh new beginning. But unlike the still posture of temple dancers Indu chooses to depict the secular posture of the legendary “Dancing Girl of Moheenjodaro” in the tillana which is her way to adapt_  

128 In different version of this for an event on Kashmir day sponsored by Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) Indu has used still figures of the Unicorn on the Moheenjodaro seal on a back screen as the “Moheenjodaro girl” finished her dedication, last part of the tillan. See Appendix
the tillana to the Pakistani cultural context and to show this Pakistani secular history older than the temple history of the dance.\textsuperscript{129}

And it was a new beginning in every way for both the nation of Pakistan following 14\textsuperscript{th} August 1947 and Indu who in 1951, four years after this event, arrived in Pakistan on a permit\textsuperscript{130} to get married to her love. For the newly born Pakistan this was a time of new beginnings with immense struggles. This was particularly so after Sep 11, 1948 when the founding father of the nation Jinnah passed away. Analysts mark this as the beginning of disorder, a time when the tussle for power and survival between different political groups in society occurred as the government structure displayed weakness especially with the economic pressure of incoming refugees.\textsuperscript{131} The right wing religious political party who were against the ideology of Pakistan in the beginning jumped in to grab opportunity for power, and thus the debates on identity of the nation as “Islamic” nation first entered the discourse. A good example of that impact at the people’s level is from Indu’s early days at her in-laws that she shared with me. Indu was gently advised by her in-laws to change her name Indu to a more Muslim sounding name and to not wear sari in order to mix in more with the new “Muslim” context, but Indu did neither and her husband supported her throughout.\textsuperscript{132}

Indu entered Pakistan into the then capital city of Karachi where she got married. Indu came on a permit arranged by Mitha as despite Mitha’s attempts he could not get a permit to enter India. Later he would discover that Indu’s influential father had managed to make sure that he would not be able to enter\textsuperscript{133}. It was good timing as only a year later in 1952 passports would be implemented

\textsuperscript{129} Indu, email correspondence, February 28\textsuperscript{th}, 2012.

\textsuperscript{130} She arrived just a year before passports were introduced in 1952.

\textsuperscript{131} Veteran journalist Aslam Sheikh’s unpublished book “A Journalist Looks Back”.

\textsuperscript{132} Indu had made it clear to her husband before marrying him that they would both practice their own beliefs and she would not convert. Later they both would also mutually decide to raise their three daughters as Muslims.

\textsuperscript{133} He writes about it in his book, Mitha (2003, 150).
and also other jurisdictions barring a non-Muslim from marrying a Muslim man.\(^{134}\) The year after this Mitha was posted on the Brigade near the Wagah border and that is when Indu got a chance to return to her beloved city of Lahore. Thus Indu returned to Lahore except that it was now a part of Pakistan. The Lahore that Indu returned to seemed to her to be mostly the same except for small changes, and of course she herself had changed. Now Indu Chatterjee had become Indu Mitha, an army wife and a “Pakistani”. So while Indu returned to a Lahore reduced to a Muslim majority of locals and refugees from across the border, she recalls that it was the same Lahore where she had grown up and was a homecoming of sorts. Post Partition Lahore was as culturally alive as ever.\(^{135}\) The city was vibrant not only culturally but also politically. For instance, in 1952 just a year after Indu’s arrival in Pakistan, Lahore hosted the first Muslim Women Conference.\(^{136}\) The International Progressive Theatre Association was also active at the time, providing a healthy resistance to the more right wing “mullah” forces that were already trying to assert their power and influence. Indu had finished her studies at Kinnaird College for Women (KC) in Lahore, so when she returned to the city she had many college contacts and thus soon got involved in cultural activities. One of these old Kinnaird College friends with whom she reconnected and later often danced with was Mehr Nigar, who belonged to a liberal family that was active in Muslim league politics, the performing arts and literature. Yet it was not in Lahore but in Indu’s next destination Rawal Pindi, when Mitha was promoted to Lt. Col. in the Pakistani army, that the two college friends got a chance to get close and work together. Mehr Nigaar or Mehru, the nickname by which Indu would call her, was married to an air force officer who was posted in Peshawar. In 1960 the two women’s husbands worked

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\(^{134}\) Pakistan Citizenship Act 1951, and Pakistani Citizenship rules implemented 1952.

\(^{135}\) and as it still remains so at the end of the day despite attempts by extremist elements to make it otherwise.

\(^{136}\) There was a cultural event with dance performances in this conference that Indu took part in though Indu complained to me that it was suggested that it be a “woman’s only” function and the Women Action forum ladies compromised and agreed. When Indu asked them why they said “just this once” but it was a mistake Indu feels as that became the norm to date. I discuss these “women’s only” dance performances in more detail when I deal with “feminine spaces” in chapter three.
together on a project, and it was then that Mehru asked Indu to dance in a historical musical theatre production for the Pakistan Air force drama group. Indu, with the support of her husband, welcomed this request since following the birth of her two elder daughters in 1955 and 1958 Indu hadn’t had a chance to get back into dancing. The result was the beginning of a long work relationship between the two friends, starting with Mehru’s musical theatre production “Jab Jhelum Jawaan Thah” where Indu got to choreograph and compose her first bharata natyam solo. Indu’s performance took the audience by storm, (especially as a bharata natyam performance of that quality was rare), and their jubilant response encouraged Indu to a great start in her choreographic career.\footnote{I have taken Indu’s unique contributions to the Kalakshetra bharata natyam style that would follow at great length in chapter three ahead.}

In the years that followed Mehru continued to invite Indu to be part of her theatre productions. In 1972-74 Indu performed in Karachi on stage and also on Pakistan National television in a series on dance called \textit{Raqs Kahani}.\footnote{For this Indu used the stage name of “Mariam Usman” though everyone in the group knew her as “Indu Begum”. This is interesting especially in the Post 1971 context and with more Islamization efforts at Government level.}

But before I go to the late 60s and 70s and further in the story of Indu’s choreographic profile, I want to also pay tribute to another female dancer who migrated with her husband at the time of Partition to the city of Rawal Pindi and settled and choreographed there. At a time when Indu was still adjusting to a new country and her new role as mother while slowly learning and entering the dance and music scene in the army circles where she found herself as an army wife, there was a senior dancer who is the forerunner of the first debates on the question and place of dance in Pakistan. The woman was Ana Marie Gueizelor, who came to be known as Madame Azurie.
Madame Azurie

Azurie came with her Muslim husband to Pakistan like millions of other migrants from India August 1947. I want to bring in her story here, as her life and work in Pakistan also constitute an occluded history.\(^{139}\) I happened to learn more of her work through a book (no longer in print) that I received thanks to dance critic and scholar Salman Asif. Her solitary work on classical dance in the early decades of Pakistan is an occluded history that I want to bring back into the archives, because in this regard she is the first woman in Pakistan to start the debate about the place of dance in the newly formed state of Pakistan.\(^{140}\)

Azurie was writing in 1935 to promote dance in India as “A Sacred Art.”\(^{141}\) Once she made Pakistan her home she continued her work for dance in her new context to resist the stigma that dance and dancers had to put up with. Azurie was conditioned for this resistance though of a different kind of stigma, as her German father had given her many a beating for secretly learning Indian dance from cinema when he wanted her to learn only European ballet and not “native” dance. So pre-Partition she wrote against the colonial stigma of Indian classical dance, and post-Partition Pakistan she tried to create a space for dance in the narrative of the new nation state with its increasing “Islamic” orientation. In the time of General Ayub Khan, which also happened to be during the first martial law imposed on Pakistan (October 1958), Azurie proposed a “Pak Raks” (Pure Dance, also short for Pakistani Dance) (1959):

It has taken me ten years studying the various tribes settled all over Pakistan. I have come to the conclusion that the best platform for basing the new dances is to take various elements out of the various folk dances which bear the description and integrity of the Muslim race,

\(^{139}\) Part of the reason for this occlusion is the place of the minorities in Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Azurie like Indu is one of the few non-Muslims who made Pakistan their home. I get in detail of the “minority question” in Chapter Four.

\(^{140}\) Pana is teaching somewhere in Pakistan. There is only some reference to her in some newspapers of her participation in dance events, latest one is on International dance day April 29th, 2012 written by Shoaib Ahmad. He mentions her as student of famous \textit{kathak} dancer Naheed Siddiqi. See article on Dawn news, April 27th, 2012.

and apply it to the present mood of our thinking. This will be the new dance of Pakistan. I have already termed PAK RAKS. (Azuriein Naheed 1996, 9)

Azurie opened the first Academy of Classical Dance in Rawal Pindi where she settled after her move at Partition. From a rare book about Azurie’s life published by Pakistan National Council of the Arts I find that the “maulvis” created a lot of trouble for her as early as 1948:

When I first opened a dance school in Rawal Pindi in 1948, all the maulvis of the town stood up against me. They were after my blood. They delivered sermons in mosques and spread as much venom against me as they could. There was big agitation. I was nervous. But Mrs. Mani (the late owner of Pindi’s premier book shop who wielded considerable influence in official and social circles of the city), she calmed down all including me. I love this country. I will serve this country and die in this country. (Azurie in Naheed 1996, 9)

This excerpt above is from an interview with Saleem Asmi published in an article “Memories of a dancing queen” which I found in the same book. It is revealing in multiple aspects, and for this chapter it shows me the struggle very early on after Partition in Pakistan between the mix of the liberal, progressive and very conservative “maulvis”, many whom had been against the creation of Pakistan, but all of whom made Pakistan their new home. What is pertinent to the question that I raise in this chapter is the deep cultural and social ties that people had across the recently made borders during the early decades of the 40s, 50s and early 60s, were prior to rigorous enforcement of borders by the two Governments. A good example of an expression of this love connection is in the words below of a fan of famous singer Roshan Ara, who also migrated to Pakistan much to the disappointment of her Indian fans. In a book about her life and work I read a telling remark for this people’s history that I am also narrating:

“Kashmiir le lo aur Roshanaara vaapis de do”

142 Term used for teacher of the Quran in mosques, and amongst progressive Pakistanis used as a derogatory term as majority teachers of Quran “Maulavis” have a limited understanding of religion.

143 Naheed, Memories of Dancing Queen, 9.

144 The last line of the excerpt where Azurie as a religious minority has to prove her loyalty and belonging to the nation is a topic I take into detail in chapter four when I tackle the complex and urgent “minority question” in Pakistan today.
“Take Kashmir but return Roshan Ara”\textsuperscript{145}

The people torn by haphazard boundaries drawn by the departing colonial masters express that geographical territory matters less to people than the shared arts and cultural traditions that people love and cherish. These love connections are given precedence at the personal “people’s” level as is evident from this simple statement. The shared music, culture and religious space all is reflected in this simple heart felt remark by Roshan Ara’s fan. But these expressions would become rare in the passing decades as the process of “Long Partition”\textsuperscript{146} on both sides of the border of India and Pakistan on the official level would mute them. Things would become more complicated for Pakistan’s identity as a nation state independent of India due to tense relations with India, especially after the two wars that are fought over Kashmir in 1948 and 1965. I will discuss the crucial impact of these wars in more detail ahead. But that doesn’t mean that these expressions are muted in the private spaces as well. As I argue in the coming final section, artists, poets, and writers would continue to creatively find a way to express the true composite culture of South Asia despite all odds. These individuals are the source of light, which I will equate to the moonlight in a pitch-dark night in the final section. But there is an important liminal time period in between these two, i.e. the actual sunset with its beautiful diverse array of \textit{shafaq ke rang}, or the colors of the sunset, and I will now get into this part of the choreography. And that is the period that I will get into now. Indu describes this transition from the end of the sun part of her dance drama below:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The dancer who is the sun dances three different korvey’s\textsuperscript{147} in three different parts of the stage to show that the sun has moved to a new part of the dome of the sky leaving the stage in “Muzhi mandi adavus” slowing down as the “shafaq ke rang” enter hesitantly on the stage.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} Chaudri, \textit{Savath bayat-i Rausan Ara}, 54.

\textsuperscript{146} Zamindar, \textit{Long Partition South Asia}, 234.

\textsuperscript{147} The word \textit{korvey} means to combine so in dance it is a dance sequence, combination of different movement gestures or adavus, set to a rhythm or \textit{tala}. 

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5. *shafaq ke rang* (Colors of Twilight)

Reconnecting with Pakistan’s occluded Bengali History (1965-1971) with Uday Shankar’s creative dance

The tilana ends, and slowly one by one, dancers in colorful dresses enter the stage, each striking a pose and holding fingers open like a flower at the end of their stretched arm. The dancers spread out asymmetrically in different parts of the stage. Each represents the different colors of shafaq or sunset.

I had never seen this third part of the dance drama, which is part of the bigger piece *caarN paihair*, performed on stage by Indu’s students, but she had them perform it for me when I last visited the Institute in the summer of 2011. The dancer personifying the sun slowly departs from stage stamping her feet, kicking, and lifting her right leg back and then a small stamp on the left, in typical bharata natyam adavus. In contrast to the symmetry found in the classical dance form *shafaq ke rang*, dancers enter in an asymmetrical pattern, with all eight dancers entering from different sides of the stage and no one in parallel lines. They continue the asymmetrical aspect of Shankar’s creative dance movements, i.e. they do their unique piece of choreography with each of the four groups doing their own choreography, but all are moving back to back to the rhythms of the tabla going “*dhin-ta-ka-dhin*”. The beat *dhin-ta-ka-dhin* and the non-symmetrical formations of different groups of dancers in groups of twos and threes across the dance floor remind me of the genius of the man Uday Shankar who pioneered this “creative” dance style. He observed a variety of Indian classical dance styles as mentioned earlier and then further developed his own “creative” style at his Centre at Almora.

During her time in East Pakistan in the mid 60s Indu choreographed the dance drama *tuufan* which I described at the start of this chapter. In *tuufan* Indu, like Shankar, combines a common Bengali context of a fishing village, includes Tagore’s poetry translated into Urdu, and uses local

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Indu uses the word “creative” to describe her training from Uday Shankar style and her training that comes from it.
Bengali musicians, dancers, and folk tunes while at the same time fusing bharata natyam with Uday Shankar’s style.

Also in **tuufan** the scene began with **alaripu** as the prayer of a childless wife in **rupak mishram** taal seven beats with some changed arm and hand movements showing the child she hopes and dreams holding in her arms, watches growing up even scolding him/her or lovingly playing with him and taking him for a walk etc, climaxing in a passion of longing (the fast end **tirmanam**) but ending on the floor in an attitude of despair and **iltija** (pray) to Allah to grant her prayer.149

Indu describes above how in both her dance dramas **caaroN paihair** and **tuufan** she shifted from a pure bharata natyam piece back to an Uday Shankar style piece to depict a change in mood. In **tuufan** she uses an **alarippu**, a classical bharata natyam beginner’s dance but she puts in the mood of the prayer of a childless mother. Then the part described in the introduction for the scene of the storm is all Uday Shankar style. Similarly, here in the second part of **caaroN paihair** Indu uses the tillana to represent the sun, and for the colors of the sunset or **shafaq** Indu returns to Uday Shankar style, which I will now discuss in more detail. Notice that Indu maintains and bridges India, East and West Pakistan through her dance all during the 60s, a time when the relations between India and Pakistan and between the East and West are getting increasingly problematic.

Indu recalls her three years in Comilla from 1965 to 1968 with delight when her husband was posted there. She got a chance to reconnect with her Bengali lineage, which for her meant getting ample opportunity to be surrounded by music, dance, and culture. In response to my questioning Indu about getting in touch with her Bengali roots, some interesting material came up, especially concerning the importance and place of Bengali language in the formation and reinforcement of Bengali identity in the middle and elite classes in East Pakistan.

In my years in East Pakistan I was trying to soak up what I could for my love of Music and Dance (not of “bengali-ness”, mine or theirs) which I found less opportunity for in West Pakistan, both folk and classical which even in the small cantonment town Comilla was available in plenty. We took lessons in sitar and singing from masters and sang exchanging Bengali and Punjabi songs in the Cantt (army cantonment area) ladies club and with civilian friends; it was really a culturally lively time for me and for the whole cants community,

149 Indu, email correspondence, September 25 2011.
mostly West Pakistan officer’s families an extended honey-moon till the end of the 1965 war!  

In the same interview session as excerpt above Indu shared with me that since she had grown up in Punjab, where her grandparents had moved from Bengal, she had not learned Bengali. Her parents, especially her father, had emphasized learning English and Hindi-Urdu (“Hindustani”) as that, in her father’s opinion, would be the most important language when the colonials left and for official purposes in post British India (Pakistan was not in the picture at this time in 30s and early 40s). As a result, Indu felt that as a Bengali who didn’t speak the language she and her siblings were always somewhat “outsiders” in the Bengali circles both in Punjab and Bengal. Bengalis had a lot of pride in their language, and it became the major bone of contention between East and West Pakistan very early on in the history of Pakistan when Jinnah declared Urdu as the state language while he agreed that the language of East Bengal would be Bengali. After this was declared in 1952 protests started by Dhaka university students which later spread to the provincial level, and by 1952 the whole of East Bengal was in a state of general strike.  

By 1954 the Pakistan government was compelled to recognize Bengali as a state language according to Bengali scholar Nitish Sengupta, but the damage to Pakistan’s unity was done and the acceleration of Bengali separatist nationalism in full force. As mentioned earlier, it is now well established among historians that politics around the language issue build up to be the chief reason for contention in East Pakistan against West Pakistani imposition of “Urdu” as the national language. Bengal was one of the two provinces in East Pakistan; the other Punjab cut and divided into two between India and Pakistan in 1947.  

150 Ibid.
151 Gupta, Bengal Divided, 177.

152 During Ayub’s martial law era 1958-69 both Provinces became at opposite ends. While Punjab gained a larger than a province identity, Bengal became increasingly marginalized. “Punjab lost its identity in order to gain a larger Pakistani identity, it began to perceive itself alone as Pakistan, while others started calling Pakistan the greater Punjab” (Hanif Ramay as paraphrased by Feroz Ahmad [1998: xix] and quoted by Ifitkar Dadi in “Registering Crisis” p.149, 2010). A chief factor for Bengal’s marginalization was also a result of Ayub’s policy of massive centralization in West Pakistan which Dadi says also negated regional specificity and claims made by East Pakistan (2010, 147).
Ayub’s martial law era 1958-69 both Provinces became at opposite ends. While Punjab gained a larger than a province identity, Bengal became increasingly marginalized. According to intellectual, politician and journalist Hanif Hamay “Punjab lost its identity in order to gain a larger Pakistani identity, it began to perceive itself alone as Pakistan, while others started calling Pakistan the greater Punjab”.\textsuperscript{153} A chief factor for Bengal’s marginalization was also a result of Ayub’s policy of massive centralization in West Pakistan which Dadi says also negated regional specificity and claims made by East Pakistan (2010, 147).

The Bengali language had become an essential part of Bengali nationalism, which has a much longer history of activism against colonial rule and a very unique cultural and nationalistic identity. Since not much had changed in the government structure for East Pakistan (Bengal) after independence from British colonial rule; Pakistan lost its Eastern wing.\textsuperscript{154} The 1971 break-up and loss of Pakistan’s Eastern wing was a sad result of neglect by the Pakistani leaders at that time.

In light of this historical background, it is all the more interesting how Indu’s choreography attempts to bring elements from both the East and the Western sides of Pakistan together at a time when on the political front there were escalating tensions between them. For example she called on poets from both East Pakistan-Tagore, and Iqbal-a poet from Punjab, West Pakistan. She uses Bengali musicians and folk tunes, translates them into Urdu, and thus appeals both audiences to come together and enjoy the stories of struggle and disaster and how life has to go on, stories which belonged to all on a humane level. In this way her work is the bridge between East and West Pakistan. As mentioned earlier in Indu’s remark, despite political tensions Indu continued to choreograph in the army circles that she found herself in, which shows that at the personal level healthy cultural exchanges between East and West Pakistan were clearly happening until 1965. While

\textsuperscript{153} Dadi, (Ramay as paraphrased by Feroz Ahmad [1998: xix] and quoted by Iftikar Dadi), “Registering Crisis”, 149.

\textsuperscript{154} Thus Bengal and Punjab provide an ideal case study for further study to compare and look at the culture that is composite and shared beyond the borders which cut Bengal and Punjab into two, amongst other regions.
Indu says that “the 1965 war with India changed everything”, she is referring to the support for such collaborative work, but not Indu’s work or orientation to choreograph according to her nature even if it meant going against the “politically correct” trends of that time.

I will elaborate on this in relation to Indu’s transgressions in the last part of the choreography ahead. But before I get further into the transgressive nature of Indu’s work, I want to delve a little deeper into the impact of the 1965 war and the language politics as there is also an occluded history of the “Hindustani” language that is closely tied to the topic of Partition politics and the occluded composite culture.

**Hindustani Language and Composite History**

The war proved a turning point, for with the ensuing suspension of communications between the two countries, Urdu Literary production and reception began to take place within national spheres less and less in contact with each other. …The year marks the entrenchment of ideological polarization between “Indian” and “Pakistani” writers, with increasing self-consciousness about hitching literary production to the cultural frontiers of either the one state or the other. (Mufti 2007, 263)

Above Mufti quotes C.M. Naim’s argument of what 1965 meant for Urdu literature and the imaginaries of the two nations. What Mufti describes above is part of a decades-long aggressive process, one that Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar calls “Long Partition”155, a concept that I introduced earlier in this dissertation. Language politics play an integral part in the construction of a national identity and in the Partitioning of composite cultures. Thus, it is to language uses that I turn to show the composite culture that linguists have established and deliberately compartmentalized for the purposes of reinforcing separateness between shared cultures.

Mufti’s “lyric history” shows that there are people who opposed the Partition through manifesting their opposition in artistic works such as Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s poetry. Mufti’s work inspired me to dig the occluded history of Urdu, which is a powerful example for my project of excavating the occluded composite history. According to a Pakistani social linguist Tariq Rehman’s

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latest book *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (2011), modern Urdu and Hindi both belong to a common language known as “Hindustani” or Hindvi or Old Urdu or “Urdu-Hindi”. Indu uses the language Rehman defines, referred to as “Hindustani” in her dance dramas, and her usage of this constantly opens up a space of questioning for me that aids me eventually with the revival of a composite history of Pakistan. Indu is very particular about using a proper form of Urdu in her conversation and in her work. She has learned Sanskrit from Kalakshetra and translated the *bols* and names of the *mudras* into the Urdu language. But what Urdu does she use? She continues to use Kavita *bol*. So her repertoire uses not just modern Urdu but an Urdu from an older time-Hindustani.

Rehman also illustrates that colonial legacy lives on in South Asia today through the case of Urdu and Hindi language. He traces the departure of modern day Urdu and Hindi back to when the British introduced the census, which required Muslims and Hindus to identify themselves. This was the origin of what we know today as the Hindi-Urdu controversy according to Rehman. Consequently, at the official government level efforts were made to revive and build on Hindi’s devanagri roots in India and to not use the Persian script. On the other hand, in Pakistan these efforts have been on removing words with Sanskrit origins from the modern Urdu. The question that arises for me is can a language be “cleansed” of its history, and my concern is what is lost in this process of occlusion? Since language is a product of a culture then what gets lost in the culture when certain parts of a language are deliberately occluded? What is the impact on the ordinary people upon whom this forced amnesia is inflicted? In the case of Urdu and Hindi, their shared history has been forcefully hidden and thus forgotten for it does not suite the two-nation theory. So the Urdu users are made to forget their connection with a non-Muslim part of history, and Hindi speakers are made to deny usage of the Persian script official court language of the “Muslim” Mughal regime. Thus both languages eschewed the vocabulary from the rival source.
The works of individuals like Faiz and Indu allow me to access this history which reflects the composite culture beyond Partition which persists despite it, a history forgotten but important for South Asians to remember for any attempts to bring peace in this region, a region which has been plagued by communalism and now the throbbing centre of what is called “terrorism” in the Post 9-11 world scenario. Indu through her being, her history and her choreographies is walking and talking proof of the delicate link that exists between these war-torn countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Unfortunately that link is fragile and delicate and unless maintained at an institutional and government level may only remain within the generation of eighty-two year old Indu. Indu has lived in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh when all were one nation. She has been a citizen of two of the three states: India for the first seventeen years of her life, and Pakistan after that. It is a precious link that if not acknowledged and nourished could be lost forever. Why should we protect this composite cultural legacy? We must, because it allows for a deeper decolonization process that has yet to happen. India, Pakistan and later Bangladesh came into being as a result of an immense struggle, a bloody struggle for independence from the colonial power. It was a success but was followed by a cycle of violence and wars that led to further fragmentation of this region. The deeper decolonization that I envision is part of a healing process between the regions comprising present day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and an important part of this healing process is a holistic review of contested histories of this region.

I am particularly interested in how artists transgress strictly guarded boundaries through their artwork. I read the theme of transgressing boundaries in a subtle way in all Indu’s choreographies,

156 An interesting research project is comparing different Post-colonial Muslim nation stated like Indonesia and Pakistan for following queries: how do the case studies of India and Indonesia compare in their efforts in promoting “Unity in Diversity” with a diverse population? What was different in these colonial histories and how do they play a role? Was it the difference in the British and Dutch colonizers? The Dutch did not interfere in the lives of the natives like the British did. English is a strong remainder in India, Pakistan as the language of work which the British left behind. I find it interesting the manner in which English has perpetuated cultures of British colonies (Malaysia, Singapore, and South Asia versus the Dutch in Indonesia).
despite growing tensions between East and West Pakistan. Mufti reads this transgressiveness in Faiz’s poem “Sipahi ka marsia” “Soldier’s Elegy” written in October 1965:

He elaborates an experience of modern Indian selfhood that seeks to escape the cultural logic of the nation-states system inaugurated at partition, that paradoxical moment of realization through reinscription, of success through failure. (Mufti 2004, 273)

I am interested in what Mufti notices in Faiz’s poetry and how it becomes the site where selfhood, at odds with the mutually exclusive reality of the post-colonial states created by partition, resides (p. 274). I am interested in this lyrical history and how an artistic practice and its products become this site that I see as a liminal space. Indu’s inclusive and composite dance drama transcends constraints of territoriality in a manner similar to Faiz’s poetry as argued by Mufti. In both Faiz’s poems, “Black-Out” written in September 1965 and “Memory”, Mufti argues that Faiz uses space in a manner that counters state territoriality. For Mufti, Faiz “renders a human geography that traverses the boundaries, and escapes the territorial logic, of the nation-state” (p.266). This composite culture is reflected in these cases of shared communal life reflected in rare clans like the Rubabis, and through the work of artists like Faiz and Indu Mitha who by their genius have found a way for the continuities of this culture to persist beyond the crisis of Partition and wars. That is the space that this last part of Indu’s choreography takes me to, and I will take you to this place now when the night is getting darker and the moon is about to enter.

For this finale of caaroN paihair I am using the story line, the unique kavita bols, and the selection of poetic verses combined with Indu’s explanation of the piece, to argue Indu’s subtle rebellion to retain a shared South Asian identity through her art, i.e. her dance choreographies. In doing so I argue that Indu also presents a model of subtle activism for artists and for artistic citizenship beyond borders. Let us first allow the rhythms of the kavita bols combined with the verses of Iqbal’s work narrate the story of the moon’s entry in the increasing darkness of the night.
6. *maahtaab* (The moon lit night): Subtle Activism (Post-1971) and Space of Hope

As the still postures of the *shafaq ke rang*, the colors of the twilight, spread over the stage and slowly start to depart, Indu enters from between them personifying the character of the Moon arising in the quickly approaching night sky. A male voice sings the following verses of Pakistani national poet Iqbal’s in the background:

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suuraj ne jaate jaate shaamo-yaab kabaab ko
tashte-ufaq se le kar laale ke phuul vaare
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As the sun was leaving, the evening started to get dark
And the sun distributed different colored flowers on the horizon

The moon enters on these verses and then starts an intriguing interplay between poetry and rhythmic kavita bols. This interplay is between the singing of Iqbal’s verses by a male singer intermittently blended with the chanting of kavita bols by Indu Mitha herself. The bols, set to rhythms of the tabla, embody the verses making them come alive. The first set of kavita bols that Indu chants (see appendix set 1.) narrate the entrance of the moon with a rhythm like a young women’s sensuous walk, emphasizing the beauty of her radiant face. It ends with *man mohat maahtaab*, telling the audience that this beautiful lady is the moon “the moon who follows her heart-man mohan”. The verse intervenes in a deep male singer’s voice describing the story that this caravan of nature led by the moon carries on without a bell to guide. The second kavita bols describes in rhythm the changing faces of the moon. First the new moon is described like a new bride her radiant beauty makes “Laaila” the night feel shy and then also worrisome and jealous. The bols proceed to emphasize how when the fourteenth day of the moon came and she was in full bloom, the radiance made the stars worry too. (See Appendix for the verses in Urdu and translation).

When I visited her class in the summer of 2011 Indu displayed this part of the choreography for me. Both *shafaq ke rang* and *maahtaab* have not been formally performed on stage as of yet. This final part of the dance drama is now called *maahtaab* or the moon instead of the previously title *raat*, as Indu said the former was more poetic. It exists at this moment of writing only in Indu’s mind.

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157 This verse is from Iqbal’s famous poem *Baze-e-Anjum* (*A Gathering of Stars*) where he gives the lessons that we can learn from the stars and the night especially about how everything is in balance. Indu just takes random verses from different poems of Iqbal for developing the character of the moon.
Indu has also already recorded and worked out the music and details for this choreography but she has not had enough students who attend lessons consistently enough to perform all four parts together, especially for the part of the Moon.

Using the metaphors of the changing seasons from Indu’s choreography caaroN paihair, thus in the dark night of tense relations between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh artists like Indu Mitha stand out like the brightness of the moon against the pitch black of the night. It is Indu’s text that leads me to this analogy. Below is an excerpt from my email correspondence with her, where Indu describes the content and theme of mahtaab and the unique nature of her personification of the moon. Here she also describes the characters that she takes in her dance drama from the poetry of Pakistan national poet Ilama Iqbal:

It contains some couplets from Ilama Iqbal’s poem bazm-e-anjum, but some are from a different poem, so I couldn’t use his title. Moreover, in my presentation the moon has become the most important personality on stage among a host of others, e.g. there are shaamo-yaab kabaab (evening turning into night); lailaa-e-zulmat (the beautiful dark night); aroos-e-shab ke moti pyare, pyare; (which I have personified as little stars, and finally: mahtaab, herself (though this word in not used, qamar and perhaps others are used.) I have given importance to the moon because the Poet has made her a mysterious character, saying she enters silently; takes all in her qaatilaab (caravan) the little stars are over awed by her, trembling, frightened; because she gives the message of the “ups and downs of created, finite entities”; herself included; lailaa is jealous of her beauty and effect on the others; lastly mahtaab leaves us without any answers to her personality, where does SHE come from, where is her home/ What Identity? And where is she going? All these last questions are the problems of populations of many nations these days, and so we bring mankind’s problems into our theme, and make this panorama of the caaroN paihair meaningful and philosophical for our generation (My emphasis).

Yet migrations are ancient, starting even before the Jews returned to their land after captivity (perhaps forced migration by a conqueror? Egypt and all the trouble they gave to hazrat Moosa on the way. Humans, always complaining!

There are a number of themes that I can analyze in Indu’s vision of this section of the Night, but I situate Indu’s characterization of the moon in the center of my discussion. As evident from the quote above that for Indu it is the moon and not the night or the stars that are the focus. In caaroN paihair, Indu depicts the moon as the most overpowering personality, and the moon is female as well as a silent mysterious personality. Indu also uses mahtaab’s mystery to raise questions of her identity
and in her explanation above Indu is deliberately doing so to connect to questions of national identity and belonging.

Interestingly her name “Indu”\(^{158}\) also means the moon in the Bengali language. I read this character of the moon as a reflection of Indu herself and her subtle resistance to both a conscribed public space for dance and dancers and for mixing of East and West Pakistani aesthetics and cultures. I see Indu’s work in this period of Pakistani history as similar to the work of the moon in the pitch darkness of the night. Especially since Indu uses what Mufti called “transgressive human geography”\(^{159}\) in his reading of Faiz’s poetry. This is most evident in the last part of Indu’s choreography caaroN paihair where she uses kavita bols. Mufti points out that in poem “Black-Out,” Faiz uses common metaphors for Muslims and Hindus as a strategy for his transgression. For instance, Faiz uses an Indic word ghat for riverbank instead of its Persian-Arabic counterpart, and also uses fana, which points to the Sufi goal of annihilation of the self in the divine.

The combination of these images—the one clearly of “Muslim origin”, the other, “Hindu”—is an attempt, in this poem occasioned by the war of 1965, to keep open possibilities of collective selfhood that that event was closing off. (229)

As mentioned earlier Indu’s particular usage of Indic kavita Bols as well as her choice of content in Iqbal’s verses shows this “transgressive human geography” as well. I discussed Indu’s usage of kavita bols in chapter one with reference to her kathak choreography “In the Garden”. In chapter one I read Indu’s usage of these bols as evoking a syncretic past, here in the context of Post Partition Pakistan tensions between East and West the kavita bols are conveying a questioning of nations and nationalities. Thus here the bols below are an example of how Indu’s choreography displays use of a similar metaphor of “collective selfhood”. These bols are the last set of kavita bol and verse and to me they are a prime example of Indu’s subtle resistance in her choreographies

\(^{158}\) Most people in Pakistan today mistake her name to be a Hindu one; just like the name of the dance form that she is associated with- bharata natyam.

\(^{159}\) Mufti, Lyric History, 266.
(Kavita Bol)

na na na na na na muur naachak naarii naarii calii aavat
Camak camak catke chaananchan chanchan ke saae chaee
ghanak ghanak jhin ghanak jhin ghanak ghanak jhin jhin jhin
ghana na ghana na na ghananana ghuumar ghuume ghunaruu

(Poetic Verse)

ghatnaey bahrnaey ka samah aaMkhoM koe dikhatah haey tue
haey vatan terah kidhar kis des koe jatah haey tu [repeat 3 times]

**We see the scene of the changing faces of the moon and we learn from it lessons**
**Where is your “Nation”, which country” are you headed to?**

(My translation and emphasis)

Up until this final verse in the section _maabtaab_, Indu’s transgression had been to include these kavita bols otherwise forgotten in classical Pakistani dance Post Partition. The usage of kavita bols is a subtle transgression that may be lost on those unfamiliar with the available classical dance music and traditions available in Pakistan. Only people familiar with these bols in pre-Partition North India may recognize that these are one of the beautiful elements occluded and lost in classical dance repertoire in Pakistan after the Partition. In _maabtaab_ I want to emphasize how Indu uses kavita bols in combination with Urdu poetic verse with a powerful integrating impact. The final poetic verse above makes a more obvious transgression and leaves the audience with a thought-provoking question. To make a bolder and clearer message she chooses a very telling verse of Iqbal’s which says that there are lessons we can learn from the changing shapes of the moon and Indu uses the highly regarded national poet Iqbal to problematize belonging, identity and the “nation”.

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In Iqbal’s verse selected by Indu, Iqbal uses the same strategy of combining the Indic word *dees* for the Nation as well as the “Muslim origin” word “*vatan*” in the same sentence to ask the same question, “Where is your nation? And which nation are you headed to?” While Mufti’s “A lyric history of India” (2010) shows how Faiz’s poetry “black out” and “memory” use spatial imagery in a manner which counters territoriality, and thus provides me a model to access a unique space which Indu’s choreographies also inhabit. Indu’s use of kavita bols along with Iqbal’s transgressive verses are Indu’s efforts, which I term her “subtle activism”, to retain her composite South Asian identity. In the process she also succeeds in choreographing a unique composite space for her Pakistani Muslim students like myself who, if not for her, would live in a homogenous Islamized space post 1971. It is her cultivation of this composite space which fosters independent thinking through the language of the dancing body that has ultimately brought me today to be a dance history scholar, who uses an embodied dance form as my data set, as well as my tool for the writing of a controversial history.

Thus Indu’s choreography take me to a place which is my “space of hope” as she continually “moves through space” in South Asia moving beyond territories made in 1947 and later new ones in 1971. Shankar’s creative dance comes to her aid here as she is able to have a language to surpass the strict and rigid spatial confirms of Indian classical dance in its use of space. Indu’s training in the Shankar style influenced her use of space in a very different manner than that of classical South Asian dance traditions. Indu admits that her use of stage space has influenced her overall repertoire below and not just her Uday Shankar repertoire alone. Here in an email correspondence she refers to her kathak choreography “*In the Park*” (June 15, 2010) and describes the difference between use of space in classical dance like kathak versus Shankar’s technique below:

Unlike formal or Muslim or technical kathak items, where dancers generally stick to one place and dance “on spot” because they need to face the “patron” especially in a
Instead of dancers sticking to one place (which of course would not have suited the story) there are changes in what is often called “floor patterns” and also much movement across the stage, carefully planned to use every part of the stage, at times suitable to the story. This is the contribution I learnt from the Uday Shankar style, both in the way my Modern dance teachers worked (Zohra and Kameshwar) but also from the simple hints that each would refer to in class when they used certain basic ideas of the new choreography.

Indu incorporates this use of space in folk dance choreographies in her classical dance dramas as well, something that classical Indian dance does not do. Indu’s training in Shankar style through her teachers Zohra and Kameshwar become her choreographic tool as well as teaching methodology.

The process of studying Indu’s creative and liberating use of space aids my journey to excavate occluded histories of shared spaces between East Pakistani Bengalis and West Pakistani’s non-Bengalis. Just like the writing of histories- when the narrative remains the same official histories are like classical traditional dances, rigid and asking for complete servitude. In a different light, the creative use of space is similar to alternative people’s histories that often counter and diverge from “National” histories.

As discussed in an earlier section Uday Shankar introduced a whole new methodology for Indian “creative dance”. In this respect I also want to point out the use of space in Shankar’s dance, which also appealed to Indu and is evident in most of her creative dance dramas. In an interview with a prestigious local magazine *News Line* Indu remarked that due to her training in Shankar style modern dance she conceived of her movements as “moving through space” rather than “cleaving through space” which is often the case in traditional classical dance repertoire. The difference in "spatial" relationship is further discussed by Indu in her email correspondence (2011).

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160 Indu explains here for my purpose as she knows my interest in Sufism that this is also why kathak chakkars are so particular that they always stay on spot, and always finish facing the patron “incidentally this is ONE of the many important ways in which kathak chakkars are BASICALLY different to the Sufi chakkars, which are “endless”, and “beginning-less,” i.e. they are continuous (also called “seamless”) to express the “INFINITE”/God/power.”

161 Indu, email correspondence, 2011.


163 The use of space in Indu’s kathak choreography *In the Park* Indu just mentioned and I discussed in my first chapter is also an evidence of this early influence.
in the two for Indu is that between a modernist conception of space versus a traditional one. In the same interview with *News Line* magazine she gave the comparison between traditional Kathak dancer’s uses of space versus her own with example of famous Pakistani Kathak dancer Naheed Siddiqui:

Naheed Siddiqui once remarked that the Kathak dancer carries her space with her. I was astounded because I had not been taught to look at space like that. My reaction to space came from my teachings from Zohra Sehgal. She had studied with Labaan—one of the most renowned theorists of the dancer’s space, around the turn of the century—who had a modernist idea of dance.

Thus as mentioned in Indu’s interview above, her use of space is influenced by her exposure to modernist conceptions (yes, but it’s important to acknowledge that Indu is noting that the classical use of space is more complex than she initially gave it credit for). This influence allows me to remember another modernist history - the narrative of Bengali modernism-, which along with Shankar and Indu’s Bengali lineage has been long forgotten in Pakistan. Indu’s work reminds me of this occlusion of the strong resistance to the colonial regime put up by the Bengalis Muslims during the Pre-1947 independence movement and later to their neglect by West Pakistan that led to 1971. It is important for Pakistani leadership to remember this neglect of the unique culture and identity of East Pakistanis and to learn lessons from it. Further this tapping into the composite elements from East and West Pakistani in Indu’s choreography gives me a new perspective to view this shared period in history between Pakistan and Bangladesh. This is a period that harbored a composite space which is not a space carved for any one particular ethnicity or religion. Indu questions and challenges her audience by using Pakistani national poet Iqbal, who incorporates composite words from Urdu and Indic registers, and allows me to access a composite culture that continues to live although hidden underneath the overtly Islamic public culture portrayed officially. Thus I argue that Indu herself is the character of the moon in Pakistan during the darkness of the martial law years that followed 1971. After 1947 in Pakistan this composite culture went underground and thus becomes a part of a history that is occluded, especially post 1971. In the time that follows public
official culture becomes increasingly defined by a narrow interpretation of Islam. Despite this constricted space and importantly as a resistance to these events the work of artists like Indu maintains a composite space that reflects pre partition and what is the history of this land. This space is a space of hope and thus it is very important to give it more energy to continue to protect as well as to help make this space grow. Unfortunately 1971 marks the beginning of very different Pakistan, with its own unique set of challenges especially for women’s issues, which I will explore in the next chapter. Ahead I will establish how this space of hope is a feminine space using Indu’s bharata natyam dance repertoire to navigate how she faces and manages to maintain this space despite challenges of the rigid policies for the performing arts, women, and civil society implemented in the martial law years of mid 70s onwards in a time of increased militarization in Pakistan Post 1971.
CHAPTER THREE

Nartaki, Bharata Natyam and “Land of the Pure”: Choreographing “Feminine Spaces” in Pakistan

Today’s woman wants her self-confidence, keeping her *vaqar*, her pride, in this world, her respect and independence in this world, and so for these things one has to go against the grain, maybe through words, a story, or a plot, maybe through only a song, through music, or by leaving words through a musical instrument. I have raised lot of themes like that.164 (Indu, 2006)165

*Islamabad 1986*—the era of martial law. The chief administrator, Zia-ul-Haq, has implemented the “Islamization” policy, which amongst other restrictive policies, bars women from appearing on television without their heads covered.166 Zia has also banned *kathak* dancer Naheed Siddiqi’s television program, *paayal* (Dancing Bells), the only classical dance program on national television at the time. This is the first time dance is officially banned in Pakistan; but inside the walls of the German Embassy an *arangetram* (a debut performance for a dancer) is about to start. It is Indu Mitha’s daughter Tehreema’s *arangetram*. This is Tehreema’s “coming out” in the dance world, and what a dramatic way to do so, in a decade when no one is allowed to dance. This start will set the tone for the young dancer’s work in the future, as not only will she go on dancing throughout the remaining two years of martial law, but in 1992 she will raise the bold and taboo topic of women’s sexuality in a dance that depicts a conversation between mother and daughter, both moves radical for traditions of classical dance repertoire and post-colonial South Asian culture.

164 Appendix 1 (for Urdu script)

165 Excerpt from a television program “Walk about with Indu Mitha”, Serendipity Productions.

166 See Talbot, Sheikh for details of restrictions that Zia’s “Islamization” agenda, a process started by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto before that included [missing something?].
Let’s skip ahead to the year 1992 when this bold mother and daughter launch their first radical dance, erii maaM (Ob Mother), co-choreography for Tehreema with her mother Indu. Indu recites the bols and plays the manjira (an instrument used to keep the beat). The theme of the dance is Tehreema’s and it is a progressive one. She portraits a pregnant woman deserted by her beloved. She shares her secret with her mother and also makes clear her resolve to have the baby. This woman’s character is unlike the traditional woman in the classical bharata natyam repertoire, who either pines for her lover or portrays her heartbreak, because her beloved betrayed her for another woman. Indu and Tehreema’s choreography breaks that mold of traditional bharata natyam repertoire and of the female character in it by raising this unconventional theme and by inherently questioning social mores.

Unlike traditional stories where the woman in love confides to her female friend or sekhee about her heartbreak, the heroin in erii maaM confides in her mother. Together they raise the topic of sexuality, traditionally considered taboo for a mother and daughter to share. More important, for the questions that I want to explore in this chapter, is the strength of the female character, as the woman in erii maaM, who is otherwise a modern day respectable woman, shows that she not only moves on from her loss, but also breaks societal norms with her decision to raise her child out of wedlock. While staying within the tame, traditional, domestic setting of the mother-daughter bonding scene, Indu and Tehreema (a mother and daughter both on stage and in life) choreograph: 1. Acceptance for non-domestic sexuality in a “domestic” context, and, 2. Scenario of strength and agency for a woman to chart her own destiny despite such adverse circumstances.

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167 I will address Tehreema by her first name to differentiate references to her from her mother, Mitha. Tehreema was born and raised in Pakistan and moved to the United States a decade ago. Today she has her own contemporary dance company, “Tehreema Mitha Dance Company” (TMDC), in Washington, D.C., a company she founded in 2000. She performs both her mother’s repertoire as well as contemporary pieces, which are her hallmark. I conducted a one-month fieldwork with Mitha and her company in D.C. in the summer of 2008.
In the process, the mother-daughter duo also choreograph beyond colonial understanding of the problem of Indian women. eri maaM allows me to revisit what is now well written as “the woman question,” which started with British colonizers’ issues concerning Indian women’s subjugation through their traditions, by their men, under the “honorable” guise to save Indian women. Thus used as an excuse by colonizers to colonize India, the “woman question” became, according to Lata Mani, a symbol of an Indian society in need of reform. Subsequently, this led to a local nationalistic reaction, through which women were seen as emblems and protectors of Indian culture against the colonial. Dance scholar Janet O’Shea argues that, for bharata natyam dancers, the “woman question” presents a paradox, as the questions remained unresolved while at the same time productive for dancers to question the traditions that they also simultaneously helped maintain. Using Indu’s bharata natyam innovations in terms both of technique and theme, I build on O’Shea’s work to conceive of Indu’s chosen dance form of bharata natyam as a space where new communities can be imagined (Benedict Anderson 1991, qtd O’Shea 2007, 166) through an informed understanding of this occluded past. Indu’s work is an excellent example of this “critical classicism” in bharata natyam that O’Shea addresses with regards to Rukmini Devi’s work in Kalakshetra. I have taken one of Indu’s bharata natyam choreographies with a radical theme and female character to read from it the cultural moment when this piece was born, and the past and future of that moment with regards to the woman question in Pakistan. I have found that Indu has succeeded over a period of time in delicately choreographing a unique inclusive space for the feminine voices that were occluded before and, ahead, I will emphasize aspects crucial in


169 In O’Shea’s more recent (2008) article “Serving Two Masters? Bharata Natyam and Tamil Cultural Production” in Peterson’s Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India she counters the previous scholarship’s stance that bharata natyam’s existence as a respectable urban practice depended on its ability to contribute to national identity (Srinivasan 1983, 85, Meduri 1996, Coorlawala 1996, quotes O’Shea). For O’Shea it was more than just national form and instead emerged as a space to imagine communities.

170 For a comprehensive account of Devi’s project according to different people’s take on it I recommend O’Shea, At Home in World, 168.
choreographing this inclusive feminine space. erii maaM, with its premier in 1992 in the aftermath of Zia’s martial law decade, also helps me raise a related yet different paradox in this chapter. I argue that while on the one hand this context seems very patriarchal and restrictive for women, on the other it allows space for strong women figures to emerge and find a platform to resist patriarchal societal norms. Thus the solution for the women question is to be found in the “feminine spaces” of the local South Asian context. Through the story of Indu’s life and work, I propose this model of “feminine spaces” as a space of hope, based on Harvey’s “Spaces of Hope,” as introduced earlier in this dissertation.

1. Feminine Spaces as “Space of Hope”

erii maaM is particularly defiant of societal norms considering the restrictive context in which the choreography was premiered in 1992. The theme of the dance is more radical than most of Indu’s repertoire as she says she co-choreographed it with her daughter Tehreema and the theme was the latter’s:

erii maaM is composed ON Tehreema Mitha (as they say in the Western world when a dance is especially composed for a particular dancer and therefore in a sense carries HER personality as much as of the choreographer)\(^{171}\) (emphasis is Indu’s).

Indu marks this dance, which was made after Tehreema’s coming of age as a dancer, as the beginning of a period of growth for them both in which she felt she has got a “fresh lease on life and inspiration to compose as I had a pupil who could really do new things”.\(^{172}\) Indu’s earlier dances up to this point like dukihu (Sad/Melancholy) which she learned from her first bharata natyam

\(^{171}\) Indu, email correspondence, December 2010.

\(^{172}\) Indu, email correspondence, December 2010.
teacher Sri Lalita Shastri, repeat the themes of a woman’s anxiety of waiting for her beloved and helplessness in the separation and abandonment from her beloved, themes which both Indu and Tehreema say they were tired of. It was the 90s that brought about this pivotal shift, and the journey is as important as the destination at what I call “Indu’s Feminine Space of Hope”.

I discussed in chapter two the separation of Pakistani’s Eastern wing in 1971. Soon after that, structural changes in the political scenario led to martial law and eventually an Islamization policy, which banned dance during that time. Dance and women went underground and under *pardaab* or the veil. How was Indu able to get away with staging radical feminist choreographies under a martial law that severely restricted woman’s behavior? I will explore this query in the second half of this chapter. I propose through Indu’s work that private spaces, which are also feminine spaces, operate as the “space of hope” as introduced in chapter one. At the end of this current chapter I propose Indu’s strong female characters as a model of South Asian feminism that is very different from Eurocentric feminist models—foreign models that Indu doesn’t like to associate herself with. In addition, I will discuss how Indu’s choreographies allow me to revisit the history of “women’s questions” in bharata natyam as taken up by dance scholar Janet O’ Shea and also tackle these questions in the context of Islam in Pakistan. In O’ Shea’s model, while the “women’s questions” were first raised by colonial reformers who re-made women through ideas of respectability as well as freedom, they were reconfigured by women in the dance sphere in the

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173 See chapter two for this story of how Indu fell in love with bharata natyam.

174 The word *pardaab* refers to a curtain or a veil that would be drawn separating the female space from the male space, generally where the men of the house may entertain other male guests for work or personal reasons. This usually would be the *baithak* or front courtyard of the house. This divided the space in the house into “male space” and “family space”. This has changed today though some families continue to practice this division. In this context I refer to the law that was passed to enforce that all women who appear on National Television, whether newscasters, actresses or hosts, must cover their heads. This law was an attempt to return to the traditional practice of segregated spaces. At this time there was only “Pakistan Television (PTV)”. The explosion of dozens of new channels would happen towards the last decade of the twentieth century starting from 1999 during the term of General Pervez Musharraf, the tenth President of Pakistan.

175 I am taking the term “Spaces of Hope” used by David Harvey as has been explained in chapter one.
interest of self-representation. I build on this positive progressive aspect of women's agency in South Asia for a unique feminine space in the region's history and present time that has until now been ignored.

South Asian female performing artists, similar to women around the world, have faced challenges to make their place in the public sphere. My dissertation covers the period from the early to mid twentieth century and the early twenty-first century and focuses on the changes that this brought for women in the performing arts in South Asia, and particularly in present day Pakistan. The 1947 Partition provides a comparative framework to see in this chapter what were the struggles of women in dance in united India, which is the history that Pakistani women inherited.¹⁷⁶

Next in this chapter I will travel back to the history which starts with the impact of the bhakti movement on women in the performing arts. After that I will consider the controversial figure of the temple dancer/courtesan the devadasi. Section two moves to the early and mid twentieth century period when once again the “woman question” was at the center of the revival of dance forms and the imagining of national identities. I will build on the available literature written about the devadasis and the emergence of the new elite class of Brahmin women who by the early twentieth century had taken over their dance in its reconfigured form bharata nayam.¹⁷⁷ Here I will focus on debates around the dance form of bharata nayam and the female practitioners of the dance lineage that Indu inherited in the mid twentieth century.

The third section will delve into Indu’s bharata nayam in relation to her Kalakshetra lineage via Rukmini Devi. This section also applies Madu Kishwar’s definition of a space for “exceptional women” in South Asia to the space that Indu carved out for dance in Pakistan, tackling the question

¹⁷⁶ According to dance critic and gender specialist Salman Asif the resistance that women performers put up in both the contexts have to be seen in light of the two constitutions of India and Pakistan, as in the former it became part of the women’s movement and in the later their struggle was for a change in the art form so it was merely a “protest” (Personal conversation August 2010).

of her strategies of resistance to the dance hostile environment that she found herself in. The fifth and final section of the chapter sums up how Indu’s play with the use of public-private space availed of selected elements of the model of respectability established by her dance lineage, but how she succeeds to expand the conscribed space for her characters in her efforts for survival of her work independent of both Pakistani and Indian audiences. Her dance presents a model of South Asian feminism that strategically mobilizes respectability. Thus I argue that Indu’s choreographies evoke a history of resistance to gender oppression and that resistance was incomplete in its history and swept back into the mainstream culture. Thus this is where Indu’s model comes in which I will lay out ahead.

This chapter discusses how Indu’s life and work in the dance form bharata natyam in Pakistan deals with the “woman question” in South Asia. Here the time context is post 1971 separation of East Pakistan up to the end of the twentieth century, a time when Indu comes into the dance scene in Pakistan as the public space for dance and women is already contracting.\textsuperscript{178} To understand the nature of the issues in the Pakistani context I will also look into the history of the “woman question” in pre-partition context and the women’s movement in the South Asia, which continues to inform the work of female artists and performers in Pakistan. In chapter one and chapter two Indu’s Kathak repertoire allow me to access a syncretic past of South Asia, and Indu’s Uday Shankar style dance dramas allow me to travel to East Pakistan and learn about the flexible borders through the 1950s, 1960s up until 1971. I discussed language and national identity politics in the aftermath of Partition, which led to further fragmentations and violence in this region. This

\textsuperscript{178} The first three decades after 1947 witnessed a vibrant time culturally, as discussed in chapter two, as borders were more flexible and the new country not yet defined as an “Islamic Republic” as it would be following the 1965 war and the 1971 separation. For the classical dance scene in Pakistan at this time film arena was very alive where many dancers and singers were employed and resided. Thus Cinema was the custodian of classical dance as until 1964 our films were sent to India. Cinema was thus a big source of employment for classical dancers since the audience was wider and included India, East and West Pakistan, which helped maintain a standard as well as more patronage for these artists. But the 1965 war changed all this. After the 1965 war there was a ban on Indian cinema and on the exchange between the two countries, which included having any “Indian” dance in films and thus this space was no longer there (Personal correspondence dance critic Salman Asif and some classical musicians I interviewed earlier had similar impressions).
chapter continues to unveil occluded histories with Indu’s chief repertoire bharata natyam and utilizes her contemporary bharata natyam choreography to focus on questions of women’s agency and models of feminism.

The resilient female character that emerged in the 1990s in Indu and her daughter’s co-choreography erii maaM echoes the history of strong women in the history of the subcontinent. Here the mother and daughter have created a space for the feminine voice to articulate a matter otherwise taboo. This is of particular significance for its times, as outside the theatres of foreign embassies, women dancers in Pakistan are banned from moving their bodies in public space no matter what the theme they convey.

In the history of women artists and performers in the sub-continent, the bhakti movement in the sixth century CE, provided space for the feminine voice and I will discuss how this was possible. Indu Mitha’s choreography erii maaM becomes the portal for me to access a history of strong South Asian women in dance. This history precedes the colonial and lays out a model for South Asian women unique to this region. What does this model look like? I will now proceed to look into the history for the available models of strong women figures from the women Bhagtar in this section, and then to the devadasis, before I move to the current context of women in dance in Pakistan and as public figures in the sections ahead.

1.1 Rethinking the Legacy of Bhakti

In chapter one I discussed the synthesizing aspect of the bhakti movement and interaction between bhakti and sufism in India, between both the bhaktas and the sufis and in their followers who were of both Hindu and Muslim traditions. In this chapter my interest in bhakti is in how this movement, which began in the South of India in 6th century CE and moved to other parts of India, impacted women and the performing arts. As will be discussed here, bhakti offered a big contribution to changing the public roles that were available to women as performers of bhakti text,
whether as poets, singers or dancers. What most scholars agree on is that with the bhakti movement’s focus on devotion and the human aspects of the gods, there was a shift from the secular heroes and heroines to the divine lovers – like Murugan, a key figure in bharata natyam, and also Radha Krishna. Thus now the erotic became a play of the divine characteristics, instead of what was previously considered attributes of the “best cultivated humans” (Gupta, 2005, 21). This is evident in Tamil literature where we find a shift from secular eroticism in Sangam poetry to a later religious eroticism identified with bhakti.179 This eventually led in the mid to late twentieth century to the secular aspects of these stories disappearing completely.

I want to emphasize here that both Sanskrit drama and Sangam poetry are secular predecessors that had already existed in Indian society, the bhakti movement just brought in a re-imagining of eroticism. With the advent of the bhakti movement, for the first time in the history of the sub-continent the notion of God became more intimate and spiritual practice moved away from asceticism, which brought changes at many different levels of society. This was a revolutionary approach as it reduced the importance of the Brahmins who had been interpreters of the scriptures and the means of reaching God. Now the devotee could have a more immediate experience of the Divine and so Hindu orthodoxy was challenged. The caste hierarchy was questioned, and this was translated in art as well with different layers in the temple, as embodiment now became central and the scriptures less so. The expression of devotion became fundamental. In dance this led to bharata natyam giving theory of channeling emotion into sringara, something examined in the next section of this chapter. Gupta mentions in passing that like the Vaishanava literature, Sufi poetry of this time

179 Sumanthi Ramaswamy (1997) in his book Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1981-1970 in late colonial and post-colonial Tami Nadu mentions that there were a number of different affiliations amongst the colonialisnt, nationalist and regionalist discourses of that time. Amongst these different cultural and political affiliations were the Dravidian activists who looked into the Tamil past for their political legitimization through history. They would use texts like Sangam poetry, Silappadikaram epic and Tirukkural scriptures for proof for a “secular” Tamil culture (Ramaswamy, 1997:74, qtd by O’Shea, 2007, 75).
was also steeped in this tradition of the search for the divine love in the erotic play of Radha Krishna, an issue I will explore in this chapter’s final section.

With the advent of the bhakti movement, the anthropomorphized God figure could now have a woman dedicated to him who looked after him as if he were human. Before this God was an abstract concept thus for the common man under the control of the temple and the priest. Thus with bhakti, the women worshipper space was created. The 20th anniversary (1989) issue of Manushi titled “Women Bhakta Poets”

celebrates the lives of the extraordinary women poets as a product of the bhakti movement. The bhakti movement played a crucial part at this time in shaping the social, cultural and religious life of Indian people across religions from 6th century CE onwards.

Madhu Kishwar points out in the introduction that these women have been remembered for their “selfless love” but it is also important to pay tribute to their “songs and verse sayings of deep wisdom and philosophical thought”. The bhaktas asserted the equality of all souls before the Divine regardless of race or caste and thus made god accessible to the common people by questioning the sole authority of the temples and the priests.

This shift in the language of worship from Sanskrit to the vernaculars made way for not only the lower classes and castes but also for women. Kishwar argues that these women poets are the shapers of modern Indian language as “they helped make the vernaculars more flexible, suitable for expression ranging from proverbial wisdom to complex philosophical thought”. The bhakti traditions have through both oral and written records preserved the names and life stories of the women bhaktas as well as their compositions. Kishwar gives the example of the woman bhakta poet Mira’s work, which is well preserved.

Kishwar, Women Bhakta Poets, 50.

Ibid, 3.

Ibid.
These women bhakta poets, unlike their male counterparts, could not simply continue their chosen paths while remaining in their households so they either opted out of married and domestic life or remained childless. Interestingly, Kishwar mentions how some renounced respectable feminine behavior in a dramatic way, and here she gives the example of Mira who wore the tabooed dancing bells (ghungru) and danced in public, as well as Mahadevi and Lal Ded who discarded clothing altogether. They may not have founded their own sects like the male bhaktas but they were accepted as gurus or teachers and revered as important religious thinkers of their times. The important point here for me is what Kishwar argues about their reverence and the space for these women who on one level are completely defying societal norms:

This is evidence of a very positive aspect of our cultural tradition—its capacity to make social space available for women with exceptional outstanding abilities and courage, even when they have outrageously defied what are ordinarily considered the fundamental tenets of stri dharm - marriage and motherhood (Kishwar 1989, 6).

Kishwar points to a contradiction in South Asian society. While this space is there for exceptional women this doesn’t mean that South Asian society is willing to grant ordinary women their basic human rights. She urges a need to expand this space so that women need not be exceptional to claim their fundamental rights. Acknowledging this limitation, I nonetheless want to explore this social space for exceptional women that Kishwar points out as unique to South Asian society. While Kishwar’s exceptional women defy “marriage and motherhood,” neither Indu nor her characters do so. Are the female characters in Indu’s choreographies availing this social “positive aspect of our cultural tradition”? I would like to argue in the affirmative, and if so then I can go a step further to say that if Indu choreographs and perform in this very space she also plays a role in

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183 The ghungru are associated with the dancing girls and the sound of the bells has the associated stigma as well. Usually consist of bells strung or sown together wore in the feet, sometimes on a piece of leather.

184 Kishwar, Women Bhakta Poets, 6.

185 Ibid.
creating this space. If so, how does her work play a role in choreographing this exceptional space? I will take up these queries towards the last section of this chapter.

To understand the unique contribution that Indu has made in both the dance form bharata natyam and in the Pakistani women’s movement, I will refer to multiple lessons of history. The duality in South Asian society that Kishwar addresses allows a unique space to “exceptional women” that can best be explored with the much debated and recorded history of the devadasi, the temple dancer, who served the gods in this region. Their case also elucidates the impact of bhakti on the performing arts and women, and while I will not be going into detail of the history of the devadasis and the debates around them, it is important for my purposes to see how they are an example of the “exceptional women” that Kishwar refers to.

I am interested in the agency of the devadasi and her status, which today has been well established in literature especially in dance studies as both ambiguous and complex. I take this case study to show how women performers work out and avail this open space for exceptional women in a patriarchal system that Kishwar points to, and later argue for an understanding of this “feminine space” as a space of hope. In the Indian context of bharata natyam this discussion is best raised by O’Shea through her autonomy and restriction of the sexuality model, a topic I will get into in the sections ahead. Before proceeding I would like to revisit the complexity of the history of the devadasis. I want to take a moment to visit this history by peeling one layer of debris that has surrounded this heavily recorded but contested history. And here the key is the occlusion of female agency in the history of the devadasi since the bhakti movement.


187 O’Shea, At Home in World, chapter three “Women Questions” 104-139.
1.2 Case Study of the Devadasi and history of Occluded Female Agency

Most of the extensive material written on devadasis viewed the figure of the nautch girl from within the colonial orientalizing lens. Amrit Srinivasan’s work pioneered an attempt to rethink devadasi culture outside this colonial understanding of abject women, or women that needed to be saved. In “Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and Her Dance” (1985), Srinivasan used fieldwork based on contemporaneous devadasis, and carefully reconstructed the devadasi system as it was before the legislations of 1947 that banned all temple dedications and rituals around their dedication to the temple, and thus their bread and butter. Srinivasan details the socio-cultural life of the devadasi before the reform as well as revival movements to see the impact the reforms had on the social, political, religious and domestic status of these women. She says that in the matrilineal system of the devadasi household the devadasi was dominant in wealth, influence and power as compared to dependent men. She mentions that a combination of missionaries, doctors, journalists, administrators and social workers, largely Hindus who were influenced by Christian morality and religion, started the anti-nautch campaign. The men of the devadasi community also joined this campaign. Their efforts resulted eventually in the suppression of the secular performance of sadir, name of the original dance of the devadasis, i.e. at social functions and events long before the 1947 legislations.

It is this moment in time, the early to middle of the twentieth century, that I will dwell in for two sections, as in this period of time in the story of the devadasi also lies the complex history of the birth of the dance form which has come to be known as bharata natyam. This history is complex, as the body of the devadasi became the site for divergent discourse in both the reform and the revival movements that were occurring simultaneously at this time. Most importantly Srinivasan pointed out that not only did the reform movements use the rhetoric of empiricism for attacking the devadasi, but the revivalist reclassified the regional artistic forms into “national” dance forms. Both impulses
are “in no small measure an effect of westernization”\textsuperscript{188} of the Indian educated thinkers and activists involved in both.

Thus two main problems emerge with looking at the devadasi through the colonial lens. The first problem is the categorization of the devadasi as the “nautch girls” (dancing girls), a term which has remained and is used for the common prostitutes in the red-light area district of Lahore. By using the term “nautch girls”, the devadasi were narrowly categorized, which in fact was not the case. There were many kinds of dedicated women and many kinds of secular and semi-secular courtesans. Secondly, colonial discourse could not comprehend and do justice to their special position in society. Devadasis, unlike the majority of Hindu women in Indian society at that time, never became widows with all the restrictions on behavior and the loss of status that this involved. They were also among the only women in India who could inherit property and among the few who could read and write. Having said that it goes without saying that they too, like everyone else, were operating within the patriarchal system in which a woman provided services to the priest and the King. Within this system the devadasi had not only material wealth but also “psychological security” due to her “respected status”, argues dance scholar Pamyla A. Stiehl also using Srinivasan’s work.\textsuperscript{189} I want to pause in this moment in history on Stiehl’s reading of Srinivasan’s work, when the devadasi had “respectability”:

As a woman with the protection of a living husband—the deity and lord of the temple corporation—the devadasi was provided with the excuse to enter secular society and improve her artistic skills. [...] As a picture of good luck, beauty, and fame, the devadasi was welcome in all rich men’s homes on happy occasions of celebration and honor [...] –i.e., an adjunct to conservative domestic society, not its ravager (Srinivasan 1985, 1870).

This quote highlights the respectability the devadasi enjoyed in society due to her special marital status as an “adjunct” that is a key here. Unlike the revivalists of that time my goal is not to

\textsuperscript{188} Srinivasan, “Reform and Revival”, 1874.

establish the devadasi as a “nun” versus the reformists claim of her being a “prostitute”. Instead I invoke her respectability at a not that distant pre-colonial time in Indian history as evidence of an occluded history, and this ambivalent space is replete with what I deem a “feminine space of hope”.

Spivak, like Srinivasan, raises the issue that modern day narratives of the devadasi continue as a colonial subject, and thus her agency is being curtailed even when she is being represented. Spivak raises an important issue of the labor involved and the care needed in the process of deconstruction and the rewriting of histories. It is this awareness of the historical construction of the colonial subject and the many layers of that construction that I attempt to peel through as I celebrate the exceptional status of the devadasi. Here I align myself with feminist writers of the 80s and 90s like Veena Oldenburg (1991), Uma Chakravarti (1989) and Amrit Srinivasan (1987) who had a different take to the bhakti movement. According to O'Shea (2007, 124) they looked at the bhakti

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190 Gayatri Spivak critiques Srinivasan in “How to read a culturally different book” (1999) Spivak thinks Srinivasan is utopian about the devadasi pre-1947 reform life, and ignores the larger forces and relations of production within a Marxist system which confine the agency of the devadasi within interest of economic production. I would defend Srinivasan on the basis of her project and her aims at the time when she is writing. Srinivasan writing this article in 1985 is the precursor to Spivak by writing the narrative of the history of the devadasi, an abject subject at that time, in a manner that there can be space created or imagined. Srinivasan’s focus here is on a class and caste critique which is a decolonizing project in itself and is done best with the rigor to historical details and comparison that Srinivasan presents putting the before-after scenario of the devadasi life. She is trying to move away from the representation of devadasi as the abject subject.

191 This article was originally a result of an exchange between academic historians on questions around theory and history and this version is aimed to instruct an English teacher how to read a “culturally different book” like R.K Narayan’s “The Guide” was first published in 1958. Of particular interest for scholars of dance and feminist is Spivak’s interrogation of the representation or non-representation of the character of Rosie/Miss Nalini who is the daughter of a devadasi but has been educated and is not pursuing her mother’s profession of dancing in the temple and all that is attached with the title of a devadasi. While there has been a whale of literature written today, Spivak wants to complicate the analysis of the devadasi from being positioned either as a subject of anthropology or an object of an activist’s project. E.g. she points out how in the novel and the film Nalini is the medium or means for self-representation of Raju who is the key character and focus of the film. In the process Nalini’s agency just like the devadasi’s cannot emerge. The narratives around both of them i.e. Nalini and the devadasi, don’t allow that agency to emerge. Spivak’s paper thus provides a guide to reading and viewing the book and film The Guide and by illuminating the problems of a reading that is hasty in embracing of the “other”. Thus she writes against this tendency which is coming from neo-colonial notions of “ethnic minority” and “national identities”.

192 Spivak raises the question of when did lasya change to lust in the history of the devadasi’s dance? When did the devadasi become the agent for lasya? In response to her question Spivak suggests that we must acknowledge that history is unable to look beyond quick definitions and doesn’t ask this question of when this conflation happened.
movement and its artistic products as a “model of pre-colonial social critique” thus challenging the idea of India receiving “feminism” from the West (O’Shea 2007, 124).  

2. Symbolic Domesticity and the “Woman Question”

Having established complexity of the status and agency of the devadasi I will now proceed with the next layer in my analysis, which requires an introduction of what were the “woman question” and its connection to the story of the devadasi. The phrase “woman question” was born from the women’s right movement in the west at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Due to the colonial encounter in India, the “woman question” became aligned with nationalism and the nation state in the early to mid-twentieth century. In this scenario, the “woman question” influenced the role that the character of the devadasi would now play in the theatre of nationalist politics and the movement for freedom. The events that happened during this period put these questions center stage in the theatre of nationalist and revivalist politics, at the same time that the devadasis were suffering and struggling for the survival of their dance.

Within postcolonial studies there has been a lot of debate around the “Woman question”, accompanied by the intertwined notions of “symbolic domesticity”, “agency” and “modernity” and their alignment with nationalist politics in South Asia. This chapter discusses these questions and related notions to explore how they apply to my project on the life and work of Indu Mitha in Pakistan today. I will now proceed to investigate how these questions and related notions arose and were attempted to be resolved using Partha Chatterjee’s work. I will discuss the “woman question” in its colonial history, and how that got aligned with the dance form bharata natyam in the next

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193 Part of the ongoing research in this area is Davesh Soneji’s research on present day devadasis in South India; see Dance Research Journal, Winter (2004).

section. Included will be an elaboration on notions of “symbolic domesticity”, “agency” and “modernity” through a comparison of case studies of Rukmini Devi and Indu Mitha. I argue through these women’s lives and work, which covers a period in Indian and Pakistani history from the early twentieth century to the present that the “woman question” raised, contested, and debated in nineteenth century British Colonial India continues to be unresolved.

Partha Chatterjee’s book *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993) explains well how within a century the nature and the question of reforms changed to accommodate different agendas to fit the politics of nationalism. Originally coming out of nineteenth century Bengali renaissance in the beginning early to mid of the century, the “woman question” was central and included Rammohan Roy’s campaign against widow immolation and Vidyasagar’s abolishing Kulin polygamy and legalizing widow remarriage, all actions aimed at empowering elite women. But just fifty years after that, by the end of the nineteenth century, these concerns seem to have disappeared having been taken over by new issues around the politics of nationalism.

O’Shea shows how one can apply Chatterjee’s argument across regional boundaries and thus see how late nineteenth century nationalists and regionalists in Tamil Nadu, like participants in the Bengali renaissance movement, appealed to the notion of an iconic “respectable woman” who combined both traditional values and embraced progressive ones. Thus nationalism, argues Chatterjee, was able to successfully situate the “woman question” in an inner domain of sovereignty reconstituted in the light of a new discourse of “tradition” (1993, 117). She argues that nationalism split the domain of culture into two spheres of “the material” and “the spiritual”, a split analogous with the West versus the East, “outer” versus “inner”, which became the social spaces of *ghar* (home) and *babir* (the outside or the world).
The spheres of home and the world sealed the fate of what I call the “undomesticated” woman, the devadasi, as she would come to symbolize all that the respectable domain of “home” was not. Through this model it was possible for a new woman to take birth, who was all that the devadasi could not be, and thus the “respectable woman” was created and the devadasi became the “other woman”. Chatterjee argues that the “modern woman” or the bhadramahila (respectable woman) could follow the visible cultural markers of domesticity so much so that they no longer needed to be confined to the domestic sphere only. The image of woman as goddess and mother helped erase their sexuality in the world beyond the home (1993, 131). Now they could go to schools, travel and even be employed, but they had the responsibility of holding and representing “spiritual purity” through their dress, eating habits and socialization. Their bodies were the site where tradition was preserved, argues Chatterjee, and also became a source of their contested agency. But for the bhadramahila to enter center stage in the theatre of nationalist and revivalist politics, the devadasi had to exit the stage. The next section deals with what this transition from one exceptional group of women to another entailed.

195 Meduri’s dissertation Nation, Woman, Representation: The Sutured History of the Devadasi and her Dance and especially chapter II titled “Death and Rebirth of Subaltern: Devadasi and Modern Author (1920-1930)” for the details of this process of othering that I indicate here.

196 Another good example is poetess and activist Sarojini Naidu. Roy (2008) in Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India takes up this notion of Chatterjee’s and Bhabha’s discussion of the colonial subject as “mimic man” to discuss the case of Naidu, who was a prominent nationalist figure of the Gandhian period to examine her as a “mimic woman” (1998, 130). Roy argues that Sarojini’s point of entry into the nationalist movement was due to the “celebratory archaism” of sacrificing Indian women, which validated her public position, as well as stance against modernity. The symbolic domesticity of women in the Indian nationalist project worked within a dialectic between some mythical heroic, self-sacrificing women and as well as the contemporary woman of modernity (1998, 136). She proposes that Sarojini’s career as both poet and politician raises fruitful questions for understanding “authenticity, miming, and display” in the theatre of nationalism (1998, 130).

197 Lakshmi Subramanin gives a good example of this that the devadasis were invited for performances by the Music Academy but not to discussions about the repertoire as the assumption remained that they were in need of reform by the middle-class and the elite (2004, 25).
2.1 Bharata Natyam Revival and the “Women’s Questions”

Janet O’Shea raises the question of resolution of the “women’s questions” in India in her 2007 book *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the global stage*. By using the plural “women’s questions” O’Shea hints at the agency of certain women who have been ignored in the narrative of the history of bharata natyam. For her in nationalist discourse the woman has a proactive and not a passive role and so she questions those very reforms, traditions and structures in India that she is a subject of and supposed to uphold. O’Shea stressed that the British colonialist’s civilizing mission aimed to save the Indian woman who they claimed was abject because of Indian traditions. Women became symbols of a nation that needed reform, but in the process the question of their agency was ignored. As a consequence of the colonial mission in the early-mid nineteenth century two main grouping arose among Indian nationalists: “revivalists” and “reformists”. While the reformists wanted to change Indian traditions to accommodate modern European ideals, revivalists wanted to revive Indian cultural traditions and practices.

O’Shea argues that even though nationalists, colonialists, revivalists and reformists were oppositional groups in different degrees, for all four it was the women’s position in society that “served as a benchmark of civilization” (2007, 105). Rukmini Devi entered the scene on the heels of the anti-nautch campaign which wanted to abolish the traditional devadasi system, of dedication of women to the temple, who were considered married to the gods and who spent their lives dancing for the gods in the temple. In this process the *bhadramabila* Rukmini Devi came up with a solution for the preservation of the dance *sadir* of the devadasi, in the form of the dance “Kalakshetra Bharata Natyam” (the style of bharata natyam associated with the institute Kalakshetra). Devi helped resolve the devadasi “woman question” using a discourse of “tradition” and symbolic domesticity.198

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198 Chatterjee mentions how her body becomes the site where tradition was preserved, Chatterjee argues, and also became a source of her contested agency. Particularly interesting example that he brings up is the recent history of the sari that is dominantly worn in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (and by Diasporas of the regions) as a combination of a petticoat, blouse and with shoes. Chatterjee outlines how this version of the sari has emerged out of nineteenth and
The flexible conception and symbolism of the *ghar* (home/domestic) and *babir* (outside/public) is at the core of the notion of “symbolic domesticity” and also where it intersects with the notion of “agency” for women, both central for the questions raised in this chapter.

2.2 Case Study of Rukmini Devi and Model of Female Respectability

I will now take Rukmini Devi as a case study as she has been one of the most prominent figures in Indian classical dance history, particularly bharata natyam. Devi, a bharata natyam dancer and founder of the *Kalakshetra* Institute, was actively aligned with nationalist politics. That is the bharata natyam lineage that Indu inherited and I am particularly interested in tracing Devi’s nationalist alignments to see what she conveys through her female characters in her choreographies as opposed to her public persona. In continuation of these “women’s questions” I will now discuss the case of Devi to try and understand how her symbolic domesticity aided or constrained her public figure.

Devi was born in 1904 to an elite Brahmin family, so we can assume that in Devi’s formative years the model of “symbolic domesticity” was already well established. Devi came in contact with the Theosophical Society through her connection with Annie Besant, an Englishwoman and also Indian nationalist, who managed to serve as President of the Indian National Congress (1917-18). Later Devi married George Arundale who was also an English theosophist. Devi was created into a “World Mother” figure through her connection with the Theosophical Society. For my purposes it is interesting to see how Devi’s “World Mother” persona aided her symbolically a-sexual persona, which helped portray her as not breaking the norms that twentieth century experiments to come up with a dress which would distinguish the bhadramahila from the lower class women, the orthodox Indian women of that time, as well as western women. “Dress was the symbol of this nationality” argues Chatterjee.
she was breaking in traditional repertoire at that time. I find it productive to look at these events through the metaphor of the theatre of nationalist politics. From the mid to end of the twentieth century, Rukmini Devi’s successful performance of her public identity was facilitated by that particular moment in Indian history. The props for playing the role of “World Mother” were already on stage for Devi’s entry since the late nineteenth century.\(^1\) But in this drama the devadasi had to be othered for her entry. In other words the devadasis had to be othered for Devi to take up her respectable mother status. Srinivasan would agree with this metaphor as he argues that for women of the elite class from which Devi came to dance sadir, the dance of the devadasi which was almost already non-existent by 1947, it was the devadasi who had to disappear from the scene.\(^2\) Even though “Bharata Natyam” and the Kalakshetra Institute were both born to “World Mother” Devi- the dance of sadir remembered its past life very well.

O’Shea argues that in the anti-nautch campaign that started in 1892, the campaigners conflated choreographic content with the non-domestic sexuality of the devadasi dancer. Through her reconfigured dance form Devi successfully managed to negotiate some of these women questions that the anti-nautch movement raised, though not fully resolving them (2007, 115). So the first question that arises is, how exactly did Devi achieve this so successfully? O’Shea addresses this with reference to Devi’s choreographic choices which went for content that aptly brought out the symbolic domesticity within the nationalistic mode. Namely, the themes were around nationally recognizable content such as spirituality and tradition, and socially acceptable sexual morality. While

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\(^1\) This “Mother India” role was the same as that of few decades ago, which Parama Roy argues in her book Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India (1998) chapter 5 on “The Genders of Nationalism” through case study of poetess and activist Sarojini Naidu, made Gandhi an embodiment of “essential Indian femininity”, and Naidu was always seen as lacking.

\(^2\) Interestingly it seems to me that the Reddy’ Bill of 1930, which asked for banning temple dedications, was only passed in 1947, so actually the push to pass the bill was to facilitate the entry of a new class of elite amateur performers. See Srinivasan (1983, 1985).
she highlighted the theme of spirituality, she minimized *sringara* (eroticism) within dance works.\(^{201}\) O’Shea mentions that while Devi operated within the Victorian-influenced framework of bringing respectability to the dance form\(^{202}\), and within the indigenous nationalist move towards purification and back to the Sanskrit roots of the form, nevertheless she was able to make a place on the public concert stage for middle-class and upper-caste women.

Srinivasan argues that not much changed in the content of the dance-style from *sadir* to Devi’s *bharata natyam*. In fact even the teachers remained the same, except that the new baby was born in a more “proper class” (1985, 1875). O’Shea would disagree with Srinivasan here and in her book (2007) she elaborates on Devi’s choreographic changes which I will mention ahead and discuss in relation to Indu’s choreographic innovations. Srinivasan rightly argues that in this process, Devi helped provide middle-class and elite women with increased responsibility in pedagogy, choreography, and the use of the *nattuvangam*—all at the expense of the devadasi.\(^{203}\) Devi was so successful in her reconfigurations, which will be discussed ahead, in the post-*bharata natyam* revival era that not only did they succeed in her objective of not threatening feminine propriety, they instead confirm it (O’Shea 2007, 108). This is the most important contribution of Devi’s work for my purposes as she sets up a model of respectability and classicism later replicated by other regional dance forms in India and its diasporas in South Asia and beyond. I will now get into how Devi went about these reconfigurations.

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\(^{201}\) In contrast and in defense Balasaraswati identified devadasis as the link between *sringara* and *bhakti*, which for her had to be cultivated if *bharata natyam* was to successfully meld its artistic and devotional agendas (O’Shea 2007, 121).

\(^{202}\) O’Shea argues that Devi’s political beliefs were similar to Theosophical Society’s which rested on orientalist and nationalist discourse, and “neo-Hindu” nationalism in the words of Historian Sumathi Ramaswamy (1997, quoted by O’Shea 2007, 37).

\(^{203}\) Though a handful of Isai Velai women did take to the *nattuvangam* as well, which was something before Devi only the male gurus had authority to do.
2.3 Devi’s Six-point Model that Led to “Respectable Dancer” Position

I will proceed with my six-points framework to aid a comparison of Devi with Indu as this will lead me to better understand the challenges that Indu faces in her bharata natyam work in Pakistan in the twenty-first century. Here I probe in detail the new features of the Kalakshetra style tailored by Devi, as the line of inquiry through which to discuss Indu and her daughter’s work as Kalakshetra bharata natyam is the legacy that they both inherited. Let’s see what they do with it in their new contexts.

1) Increased Role for the dancer: The female dancer could now be teacher, dance historian, and choreographer, as well as performer and interpreter of her dance. Previously only the male nattuvanars had this privilege and thus the power and control.

2) “Low-Key Approach to Sringara (erotic sentiment)204”: This includes a reform of the content and presentation of the dance concert. Content considered overtly erotic was eliminated and this “low key approach to sringara” was supposed to focus more on “inward essence” as opposed to “overt eroticism” (Srinivasan 1985, 1875).

3) Increased Textualization and “Sanskritization” of Kalakshetra: In the text used for the dance Devi brought in Sanskrit literature, Sanskrit aesthetic theory, and ancient dance dramas that had been previously separate from the bharata natyam repertoire (Coorlawala 2004).

Coorlawala mentions in her article “The Sanskritized Body” that the term “Sanskritization” was originally used for a sociological process whereby the lower castes emulated the custom and rituals of higher castes for upward class mobility (Coorlawala quotes Srinivas 1956; V. Raghavan 1956). Later “Sanskritization” denoted a deliberate return to Vedic and Brahminical values from what was at that time “a new intellectual perspective” but

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204 O’Shea, At Home in World, 200.

Coorlawala reminds that this was “often but not necessarily in response to ‘Westernization’” (2004, 53).

This included religious rituals enforced in Devi’s institute; students had to follow a Brahmin lifestyle in their diet and prayer routine. These rules played a big part in reinforcing the image of dancers of a “superior class” to de-link them from the stigma that any identification with the devadasi brought.

Most interesting for me is how these questions are linked with Coorlawala’s discussion of the disciplining of the dancing body in the “brahminized dance” particularly with regards to the control of the hip movement:

The Pandanallur tradition of dance taught at Kalakshetra involves austere geometrically precise shapes, and vigorous techniques. The torso actively extends the lines of movement into space, a practice well suited for proscenium stage. The hip deflections of the Chidambaram temple karana sculptures were purged making way for the “pure” triangular form of the ardhamandi. This is brahminized dance, still carrying its fear of being contaminated by association with the devadasi, and imposing its (superior) aesthetic values (samskriti) on the body of the dance (Coorlawala 2004, 56).

I’d like to add here that representation of dance in ancient sculptures is not necessarily an indication of pre-revival bharata natyam. Indu reminds her students of this debate that it is not clear from the sculpture what dance form is being represented or whether it is even a dancing figure at all or simply a woman in a stance with her hip pointed out.

As the rhythmic complexity of the competing dancers continued it resulted in less torso movement. Coorlawala mentions how some people regard this change as one towards the “middle class housewifely respectability” (p. 56). Then Devi referenced upon archetypal images of women empowerment from Indian mythical past like the warrior, the “True Mother”, or the priestess, so that the servant of the god transformed into the goddess or Devi. Therefore, on the level of the content of narratives the move was towards “spiritualization”, women as the goddess or sacred mother. This change in meaning was
simultaneous with a change in the movement as the focus was on controlling gestures that could be interpreted as sexual. The emphasis was on “purity” both in the content and in the technique and lines of the dance.

4) “Class Distinction” (Including “Sanskritization”): mentioned above there were a number of factors that helped establish a higher class for the dancers. One example is the use of expensive saaRis and jewelry. Coorlawala mentions their use as indispensable markers of respectability (2005, 184). Also the accompanists were removed from their role of walking with the dancer on stage to a separate side stage. Srinivasan argues that the lower class of the accompanists seems to be a factor in the spatial position of the stage away from the limelight of center stage. It is arguable that these changes could have been to accommodate the influence of the western proscenium stage and that class was not necessarily a factor in this instance.

5) New Choreographic Ventures: Devi was the first modern bharata natyam choreographer (O’Shea 2007, 39). She choreographed new items within the formal bharata natyam structure. Also Devi choreographed for classical songs that were previously not used as dance accompaniment. She also created ensemble pieces (O’Shea 2007, 39).

6) Agency and Domesticated Female Characters: Devi’s female characters continued to operate within the patriarchal norms of society, never challenging them. Perpetuating such characters became Devi’s strategy to give agency to the dancers to dance these characters. This “symbolic domesticity” of Devi and her dancers enabled them to dance. So there is big difference in approach to agency between Devi and Indu as to whose agency is the target. For Devi this translates as agency of elite class of Brahmin women who are now the preservers of the sadir, while agency of the devadasi is compromised in the process. In other words, Devi’s aim was to preserve and save the dance and not necessarily the original practitioners of the form. Also, the characters that these emancipated Kalakshetra dancers
portray continue to be domesticated women who fit perfectly in the patriarchal society with their domestic subservient roles, and thus reinforcing those roles and that society.

To analyze and investigate Indu’s work I will focus on these six characteristics of Devi’s kalakshetra bharata natyam. I want to see what characteristics are retained and/or changed in Indu’s bharata natyam. This holistic look at Indu’s bharata natyam lineage and history will get me closer to the social, historical and cultural picture of Pakistani society in the twenty-first century. To fully understand the complexities of the nationalist construction of femininity and feminism in South Asian postcolonial context through the lives of these public figures, it is important to understand different political and historical moments of which they are a product. Devi and Indu were born twenty-five years apart from each other at two different but equally crucial moments in South Asian history. Their lives and work are reflective of the changing and diverse moments in history at the time when they lived, and continue to live in the case of Indu (who turned eighty-one in April 2011). Devi was born near the beginning of the twentieth century, at a moment in history when Indians were trying to figure out their culture on their own terms. Devi’s work at that time was to save the dance of the devadasi from extinction by reconfiguring a “pure Sanskritized dance” which drew support from classical texts. Towards the middle of the twentieth century the discourse around religion overlapped nationalist struggles, as independence from British colonial rule became a reality. Colonized Indian subjects had already been compartmentalized as “Muslims” and “Hindus”, combined with political interests of certain local groups. The next section gets into Indu’s context in detail.
3. **Indu’s Bharata Natyam In the “Land of the Pure”**

According to political scientist and scholar Farzana Sheikh in her 2009 book *Making Sense of Pakistan*, there was an irreversible impact from the separation of the Eastern wing of Pakistan on the enforcement of an Islamic identity for the nation. Following 1971 the slogan of “Islamization” was first used to pacify the grieving, confused nation, and the nation was turned into Islamic lands in the West of Pakistan under the leadership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who had come to power. Post 1971 when the nation was recovering from the shock of losing its eastern wing, a “return” to Islamic ways emerged as a successful coping strategy used by Islamic parties, as Sheikh describes in her book (2009). While dismissed in the 1970s elections, “the political crisis in East Pakistan, which followed the general elections, gave Islamic forces to regain the initiative” (Sheikh 2009, 93). Sheikh gives proof of a shift in the political mood that is the tone in the famous Hamoodur Rehman Commission report, which was ordered to investigate causes of the 1971 civil war:

The belief appears to be universally entertained by all sections of our people that one of the major causes of our disgrace was the moral degeneration which had set in among senior army commanders that included amongst others “lust for wine and women” (Sheikh 2009, 94).

“Islamization” would be enforced to cure this “moral degeneration”. The most visible marker of “Islamization”, and quick solution by a patriarchal, militarized regime was to “cover up the women”. It seems that to cope with the loss of identity and humiliation of the nation with the separation of its Eastern wing to India the nation needed to reinforce its “manhood” and this is where the use of Islam as a crutch became integral. Women once again, like in the colonial project to save the Indian woman, became symbols for honor of the nation and suddenly needed “protection”.

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206 As opposed to the ethnic definition of a Pakistani emphasized by the Bengali majority. This definition according to Sheikh (2009) challenged the two-nation theory and allegiance to Islam over regional loyalties as discussed in Chapter two.

The first route for the patriarchal misuse of Islam was thus through a control of female public spaces.

It was in the 1973 constitution that Islam was for the first time declared the Pakistani state religion. Bhutto didn’t live long after (overthrown by Zia’s martial law), but what would follow from then till the 1980s was an Islamization agenda of the state, the detrimental effects of which would be evident in media and cultural policy for decades to come and of which some remain to date. In such a political environment aligning with a Muslim narrative would seem the obvious choice in aesthetic practices as well, and there were efforts by artists to do so.\(^{208}\) In dance this would mean a detrimental trend similar to that in media and cultural policy. Post-Partition at home and across the border in India there has been increased religiosity expressed in aesthetic practices as well. As a result while in India bharata natyam dance has articulated using increasingly Hinduized representations, in Pakistan kathak has found space to express Sufi devotional expressions by emphasizing its North Indian heritage of the Muslim rule of the Mughals in the sub-continent. Indu complains that in the struggle to find this space kathak dancers have denigrated bharata natyam in particular, which has also been part of her struggle to counter. Indu responded to a question regarding prejudice against dance in Pakistan in Pakistan’s leading magazine *Newsline*:

> Prejudice against dance is propagated by puritans within many religions, not only Islam. It’s pursued in our nation by governments when they are frightened of the Jamaat’s (Islamic party) street power. As for denigrating bharata natyam in particular, that is the work of the kathak lobby, including some dancers, on the absurd plea that kathak is a Muslim art because the Mughal court patronized it. Also, many people are put off by the name, but critics should know that the term *Bharat* refers to the writer of the ancient textbook of theatre arts and not to the nation which did not exist as such. Personally though, being the daughter of a well-respected professor from Lahore and married to an honest army general, I have not experienced any prejudice as such.\(^{209}\)

\(^{208}\) I have discussed in Madame Azurie’s attempt to create a Pakistani Ballet in chapter two.

In the history of bharata natyam, as discussed earlier, Devi Brahmanized and Hinduized the repertoire in her Kalakshetra version which played out as an appealing yet respectable femininity that is now seen as an integral characteristic of bharata natyam (O’Shea 2007, 104, references Coorlawala, 2005, 184). O’Shea analyzed how the revival realigned nationalistic gender discourses such that the practitioners had the agency to question those same traditions which they were supposed to uphold. Her work has been insightful for me to understand the gender reworking in Indu’s work as bouncing from that platform as well. O’Shea argues that bharata natyam is now questioning its past to help frame its future. O’Shea argues here that even though competing perspectives of the revival-era bharata natyam dancers were incomplete in resolving the “women’s questions”, it remained there in such a way that it provided the groundwork for twentieth-century dancers to interrogate their subject constitution and rework gender discourses.

Thus for O’Shea bharata natyam becomes a methodology for this negotiation and I want to apply this methodology here to understand Indu’s negotiations in Pakistan in relation to Devi and also where they lead me in my journey with Indu’s dance. Devi’s lecture “Bharata Natyam Shastra in Practice” delivered at the dance seminar organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in Delhi 1958 presents a model for later dancers to follow, granting permission to drop certain elements of the traditional repertoire while still remaining “pure”. In the process Devi succeeded to make the same dance “respectable”. In Devi’s formula the core was the dance’s religious content; for Devi “If we withdraw from religion, then I think we are withdrawing from the dance” (p. 55), for Indu it is quite the opposite. In her article Temple Stage as Historical Allegory in Bharata natyam: Rukmini Devi as Dancer-historian210, dance scholar Avanthi Meduri who has written extensively on Devi refers to the neoclassical style of dance composed of new alarippu, varnams and tillanas that she created as

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210 Avanthi Meduri wants a rethinking of the classical history of twentieth century Bharata Natyam from the global modernity perspective to focus on what she calls “the semiotic history of the temple stage” which she is argues continues to structure the local/global practicing history of the dance. Meduri is attempting in this chapter “a new semiotic theory of social change and transformation” focused on “theatricality of traveling symbols” (2008, 140).
“Kalakshetra Bharata natyam” (2008, 149). This new version is the lineage Indu inherited. But instead of following what would have been a parallel path of an “Islamization” of the dance, Indu chose to not Islamitize her repertoire. Instead she removed the obvious Hindu traces, like names of gods and goddesses, and thus created an apparently secular content that countered both the lineage that she came from and the demands of the new official context of Pakistan in which she had now made her home. The model of Hinduized bharata natyam which Meduri writes about in her article is within the framework of three symbols-god, guru and temple, which for her represent the totality of the conceptual field in the 1930s. I find this in opposition with Indu’s secular bharata natyam even though Indu too was a student of the Kalakshetra tradition through her teacher Shri Lalita Shastri.

Meduri asks of bharata natyam “can god-light and stage-light co-exist?” But whose god is she referring to that occupies this space? It reads like a very Hindu space to me. Taught by Lalita Shastri, one of Rukmini Devi’s students at Kalakshetra in pre-partition India, Indu’s dance occupies a unique secular space, so has nothing to do with the three symbols of god, guru and temple. Then the question arises what stories does Indu’s bharata natyam narrate? This is where I enter with Indu’s choreographies as an “open space” for a multiplicity of narratives to co-exist, as my and her relation to the narrative vary, but happily co-exist.

A good example of this multiplicity of narratives can be seen in the tackling of bhakti rasa. Devi decided to focus on one aspect of bhakti rasa, the devotional mode, for a strategic revivalism that attempts to resuscitate a specific past for specific ends. For Devi this focus was on “subjects which were enlightening, noble and uplifting which we could follow in the dance completely as it was” (Devi 2003, 51) For Devi only bhakti expression of sringara rasa had the true character of bharata natyam and not sringara rasa as expressed through the physical side of human emotions (p. 56). So Devi’s strategic maneuver was to make the dance more overtly historical with more

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211 O’Shea uses the term “strategic revivalism to discuss Balasaraswati’s preservation of indigenous practices of the devadasi, which is Bala’s resistance to reform of bharata natyam (2007, 124).
Sanskritization and textualization to appeal to the Brahmin elite, thus elevating the status of the dance: “I had to try to make something new—not with the idea of making it look new but with the idea of making it look old” (Devi 1958 reprinted 2003, 52). To achieve this end she created elaborate costumes and brought in an old Indian instrument, Mukha Veena, to replace the clarinet. She also changed the stage by removing advertisements from the backdrop. In talking about tradition in this presentation she emphasized how while keeping traditions we need to continue to change. “There is no value in change just for the sake of change although I say that when I started there was a need for a great deal of cleaning up and spiritualizing” (Devi 1958 reprinted 2003, 54).

Indu has carried on Devi’s work with the elaborate costumes and has also made important changes to the dance that localizes it in a Pakistani context. Indu has introduced North Indian music to the South Indian bharata natyam, in absence of musicians who could play the South Indian instruments. Instead of the “spiritualizing” move for Indu the “cleaning up” has been in the opposite direction, i.e. towards removing the overt Hindu and bhakti aspects that were brought into the Kalakshetra dance by Devi.212 Indu has retained Devi’s style of memorization of passages of Sanskrit theory except that she has translated it into the Urdu language. I discuss ahead how Indu also translated the hand gestures into Urdu while keeping the original chanted recitation. While this may appear as counter to Devi’s “spiritualizing”, Indu says that this process happened not as an intentional reversal of Devi’s work, but out of a need to represent stories of everyday lives of women. For this, she and Tehreema had to go outside the “bhakti lexicon”. I will elaborate on this also with a discussion on Indu’s thematic departures from Devi. Whereas for me Indu’s move away from the over expression of the singular notion of bhakti has opened the way to access the occluded strands of the bhakti rasa, erī maaM talks of non-domestic sexuality and so the lover-beloved bhakti mode parts were removed. By saying it is okay to talk about non-domestic sexuality in a domestic

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212 This is the case not only with Kalakshetra style Bharata Natyam but in Bharata Natyam overall and consequently other classical dance practitioners have followed suite.
setting (i.e. a mother daughter conversation/bonding), Indu helps me to access and include the non-devotional aspects in the bhakti lexicon. That is my strategic revivalism, once again using bharata natyam as a methodology, as proposed by O’Shea.

3.1 Increased Role for the Dancer

Devi was also the pioneer of what is now commonly known as “lecture demonstrations” amongst dancers and dance scholars today. This is where she would explain the history of the form followed by her dance performance. Thus she created a new discursive category of “dancer-historian” through her verbal historiography of her dance performances (Meduri 2008, 149). This was also the training she gave her students at Kalakshetra, an element that continues to be a part of the educational curriculum there. Indu continues this part of the lineage as I experienced when asked to present a lecture about my research on dance at the Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad. Indu helped prepare my presentation with the right photographs to present and tips for the lecture demonstration. She also pushed my fellow dance students and me to write a review essay on a documentary about her and Tehreema made by Shirin Pasha “And She Dances On”. It was after that exercise that she encouraged me to write more about dance, and also assigned me to write a review of Tehreema’s concert at the Islamabad Club. Indu said she felt appalled at most of the reviews of her dance performances, which are written by journalists who don’t know anything about

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214 Anthropology department Quaid-e-Azam University my Masters chair Tariq Mehmood who also coincidently first introduced me to Indu Mitha when he invited her for a lecture demonstration in his “South Asian Archeology and Culture” class in 1999.

215 Published in the Friday Times (2003, 24th October) the review piece was co-authored by myself and another student (late) Sabrina also an anthropologist working in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).
classical dance and make outrageous mistakes like introducing her as a “kathak maestro”\textsuperscript{216} (Personal correspondence). She said she wants to train her students to write dance reviews so as to create a new generation of dance critics educated in dance.

Indu and others women dancers in Devi’s Kalakshetra lineage have benefited from Devi’s efforts in elevating the status of the Kalakshetra dancers as it’s led to an increase in their authority inversely proportionate to their male dance teachers and musicians. The female dancer can now be teacher, performer, and interpreter of her dance, while previously only the male guru, a north Indian term, had this privilege and thus the power and control. According to Srinivasan, Devi also removed the accompanists from their role of walking with the dancer on stage to a separate side stage where they were seated and performed though it is possible that this change had happened before Devi.\textsuperscript{217} Indu, like all classical dance forms and dancers since Devi, has continued to put a separate space side stage for the musicians. More importantly, Devi seemed to have given a successful model for all female classical dancers to pursue this increased role as dance choreographer, and thus the space for creative and independent thinking teachers like Indu to articulate different narratives, including those from a pro-women perspective.

3.2 Devi’s “Low-Key Approach to Sringara”

Devi’s strategic revivalism used a “Low-Key Approach to Sringara” (Srinivasan 1985). This includes a reform of the content and presentation of the dance concert focused away from “overt eroticism” (Srinivasan 1985, 1875). Coorlawala discusses that for Devi the dance could survive only

\textsuperscript{216} She shared with me one such headline.

\textsuperscript{217} Srinivasan argues that here again the lower class of the accompanists seems to be a factor in the spatial position of the stage away from the limelight of centre stage. It is arguable that these changes could also be to accommodate the influence of the western proscenium stage and not necessarily class a factor in this instance.
if she purged all references to sexuality or even sensuality from it. So any poetic references to God or patron or King as lover were removed and the sringara was to be reinterpreted as only bhakti or devotional worship. The female characters in Devi’s dances operate within patriarchy, empowered by the glorification of the status of wifehood.218

Perhaps the fact that Indu took to Kalakshetra bharata natyam pre-partition was due to the Kalakshetra’s style’s mitigation of sringara that resulted in an abstract bhakti, which in turn might have been more acceptable to non-Hindus.219 It makes me think also whether an “asexual” bharata natyam is less problematic in Islamic Pakistan, to distinguish its classical nature from the chasticized performances of the dancing girls of Lahore. I will pursue further O’Shea’s discussion of the engineering by Rukmini Devi of the “technical body” of the Kalakshetra dancer, as opposed to the “devotional body”, and how it was potentially conducive to Indu’s project of the secularization of the dance in Pakistan. In particular I investigate the mitigation of sringara in Devi’s context and provide a comparison with how that becomes secularized later by Indu in present day Pakistan.

But the question is can sringara be removed from the dance? Or did Devi, instead of removing it, tone it down so that it became so subtle that no one could point a finger at it? This is where the disciplining of the dancing body comes in, an important strategy used by Devi to create her respectable-dancer position. So what is the technical body? Devi maintained and highlighted the spatiality and extension of limbs in clean lines already characteristic of the Pandanallur style.220 The technical Kalakshetra body that she created as a result, according to O’Shea, emphasized rhythmic

218 Coorlawala mentions that in the 1950’s to 1980’s this remained the majority trend with the exception of the dancer Chanderlekha who managed to subvert and challenge the power relations between the dance and the temple rituals and their ascribed ‘symbolic space’ by her fiery persona as well as her dances (2004, 57). Coorlawala (2004, 55) doesn’t go into but just references the debates between Balasaraswati and Devi on performing the personal and psychological versus the ritual and philosophical recorded by O’Shea (1987 p.50-51).

219 According to South Asian historian Vinay Lal looking at Mitha’s ancestry particularly the Rudrah’s from her father’s side he feels that she is inclined towards a particular type of Bhakti which focuses on abstraction, but he insists it is still Bhakti for her.

precision and geometry with the result a style that was in her words “exact, precise, and articulate” (2007, 43). O’Shea further argues Devi’s attention to a technical body rather than an “expressive one” enabled her to circumvent the stigma that she was working hard to remove from the dance. This was part of her goal of revitalization, argues Chandrasekharan in Ramnarayan (1984b, 24), as only through such discipline and control laya (rhythmic precision) could she regenerate the arts.\(^{221}\)

My question here is how did the “technical body” contribute to performing this content more successfully? Devi, when interviewed about her opposition to sringara, clarified that she disagreed only with the depiction of explicit sexuality, and that the middle and upper class women who were dancing bharata natyam in her institute were not brought up to express such content, unlike the devadasi who grew up doing so (Ramnarayan 1984a: 23, interview qtd by O’Shea 2007, 191). Her thinking was a product of the then postcolonial British India in lines with the Victorian thinking ingrained in the British educated elite. So along with the removal of sringara content, certain movements were also eliminated and a certain disciplining of the body was enforced in the interest of the devadasis dance to continue, though reconfigured and performed by the technical dancing body of the Kalakshetra bharata natyam dancer.

How did Indu deal with this technical body of the lineage that she inherited from Devi? Indu took Devi’s work and went further in her innovations of themes and adavus to be the trailblazer of a new school of bharata natyam, work that her daughter Tehreema is enhancing and hopefully their students can carry on if they become choreographers one day. So I will now proceed with what Indu took forward, both what she retained and what she brought in, which are her innovations and which set the foundation for a possible new school of bharata natyam.

\(^{221}\) (O’Shea *At Home in World*, 184 quotes) Chandrasekharan in Ramnarayan (1984b, 24).
3.3 “Sanskritization” of Kalakshetra Lineage and a Disciplined Body

In view of the earlier discussion on the disciplining by Devi of the Kalakshetra dancing body, the question arises does the disciplined Kalakshetra body do anything for Indu? On the one hand it is true that the Devi’s Kalakshetra “Sanskritized body”, in Coorlawala’s terms, is secularized by Indu. On the other hand Indu doesn’t depart from the Kalakshetra tradition by undoing the “low key approach to sringara”. It remains modest, including the disciplined hip movements that are quite different from the deflections of the Chidambaram temple karana sculptures into the “pure” triangular form of the ardbamandi that Coorlawala rightfully mentions. In India it was a Brahminized dance fearful of contamination by association with the devadasi. What is it in Indu’s case?

I argue that Indu felt the need to separate her students from the stigma of being associated with women who are commonly referred to as “dancing girls” in Pakistan. “The dancing girls” or the “women of the red light area” as they are commonly known today, are the remnants of the courtesan culture of North India from the Mughal times. In Lahore it is the area adjoining the Lahore Fort and the badshahi masjid (Kingly Mosque) where they continue to reside and perform. Fauzia Saeed’s book Taboo is about these women and she argues that they are the only custodians of this dance and the only performing arts academy in the country. These “fallen women” have been well written about in Urdu and Punjabi literature, and today there is no distinction between them and common prostitutes. While I agree with Saeed for the need to recognize their contributions to

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222 Saeed is writing in 2004 before two major academies have been established since then “National Academy of the Performing Arts” in Karachi (NAPA) and the “National Council for the Arts” (NCA) Islamabad, though the later has been struggling to start its dance sector. Mitha is on the board of directors for this project. I will be discussing in more detail in the next chapter.

223 Anandi by Saadat Hassan Manto.

224 Raana Gulzar (unpublished thesis) a masters student of Anthropology at the Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad conducted fieldwork in the “red-light-area” Lahore in (1999) and wrote about the two main distinctions, one group is the common prostitute, and the other are the “khandanai” (family) ones who are trained in music and dance and live in a family setup and are “married” to one patron at a time. When a girl is coming of age in this family she has the option of being a “wife” or a “dancer”. The former would be serving the family and not be in the “market” while the later would receive education in the performing arts. Most girls choose the later due to the unattractive option of marrying men from their clan, and not receiving gifts or special attention from the family.
the art of dance, as far as their dance is concerned Indu would argue that since their dance is a means to an end, unlike the courtesan who performed in the courts, they no longer pay attention to preserving the intricacies of the dance style so they are no longer a “performing arts academy”. For Indu the disciplined body as a continuation of her Kalakshetra lineage aids to maintain this distance, which is crucial for the work she is trying to do for the survival of classical dance in Pakistan. It is Indu and a handful of other dance maestros in Pakistan that are these academies in themselves. A big factor for this dearth of dance academies in Pakistan is that the Pakistani public has to contest between the stigma of an existing dancer-courtesan tradition and a reformed dance practice. This ups the stakes for stage dancers both male and female. It is for this distinction that the parents of Indu’s students are particular that their daughters do not dance in a “ticketed event”. One way to establish this distinction is to dance for a selected private audience and not for money so as to ensure the distance from any unfavorable stigma.

3.4 Class Distinction

The distinction between the respectable woman who dances for her leisure and “hobby” and the “dancing girl” who does so as a profession to earn a living has great class ramifications. Establishing a class distinction is another element contributing to respectability. One of Indu’s senior most dancers who comes from a highly educated and respectable family shared with me that her parents don’t allow her to take part in a function where she will be paid for her performance, though they are otherwise fully supportive of her learning dance and performing for selective respectable audiences. This is because only women from a certain well to do class would have the luxury to pursue dance for “leisure” which is a marker of a respectable woman. Out of the girls in Indu’s class that I have danced with I have noticed that the majority belong to an elite class and are

225 One husband and father of two kathak dancers that I interviewed in Lahore described this as an artistic or “educated” audience, which he doesn’t mind his wife or daughters performing before.
fully supported and even pushed by their parents to learn classical dance as an integral part of their education. Middle class girls on the other hand have a more difficult time getting this support. One of my colleagues was dancing without her father’s knowledge, a father who consented to her modeling career but to whom dance was not acceptable. I am also an example of a middle class girl who has struggled to get permission from my mother who is reluctant to accept my passion for dance.

Indu’s male students are an important exception to this trend of classical dance in Pakistan’s affluent section of society. I will discuss them in more detail in the next chapter when I get into the minority question in Pakistan. Tired of never getting any male students in her classes Indu took it upon herself to support and mentor a group of talented dancers from a minority Christian community who reside in the kaccii aabaadii or slum areas of the otherwise affluent capital city of Islamabad.

3.5 New Choreographic Ventures: Indu Mitha’s School of bharata natyam

In this section I will discuss Indu’s “bharata natyam innovations”. Indu’s “bharata natyam innovations” include what she has consciously made within the traditional bharata natyam structure. These are in two categories: 1) new technical steps mainly in the adavu technique, and 2) departures in themes from what she inherited chiefly from her teachers, Vijay Raghava Rao and from Shrimati Lalita Shastri of the Kalakshetra lineage. Here I would add that her training in the Uday Shankar style, which I have discussed at length in chapter two, has also influenced Indu’s bharata natyam

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226 In response to my reading of the “women question” from her work Indu first referred to the changes she has brought as “bharata natyam innovations” as she feels she has worked on more “consciously” than the “women questions” that emerge in a number of her choreographies in my opinion. Perhaps this is also an example of Indu’s reluctance to be called a “feminist” in the popular understanding of what all that entails in South Asia, and perhaps especially for her generation. Indu feels her daughter Tehreema has tackled with the “women question” in a more conscious manner in her work.
choreographies. Indu explains below some of her inventions that follow Shankar’s approach to bharata natyam which were her teachers Zohra Sehgal and Kameshwar’s approach:

Their use extended to change and vary the angles of the arms to the body and their direction and elevation, with the usual footwork and body turns, so as to avoid the constant horizontals only. Making them diagonal upwards or downwards at a slant/keeping the angularity of the style.\(^{227}\)

Indu’s Uday Shankar dance training preceded her bharata natyam one and thus it helped equip her with tools for further innovations in Kalakshetra bharata natyam.

1) **New Technical Steps**

The first important new innovation in Indu’s adavu technique is that staying within the bharata natyam language she has tried to do something new and creative by using adavus that work for her aesthetically so as not to repeat the same traditional adavus. In an interview with the magazine *Newline*\(^{228}\) she explained two elements of her adavu technique:

There are two new elements in Tehreema\(^{229}\) and my use of the adavus; their use in unexpected combinations and sequences, and combining the arm movement of one adavu with the body posture or footwork of another adavu while always adhering to the basic angular lines of the style.\(^{230}\)

Indu recalls that the first time she changed a traditional *tuhai* adavu to an unusual one was for her daughter Tehreema who was going to perform *Jathiswaram* in *Raag Saaveri* and in *taal tishrem*. The *Saaveri Jathisvaram* was taught to Indu by her Kalakshetra teacher Lalita Shastra.

Also unique is how Indu worked out how to avoid what she calls “filler” korvai as used by most bharata natyam teachers she has seen. Indu gave me the example of an adavu *tat-dhit-taam*. This

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\(^{227}\) Indu, email correspondence, February 2011.

\(^{228}\) Owned by Pakistan’s oldest and most prestigious newspaper *Dawn*.

\(^{229}\) Indu’s meaningful dance movements are taken up and enhanced by her daughter Tehreema Mitha through her work in Washington D.C “Tehreema Mitha Dance Company” (TMDC).

is the most common adavu used for filler purposes in the Kalakshetra tradition, one which Indu learned from her teacher Sri Lalita Shastri. The reason why it is most commonly used for this purpose, said Indu, is that it is three bols (beats) and can also be reduced to two by doing the *tat dhit* fast and getting the *taam* on the second beat. It is also allowed to do the three bols in three beats and hold the last posture *taam* to cover two beats and make a total of four beats, which gives an important pause before a new section of the rhythmic torah. Indu is strongly against this commonly used approach in bharata natyam choreography and didn’t take this easy route:

I felt this usage of a filler piece or pieces showed poor choreography in the department of rhythm and also a poor knitting together of moves and adavus, which should be put together for reason of aesthetics: movements that go together or lead into each other or in contrast, not merely to fill up beats.

Instead of using “filler” adavus Indu choreographed her dances within the *taal* cycle. She selected only movements that conveyed the story and that fitted in *taal* and thus avoided to put in any movement for the sake of filling in the beats. This is an important example of Indu’s innovative choreography as for her no piece of movement is without meaning. Why did Indu go to such pains to avoid “filler adavus”? I argue that it is because movement has meaning for her. The need to do every gesture and movement with a purpose as in that meaning is power. For Indu meaning in both narratives and each dance movement is equally important.

An important aspect from the Natyasastra that has greatly influenced Indu’s choreographies overall and is her understanding of *sanchari bhav*. She narrated to me that Natyasastra describes its use in music and in expression of emotion/abhinaya in dance and drama. I will elaborate on how Indu uses it in her dance. *Sanchari bhav*, according to Indu, refers to a passing mood in a dance piece, not the main characteristics of the scene or the play as a whole. Indu explains it as “a passing mood in a scene, or the play as a whole (as for e.g. a fantasy or a dream) or a fleeting change of heart or

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231 Lalita Shastri and Kalakshetra’s both studied the Tanjor School style under Guru Panda-Nallur (Nallur also the name of his village). His sir name is Meenakshi-Sundaram and his caste is Pillai (Indu, Personal Correspondence, 2010).

232 Indu, email correspondence, Jan 20, 2011.
mood in a person, or a glimpse of a different aspect of the character”.\textsuperscript{233} There are two points here: Firstly Indu’s selection of adavus according to the mood of the piece, and secondly the thematic important of Indu’s usage of sanchari bhav, otherwise a common device used in bharata natyam choreography.

Firstly in her adavu technique Indu is unique in how she makes sure that mood change is depicted through the type of movements that she selects for the scene so that the movement itself depicts the mood. For example, in the entry of a male hero in saaRii sunaibrii (golden sari)\textsuperscript{234} the mood of the dance changes from the feminine to the masculine as this is the first time the narrative shifts from the female voice to the male. The korvai for the entrance of the boy who has been talked about is on tat-tai-taam dbit tai taam. The dancer jumps swiftly on the right foot and extends the right hand simultaneously in a circular movement over the head and then straight parallel to the ground, with the outstretched arm ending in the body in a horizontal plane. The left hand remains in a fist, pulled towards the opposite direction simultaneous with the stamp of the left foot on “taam”. These strong, sharp angular movements combining the jump, stamp and open arm movements that extend the chest denote his youth, maleness, and pride in them, as well as his youthful stride towards the place where the milk maiden has secured the butter. Indu chooses movements according to the mood of the story conveyed in a particular scene. So no set of advaus would be added in between the narrative part unless they are part of the story telling. Unlike many famous Indian bharata natyam teachers and schools today\textsuperscript{235}, Indu is not fond of speed in bharata natyam as she feels that it compromises the angles and beauty of the movement.

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{234} I mentioned this dance in the introduction as it has an important role in my journey with bharata natyam that has lead to this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{235} From my personal experience of learning with Viji Prakash, an incredible teacher who runs the most successful bharata natyam school in California, the story part of the dance is followed by filler sequences where dancers show their speed and expertise and mastery over adavus. Apart from Viji Prakash I also had the opportunity to learn bharata natyam with Japanese Bharata Natyam teacher Izumi Sato while I was at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (2004-6).
Secondly and more importantly for Indu is use of sanchari bhav as a bridge, as a transition, and as I argue a liminal space. For Indu, Sanchari bhav allows an in-between moment where a bad character can show a good side or vice versa. This is a key difference between Indu's choreography and conventional bharata natyam, where sanchari bhavas are used as elaborations on existing themes using poetic tropes. For Indu this bhav has the capacity to show the grey area between the black and white. With the sanchari bhav in mind Indu has choreographed mood changes in her work. It is Indu’s use of the second thematic aspect of sanchari bhav which is most important for my project of excavation of occluded spaces as Harvey’s “Space of Hope”. In chapter one Indu’s use of kavita bols that I discussed with regards to her kathak choreography aided excavating occluded histories of syncretic times and of communal harmony. In her bharata natyam Indu uses what I call “meaningful” korvey to express sanchari bhav in all her bharata natyam choreographies. Every gesture thus articulates meaningful stories. The grey areas are important for Indu and that is the most important lesson from sanchari bhav for her.

Indu’s respect for this aspect of sanchari bhav reflects in my opinion her approach to most important aspects of her life and I will take one example here to illustrate. A core turning point that defined her life, like millions of other South Asian lives, was the Partition. Partition became about Hindus and Muslims who were represented as polar opposites on a binary scale- but there were grey spaces. Those that were neither or both religions were also affected by Partition. Indu, though only a seventeen-year-old girl, didn’t let these divisions impact her, nor did she let her parent’s opposition to her pursuing a Muslim man who was moving to Pakistan deter her from doing so. Once she was convinced that A.O.Mitha was the man for her, she let nothing stop her decision to marry him. She believed in her choice and she pursued it. Imagine a seventeen year old in 1951 crossing the border to join a man who her family doesn’t approve of, who belongs to a different religion, and lives in a

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Izumi is trained from Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan in India. I noticed similar pattern of filler adavus and technical pieces before a narrative scene not necessarily meaningful in the way Indu does so.
newly made country which her family has decided not to migrate to. Indu came from a Christian, secular oriented family and when she moved to Pakistan she made a point of paying attention to this important grey zone. It was in her choreographies where she could find a venue to do just that.

Indu's upbringing and childhood environment play a major role in this. She became equally equipped in aesthetics and intellectual rigor as she grew up in a household with a focus on academics, especially as her father was a respected philosopher and intellectual. This can be seen in the fact that Indu too pursued philosophy at University for her bachelors and also her Master's, receiving first position and first division in her graduate studies, a rare achievement in those days. Her upbringing in a household of philosophers and a secularly oriented father influenced her, just as much as her mother’s love for aesthetics, dance and music. This combination of a rigorous intellect and passion for aesthetics was the incubator for Indu’s unique interpretation of the bharata natyam repertoire, and I will elaborate this with her departures in theme as discussed in the second part of this section. Thus Indu’s understanding of sanchari bhav gave her work in bharata natyam a completely different approach to interpret what she had learned from her teachers, and the Pakistani context helped ferment this, a subject I will discuss now in greater detail.

2) Thematic Departures

I mentioned earlier how in Indu’s early years her family provided a combined academic and artistic environment, which became fertile soil for her unique interpretation of bharata natyam. This interpretation is a space of hope, as I will now elaborate. That unique upbringing led Indu to combine her love for the arts and her sharp intellect towards a Philosophical bharata natyam or an

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236 Somewhat similar upbringing to Devi as far as an elite class and an intellectual and philosophical environment though Devi is a Brahmin and Indu’s Brahmin paternal grandfather converted to Christianity so she grew up Christian.

237 Indu was awarded a scholarship that she had to turn down, I think because she planned to move to Pakistan to join her love).
“anthropological”\textsuperscript{238} approach to bharata natyam stories, as Indu would prefer to call it. She explained this to me particularly with regards to themes of bharata natyam stories of Hindu gods and goddesses. Indu explains that she took the Radha-Krishna themes and showed that “pastoral societies are bound to see their role models in this way and in that sense they belong to our past without necessitating their worship or even as ideal role models as gods or avatars”\textsuperscript{239}. Next, in order to pass on the traditional items that she had learned from Lalita Shastri to her Pakistani students, she decided to translate the text into Urdu so that both audiences and students of the dance would get the immediacy of the theme. Once she had translated these into Urdu she worked to fit the translated verses into the same tune of the recited chant style that she learned from her Kalakshetra training. Similar to the Kalakshetra style, students would repeat the single and double-handed gestures with the musical rendition of their names to remember them. In this way Indu keeps the link between the institutionalization of the style and form, but also indigenizes it with the local language.

An important feature that has evolved as an important part of Indu’s anthropological approach to bharata natyam is her usage of not only the local language but also local music and musicians. Indu, and now also her daughter Tehreema, is unique in using North Indian music \textit{(raagas)} for bharata natyam, which is a South Indian dance form. Has this had any impact on her choreographies? The result is a combination unique to Indu’s style of bharata natyam in Pakistan.

According to Indu she didn’t set out to devise a new approach but it was a consequence of the new circumstances that she found herself in. Consequently, Indu’s bharata natyam attained a unique northern flavor due to the lack of availability of South Indian musicians and instruments in Pakistan, and also the demands and knowledge base of her musicians trained in the classical music.

\textsuperscript{238} Indu, email correspondence, December 7, 2010.

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
khayal that is indigenous to this part of the sub-continent. To achieve this end she has had to work very hard to not compromise her commitment to stay within the bharata natyam structure and also to coax her musicians unfamiliar with it to cross their familiar boundaries of Northern classical music. I quote her sharing an example of this process below in adapting the music for a varnam (a dancer piece following and elaborating a shabdam) in bharata natyam repertoire.\(^{240}\)

Using Northern music I have set dances in the manner of varnam (without the form of the music of a southern varnam) but using suitable khayal music/preferably a khayal that has an asthai (this is of course laazmi, one asthai) but has more than one antara, so that it can be broken into many “verses” as required, for a varnam. Both maalkauns with the asthai mukh moR moR, muskaath jaat has been so treated and also raag gaur malbaar which Fauzia performed and in which I persuaded our ustaad Fareed Nizami to add another antara bol as an addendum as I wanted to introduce two young sakhiis (friends) who came to tease the heroine at the half-heartedness of her hero who had stayed away just because of a little rain!\(^{241}\)

Finally some departures in her choreographies have been due to the expectations of the audience for whom Indu is performing. She feels that it has been a blessing in disguise for her because unlike Indian dancers, Indu can choreograph independent of demands from hard to please patrons. Also, low expectations and limited dance literacy from her audience in bharata natyam give her more freedom to do as she pleases. On the other hand, Indu feels that due to less understanding of abhinaya and more appreciation of kathak cakrs (circles) and fast speed taals she decided to introduce more korveys in some of her classical items e.g. in the padam Saree Sanehree (In the Park).

But I have put them in as in the culture of kathak aficionadas all ghazals, thumries, dadras that have abhinaya are classed as semiclassial. The audience does not give so much value to abhinaya as most of it in the use of the courtesans whose audience and clients they were used mostly naturalistic gestures and only a few symbolic/classic gestures, like those for eyes or flowers and buds etc. that are themselves descriptive and natural. Moreover our audience again takes great delight in expertise in taal and the bols of the tabla so for their edification (both to impress them and keep their interest, two korveys were put into that dance, one feminine for


\(^{241}\) Indu, email correspondence, February 2011.
the female and one after the boys main entry to steal the butter with boyish and naughty mood. 242

In summation, it seems that the demands of her Muslim context and chiefly Urdu speaking audience, as well as Indu’s strong command of the Urdu language, aided both the nurturing of her Urdu translation of the bharata nayam content and the use of North Indian music for an originally South Indian dance form. Both these indigenizing aspects work well with Indu’s anthropological approach to pass on the narratives of the traditional bharata nayam repertoire to her Pakistani Muslim students.

Indu’s earlier bharata nayam work in Pakistan includes this gradual indigenizing the traditional bharata nayam repertoire, and her later work from the 80s onwards ventured into changing the representation of women in the stories of the traditional pieces that she had learned. Thus an important departure in theme in this second period is in regards to the agency of women in the traditional stories of both bharata nayam. This change in the female characters first came out of working on choreographies for her daughter Tehreema’s arangeteram, and later as they continued working together. These were the female characters in their dances that both mother and daughter were dissatisfied with and thus changed. So I will now discuss this change, as it is one of the most important ways in which she differs from her Kalakshetra lineage. I will do so in relation to Devi’s case.

3.6 Agency and Domesticated Female Characters

As mentioned earlier Devi’s primary aim was to preserve and save the dance that created space for elite women to dance “domesticated female characters”. These characters are domesticated, as they were about women whose domestic roles fit perfectly within patriarchal society, a stark contrast to the expressions of non-domestic desire in much of bhakti poetry. The

242 Ibid.
character that Indu and Tehreema choreographed together in *eyrii manM* is the opposite of domesticated women even though it is assumed here that the main character is a respectable woman in society and not a devadasi or a courtesan. Thus this female character who belongs within mainstream respectable society is challenging social norms at multiple levels. She is not only a strong, independent woman, but also a rebel in the patriarchal society that would never accept a woman pregnant out of wedlock or her child. Additionally, this female character is opening a discussion on the topic of sexuality with her mother and not with her sakhi (friend).

To understand the complex nature of agency in the non-western context of Pakistan I turn to my personal experience and to Saba Mahmood’s secular approach in studying *Islamic revival and the feminist subject* in her 2005 book as she questions the feminist project though she herself is a “feminist”. Mahmood is looking at the piety movement from the perspective of a secular feminist and sees agency in the work of these women, broadening her conception of agency outside subordination and subversion (Butler) that was prevalent in the field of feminist subject till then. Whereas I am not a secular feminist, I see agency in Indu’s removing overt bhakti expression from the bharata natyam repertoire. Mahmood’s model of piety provides me, Indu’s student who grew up

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243 Based on her ethnographic study of the urban women’s mosque movement in 1995-97 in Cairo Egypt, which was part of the larger Islamic Revival in Egypt. Mahmood writes from within the disciplinary location of a feminist and a poststructuralist and questions certain assumptions and definitions of agency, which have been integral to the conceptualization and aim of the feminist project over the years. She is interested in how historical and cultural specificity inform the politics of a feminist project and emphasizes that questions of religion have not been explored extensively. She writes against the assumption of feminists that women *should* oppose the practices and values that the Islamist movements embody. The nature of Mahmood’s project is extensive theoretical depth to deconstruct established assumptions within the liberal progressive feminist project. Mahmood questions resistance and agency along the lines of embodiment.

244 Mahmood builds on the work of that scholarship within feminist scholarship that brought back the women’s voice in particularly in Middle Eastern studies, which were previously considered passive under patriarchy. See work of Abu Lughod 1986; Altorki 1986; Atiya 1982; S.Davis 1983; Dwyer 1978; Early 1993; Fernea 1985; Wikan 1991. While poststructuralist like Butler, Gatens and Groz have criticized the liberal notion of autonomy and exclusion of feminine, emotional, non-rational in “rational” thought, Mahmood’s project is aiming to push these notions further by what she calls a “de-coupling” of “self-realization” from “autonomous will”. Mahmood’s framework builds on these Foucauldian notions as well as Butler’s theory of ‘embodied performativity’. Butler also locates agency within structures of power and suggests, like Foucault, that norms can both consolidate and destabilize a discourse/power. Mahmood criticizes Butler, suggesting that she doesn’t explore the diversity of ways in which norms are performed, inhabited and experienced. In other words she is departing from Butler in her conception of agency outside the binary model of subversion and subordination.
Muslim in an Islamic society, with the fabric to understand expectations and to ask some questions: Is there conflict between my “religious/Islamic identity” and my “dance identity”? Do these identities work together or not in Pakistan? How is it different from India? How does respectability play into how gender modalities are played out in Pakistan? And how does Indu’s domesticity and respectability combine and enable her to create a space to teach a dance form that is apparently out of place in a Muslim society? Mahmood’s call helps me hone into to this question for the sections ahead: What is an alternative way to view Indu’s dance in Pakistan beyond the model of western-determined resistance?

Devi’s dancer as “respectable woman” subject position and choreographing a counter space

This six-point framework was to breakdown Devi’s legacy and see how she was successful in reconfiguring bharata natyam to create the “respectable-woman-as-dancer subject position” (O’Shea 2007, 117) in order to lead me to put into perspective Indu’s strategies to face her challenges choreographing bharata natyam in Pakistan in the twenty-first century. The new features of the Kalakshetra style tailored by Devi are the legacy that Indu inherited. Devi’s context was the anti-nautch movement and her role in the subsequent bharata natyam revival, which according to O’Shea, still left the “women’s question” unresolved (2007, 115). Devi’s model of respectability hinged on the spirituality of the dance and the dancers, and by distancing it and them from the devadasis and their “fallen” status. Her agenda was to preserve and elevate the dance, and enable elite women to learn and perform it. She was very successful in this end. Devi’s concern was to “appear” to stay within the “tradition”, even as she reconfigured it, in order to carve a space for “respectable women” to continue the dance. This is where the biggest difference between Devi and Indu lies in regards to resolving the “women’s question”. According to the different moments in history in which they are living and working, one has to disguise the reconfiguring of tradition while
the other doesn’t. While Indu also stays within the classical bharata nattam repertoire, she questions societal norms in subtle and not so subtle ways. Indu inherits the “respectable-woman-as-dancer subject position” (O’ Shea 2007, 117) from her Kalakshetra genes but avails it to question tradition. I am interested in the space that she manages to choreograph for such a discourse in the process.

Before I can get into the composition of the specific “feminine space” that Indu takes us to, some background of the broader space is important including a glimpse into what is happening with the women’s movement in Pakistan at this time. For this let’s go back to a Woman’s Day celebration in Lahore, March 2004, when I first watched Indu’s student Sofia Khawaja perform *erii maaM* from backstage while waiting to perform in another dance piece.

![Indu Mitha and daughter Tehreema Mitha](Figure 8.jpg)

**FIGURE 8** Indu Mitha and daughter Tehreema Mitha  
Photograph taken by Tehreema’s husband William Barron.

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245 After Tehreema, Indu’s senior most student as she started learning when she was only ten due to insistence of her grandfather Khawaja Hassan. The late Hassan was one of the most respectable academics and social critics of Pakistan.
4.  **Indu and the Women’s movement in Pakistan**

*Lahore March 8, 2004*: It is an International Women’s Day Function at the Auditorium of the Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore. I have been a student of Indu Mitha for a few years and am excited to be traveling with her and my fellow students to take part in an exciting festival Zanani (Formal Urdu word for Female gender) that is celebrating South Asian women. The festival has been organized by Ajoka, a well-known theatre group that goes by the slogan “A Theatre for Social Change”, run by the famous actress and artistic director Madeeha Gohar. They are a group that continuously and successfully works with and invites artists and theatre groups from India and Bangladesh to participate in the event. The big celebrity of the festival is the famous Zohra Segal, who is now popularly known as the famous grandmother, one of the top lead characters in Indian cinema. She was there to play herself in Ajoka’s play *ek thii naanii* (Once Upon a Time there was a Grandmother). This play was inspired by her true-life story, the story of her and her sister Uzra Butt. Both started their careers in 1930 at the Bombay Prithvi Theatre and with the Indian People’s Theatre Association. Partition separated them as Zohra stayed back in India while Uzra, like Indu, migrated to Pakistan. This play, specially written for the sisters by Ajoka Director Shahid Nadeem, brought them together on one stage after four decades. It was also the first and perhaps the only time that I got to meet my grand-teacher, the teacher who introduced Indu to Uday Shankar’s dance dramas and also influenced her teaching methodology later on. Out of her bharata natyam

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246 Ajoka website.

247 E.g. she has played Shahrukh Khan’s grandmother in the Bollywood blockbuster *hum dil deya bale saam* among many others.

248 Indu arranged an interview for me with her at her sister Uzra Butt’s home. It was the first and last time I met her sister Uzra Butt who passed away in May, 2010.

249 I performed the group dance choreography *baaghi ke meM* at this event which is based on the sort of training and confidence to choreograph on her own themes that Indu learnt from Zohra and Kameshwar’s training in Uday Shankar
Indu decided to present dukhee, which represents the traditional view of a woman’s reaction to rejection or betrayal (or any other hardship) brought to her by a man, and then *erii maaM*, which is a modern woman’s reaction to the same or more critical problem as she makes clear that she is independent enough to bring up her child herself. Indu describes the birth of the new themes and her frustration with the limited space within the bhakti lexicon that she had inherited:

… after some time they seemed to all be in the same mood. Woman left in a beseeching and vulnerable position by a man’s behavior. I asked Tehreema’s Ustad Hafeezhan Sahib if we could not get away from the relationship of man/woman and perhaps have a dance about some other subject; say the beauties of nature or the weather? Of course he said and launched at once into *amalbaar* raag but after the *asthai* about the weather it again became a desire to see the beloved … yes I know they all say it is *Ishq i haqeeqi* but it is in the words of human romance, it is easier for the Hindus to assert that it is divine love because their god becomes a human avatar but in Islamic Sufism whether a male or female form of *wird* (prayer repetitions) is used it is still love that remains faithful despite the beloved being *bee naiz*, another word for not caring, not interested. Also another inevitable person in these songs is the sakhi to whom the heroine confides her story or brings her problem or through whom she sends her message. When we moved to Karachi the problem was still with us and Tehreema or me, one of us said why can’t a girl with a problem confide in someone else, what about her mother? And the ustad we were conferring with then, khan sahib Buland Iqbal son of Ustaad Bundu khan and brother of Umrao Bundu khan, promptly started singing *erii maaM*! 250.

*erii maaM* was Indu’s point of departure away from the domesticated female characters that she had been at odds with for so long, but it was only in the 1990s with the youth and spirit of Tehreema that this birth took place. It is important to know that Mitha had been a part of the first women’s organization, which is her Ajoka theatre connection, for decades before this and I want to discuss the issues that faced this “Women Action Forum” (WAF).

The Women Action Forum, of which Indu has been a member since its inception in 1981, galvanized in reaction to the changes in the Hudood Ordinance in 1979 that prescribed under law strict criminal offences, most of which impacted women. Indu shared with me that she remembered

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250 Indu, email correspondence, December 2010.

*style. She believes that it should nowadays be classed as semi-classical (as the torahs or the classical rhythmic *bol* are used and the music classically based).*
the first time that WAF members compromised and agreed to dance in an exclusive “ladies function” just to be allowed to perform. Indu had objected to their compromise but they said “just this once”. Indu feels this was a mistake and set precedence for dance to exist in women’s only spaces from then on.

The women’s movement would later bifurcate into two fractions, “feminist” and “Islamists”, both categories that Indu doesn’t identify herself with. Kathleen McNeil suggests an alternative to the polarization of the Pakistani women’s movement into what has been thought of as mutually exclusive categories of “feminists” and “Islamists”. McNeil suggests an inclusive strategy, which appeals to both secular and Islamist ideals, which she calls “Islamic feminism”. This appeals to me as a framework that is rooted in the local region and culture.

I highlight the alternative of Islamic feminism as a theoretical and theological space where Muslim women can embrace their identities as women without renouncing their faith or compromising on their right to absolute gender equality (McNeil 2003, 143).

I see this strategy as parallel to Indu’s strategy to select themes for her choreographies that are indigenous to both the history and the present reality of what was the subcontinent and now Pakistan. McNeil reviews the different categories of women involved in the Pakistani women’s movements and highlights how their efforts have been influenced by their religious and gender identities; identities which at times do conflict.

The first category of “Islamist” consider there to be a conflict between Islam and feminism. The examples here are that of the Islamic organizations _Al-Huda_ and _Jamat-i-Islami_. The second group of “secular feminist” for McNeil argues that Islam is innately patriarchal so Islam and feminism is also incompatible for this group. These include scholars like Ayesha Jalal, Shahnaz Rouse, and Nighat Said Khan. The third group is of the “activists” who according to McNeil often

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251 _Al-Huda_ under founder Dr. Farhat Hashimi is a now a big network of institutions promoting Islamic teaching, originating from Middle East. Also has recently been controversial. _Jamat-e-Islami_ or “Islamic Party” is a political organization.
use both secular and Islamic arguments to defend the rights of Pakistani women and have made
great contributions. Members of the Women’s Action Forum (WAF) are a part of this category and
since Indu is also a member of WAF, then going by McNeil’s framework Indu is also an “activist”.
(Asma Jahangir, Hina Jillani, Bushra Ahsan are some names she included in this group). In the final
category, “Islamic feminists” assert that Islam is “feminism” as the Koran mandates equality of both
sexes. Here she includes the work of scholars like Farida Shaheed and Riffat Hassan, and I would
agree with McNeil that this position is the way ahead for the women’s movement in Pakistan. While
I can align myself closest to “Islamic feminist”, I want to clarify that Indu doesn’t identify herself as
a “feminist”. At the same time Indu creates work that I argue creates an inclusive space for both
secular and religious interpretations by allowing her audience to make their own conclusions
according to their own beliefs. Indu is also particular about ensuring that her work is close to the
indigenous roots and culture that she is in, which results in a unique framework all of her own. I will
now proceed with breaking down this framework by trying to uncover what it is not. So in the next
sections I explore my queries beyond western paradigms of feminism, by looking at Indu’s life and
work and particularly her dislike with being called a “feminist”.

4.1 Beyond Western Feminist Paradigm: “I am not a feminist!”

Indu was concerned that I was thinking of her as a “feminist” when I first started to
question her about the strong female presence that I observed in her work. In response to my
interrogation on this question Indu clarified to me in an email below, “what I mean is that I am not
a belligerent feminist. Not at war with the male gender as such”.

252 But in the same breath she also says,

252 I suspect she is referring to certain members of the Women Action Forum in Pakistan (Indu is a member too) who
identify themselves as feminist and who in her opinion have that kind of stance against the male member.
Of course I see RED when one hears of *karo kari* (local term for ‘honor killing’) and *jirgas* (tribal court/tribunal) that send a helpless innocent woman to appease a tribe when it is a male that has committed a crime… I do however believe that women should stand up for their equal/human rights and that women should have more GUTS and DO so. It will not come with legislation but through individual AND concerted togetherness of women in their own differing societies. We in ours need more CONCERTED effort say than in the western countries, therefore the need for WAF (Women Action Forum) and other such NGO efforts. (*Emphasis is Indu’s*)

Indu’s distance from the term “feminist” seems to me to originate from anti-colonial stance similar to Madhu Kishwar, an activist for women’s issues, who wrote an article in journal *Manushi* “Why I do not call myself a feminist.”\(^{253}\) Kishwar starts with a quote from Gandhi “I have a horror of “isms”, especially when attached to proper names”, and proceeds with a discussion of how western “imported labels” alienate indigenous populations who don’t relate to them, and how these labels are unduly forced on local populations simply due to the availability of funding for related projects. Kishwar’s main argument is how feminism has been linked to colonialism and to the sensationalization of the oppression of Indian women as a symptom of “culture”. Like Kishwar, Indu too was impressed with Gandhi and in her teenage years also wore khaddar at Gandhi’s call for non-violent protest. Plus she grew up in an unconventional liberal Christian family of philosophers and was given the opportunity to learn dance with teachers like Kameshwar and Uday Shankar, who were considered most unconventional and rebellious in their times in attempting to experiment with the traditional bharata natyam repertoire. All of this had a powerful impact on young Indu. I argue that she doesn’t want to be labeled as a “feminist” as that is considered a western paradigm.

Following in the footsteps of her teachers, Indu appears to want to move beyond western paradigms towards local expressions in her life and her work. This is evident from her usage of local language and music in her repertoire as discussed earlier in this chapter.

In Parama Roy’s book *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* she discusses the feminization of Gandhi and the selection of certain types of femininity within the

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bourgeois nationalist project, particularly within the trope of “Mother India”: self-sacrificing, self-effacing, nurturing, non-violent, and asexual. In this alignment of the Nation and woman, Roy argues that the case studies of Sarojini Naidu and Gandhi are interesting as Naidu’s case causes “female trouble” for nationalism. Gandhi played a crucial role in the “feminization of nationalist activity” and in legitimizing the changing definitions of women’s work at that moment in Indian history. He was able to do this by using the rhetoric of female exceptionalism and purity, privileging women emphasizing their maternal aspect, and thus the trope of women’s identity as “Nation (alist)”.

So according to Roy there are two opposing feminities being discussed in this relation and in the comparison Gandhi wins as the “better woman” of the two as he embodies completely the essential, or core of Indian femininity, which is confined to a “Mother India” representation. Thus Gandhi embodies the “essential Indian femininity” in his representation as “Mother India”, non-violent-self-sacrificing-nurturing hero, versus Naidu whose femininity is something to be wary of, seductive but both have space to be accommodated within bourgeois nationalism. In continuation of these women questions I am interested in exploring the political and historical moment and Naidu’s public persona especially when Naidu insisted on not being called a “feminist” as I have heard Indu stress as well. Perhaps Indu’s insistence on not being a “feminist” is coming out of the blend of the congruency of the gendered and the nationalist that happened in early and mid nineteenth century. She also wore khadi following Gandhi’s call, which Roy quotes Kishwar meant “opposition to colonial rule, identification with the poor and the exploited, and an assertion of the spirit of self-reliance, of freedom”.

When Indu was coming of age in the 1930s and 1940s, the local understanding of “respectability” was being in touch with Indian culture and heritage. This was linked with the anti-

\[254\] Roy, *Indian Traffic*, 141.

\[255\] Ibid, 150.

\[256\] Ibid, 149.
colonial struggle and thus modernity and westernization were shunned. In the post-colonial state of Pakistan this continues to be the case except that the colonial struggle has been replaced by anti-imperialism. The tie between respectability, culture and indigenous roots is still there even as modernity is becoming popular, though not necessarily respectable, amongst the new rich elite. Being westernized is still not respectable, so it may be “modern” but not “respectable”. Here I will like to stress the distinction between respectability and women’s activism. The question arises whether the mainstream notion of female respectability is a woman who is passive and does not speak up for her rights? No I don’t think so. But in the repertoire in the bharata natyam dance this used to be the case (and still is with some in India) when it was conceived by and choreographed by men. While Devi brought major changes in the traditional structure and style she didn’t change or question these stereotypes of women characters. I argue that in the history of the Indian context, which is a shared history with Pakistan, women have been very vocal about their rights and thus very strong women indeed. Devi cleaned the dance repertoire but the project was incomplete and stereotypical male representation of women characters continued. While Indu continues with the dance style within the respectability template set by her teacher Lalita Shastri, she slowly started to challenge these stereotypes. Just like in the Indian diasporas that O’Shea studies and argues regarding the women questions, women adopt certain markers of respectability while challenging them. This is very much the case in Indu’s choreographies. As a result in Indu’s choreographies today’s woman can be respectable, bold, independent, and a “good woman” all at the same time. How has Indu inhabited or resisted the “respectable” woman’s role through her life and work? How does this enable her feminist choreography? The next section will tackle some of these queries.
4.2 Towards a New Model of Feminism: Indu as Teacher and Respectability

It seems on the one hand that Indu’s profession in the Pakistani context is bold and against societal norms of an Islamic society as evidenced by the negligible number of classical dancers, but she has managed to find a respectable space there. She has created a space that overlaps respectability and feminism; in a patriarchal society where feminism is assumed as a western influenced model that has no place for respectable Pakistani women. Indu is able to create and represent such bold characters as the woman in erii maaM, by strategic use of her status as a teacher and wife of an army Major General, and thus her connections with a certain elite class of Pakistan, all of which add to her respectability. In the last section I discussed Devi’s domesticated characters where O’Shea argues that Devi’s “valorization of domesticity” gave legitimacy to her unconventional position as a dancer, choreographer and an activist (2007, 120). I argue that Indu’s case is the opposite. Her respectable position, which includes that as the wife of a former senior most official in the Pakistan army, the most powerful institution in Pakistan, and that as an educator and a mother, are all indicators of her domesticity. These markers enable her to choreograph unconventional characters.

Markers of Domesticity, Respectability, and Indu

Indu’s unconventional characters seem to be away from the normative submissive, female, and it is important to note here that it was through her collaboration with the next generation, through her daughter, that they first emerge in her choreography. In my latest email correspondence with Indu, she clarified that the strong women characters have chiefly been in choreographies that she has choreographed for her daughter Tehreema. Themes of Tehreemas’s dance are more “out

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257 Major General A.O. Mitha, see book autobiography published after his death by Indu Mitha, Mitha, Unlikely Beginnings.
there"; more radical than the subtle manner of her mother’s choreographies. In comparison, Devi’s choreography celebrated domesticated heroines that were content within the patriarchic norms of society. Having said that, the nature of the female characters that they both portray through their works is somewhat different from the narratives of their personal lives. In addition to Indu’s status as an ex-army Major General’s wife and as a teacher, certain class markers as verbalized through her flawless, non-South Asian accented English and her fluent Urdu and also mobility and access to a driver and a car all symbolize a “well-to-do” class.

Similar to Devi though, Indu makes sure that she distinguishes her dance students from “those women” from the red light area. Indu’s students, like Devi’s, belong mainly to an elite class of the society, which includes some middle and upper middle class students. The performance space and audience is integral to distinguish their dance from the dance of the “other women” who use dance as a means to sell their bodies. So the space has to be a protected one, a space for families and thus a female friendly space. It is due to these reasons that dance thrives in Pakistan in educational institutions, through school and college tableaus or dance dramas, as the educational space is considered most respectable for a woman. These spaces are often homosocial spaces.

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258 Indu, personal correspondence, 2008.

259 Tehreema is based in Washington D.C now. Though not part of this dissertation my next project will be comparing mother and daughter’s choreographies, how the two adapt to the changing score as both crossed borders but in different times, spaces and into different cultures and the intergenerational shift and variety of perspectives between the pre-Partition and Post Partition generation of South Asians.

260 The symbolic visual markers, which operated in the Indian case studies, were mainly the sari, body language of respectability. In Indu’s case though she wears a sari that is not the source of her agency, it is other things. Devi and also poetess Sarojini Naidu were both active public figures in the power and politics of that time. See Roy’s discussion of Naidu as “Mimic woman”, but in contrast Indu has been marginalized in Pakistan as “Indian dance” teacher, minority Christian also later as wife of a Major General who was wrongly court-martialed. See Mitha, Unlikely Beginnings for more.

261 Though the family struggled to make ends meet Post 1971 when her husband was Court-martialed by Bhutto and they struggled to raise their daughters by penny pitching and ostracized from many army friends and circle.

262 Some colleges famous for their theatre productions are in Lahore Kinnard College, Aitcheson College, among semigovernment colleges in Rawal Pindi Islamabad are CB College, Islamabad College for Girls, and private schools include BeaconHouse Public School (where I studied and had my first kathak lesson and performance), Grammar School Lahore and Islamabad (where Indu taught at different times).
With the result that respectability plays a chief role, as even conservative mothers are content to send their daughters to learn dance from Indu because they are convinced that she is very particular and selective about where her girls perform. This “selective” audience is usually educated, middle class or elite patrons of the arts, and often “only women” or “families”. Negotiating these concerns of students and their parents she has managed to carve out a space for her work. She continued to negotiate this through staying mainly within the domestic domain following her husband’s career at different army postings around the country and teaching dance and creating dance for student’s functions whenever possible.

Indu narrated to me how once when she was interviewing for a job she was told that her position would include being sent to England for 10 months training, all expenses paid. Her immediate response was, *sawaal bii nabiiM paidaa botaar* (‘question does not arise all’). Her career was never an ambition that she wanted to pursue at the cost of her children and family.263

This event is an example of how Indu chose her family over her career, which can be argued as proof of her domesticity. I assert that to continue a dance career, the only respectable space is within the profession of teaching. A teacher is the most respectable profession for a woman in Pakistan, after a doctor. Teaching is also a reputable occupation throughout South Asia and elsewhere, and it is frequently seen as particularly appropriate for women. In fact Indu’s role as a teacher has a big part in legitimizing her role as a dancer-choreographer. So it is no surprise that it is in educational institutes and settings that dance finds space to thrive in Pakistan. Indu teaches her dance classes in the evening at the same building in which her older daughter Yameema runs a children’s Montessori day school264. In Pakistan music and dance can mainly exist “respectfully” within the space of

263 Speculating she said this would have been the only time she could have come back to her education but she had children already so it was never an option for her.

264 *Mazmun-e-Shaun* is a radical venture, just like the poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s whose poem was the inspiration for Indu’s elder daughter Yameema, an educationist, also founder of the school. Indu’s evening music and dance classes are inspired by Kalakshetra, even if she is operating at a small scale and at great odds. *Mazmun-e-Shaun* too like Kalakshetra started in conjunction with a Montessori school. It is a special bilingual institution and the curriculum is unique in its focus on the arts and as it includes comparative religion.
educational institutions. Indu’s actual domesticity, rather than “symbolic domesticity”, in her role as a good mother, teacher and Major General’s wife allows her the opportunity to continue her dance work.

The woman question continues to be unresolved in the field of dance in Pakistan due to the ongoing stigma that is attached with the profession of naach.265 The Urdu word for a female dancer is naacne vaali, a word that embodies a derogatory status similar to, but much worse than, the word mirasi for hereditary musicians. While music still has a long way to go, it has been saved from this stigma as classical music remains mainly in the male domain. Particularly the genre of qawwali has found a home in Pakistan as the due to a history of strong acceptance in most circles as an accepted means of praising the lord.

As a student of Indu’s since 2000, my own example as a young woman learning and performing Indu’s choreographies is proof of her effective respectability in Pakistani society. Despite the fact that my parents atypically let me and my siblings pursue our creative interests, my mother was hesitant to allow me to dance. It was always with the undying support of our progressive, leftist, journalist father that we pursue our creative dreams much to the confusion of our extended family who thought that our household had too much “democracy” in the children’s decisions. My siblings both chose acting- my brother studying drama at the University of Surrey in England, acting in London theater, and eventually becoming a well-known television artist in Pakistan, and my sister became an actress first on a children’s show and then various soap operas on television. My mother, a highly accomplished headmistress of a respectable semi-government College in Islamabad and a teacher of Urdu and Persian, comes from a family of religious scholars and Hajjis. She always encouraged and supported my classical music lessons but did not want me to study classical dance. To this day she reminds me that I left my singing to pursue dance; she would

265 I am using the spelling nach as written in present day Pakistani writing when considering in present day, and use the spelling nautch when referring to the British usage of the term.
have been happy if I had just stuck with music. Even in a liberal household environment that supported modern stage and television performance I was not encouraged to dance. When I began studying dance I was instructed by my mother not to tell our relatives, but instead to say I was taking yoga classes, which was okay. Once my mother met Indu in person she was more at ease, impressed by her disciplined and protective attitude, and I suspect, by all the markers of her respectability.

4.3 “Exceptional Women” and Domesticity in South Asia Women

I question why is it that in many South Asian countries that have gross violations of women’s rights, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, there have been women heads of state? To test my model of respectability, and Kishwar’s definition of “exceptional women”, I will consider some possible “exceptional” Pakistan public figures to see what type of space does exist for these women. Firstly, I argue that South Asia culture has always had a unique social space for strong female presence in the private sphere, and as argued by Kishwar for exceptional women in the public sphere. Secondly, that Indu’s case study expands the definition of exceptional women by giving voice to ordinary women and to everyday lives of women. In the process she stretches the space that South Asian cultural tradition allows ordinary women and thus I argue choreographs a space of hope through her bharata natyam repertoire erii maaM.

I now turn to one of the most popular Punjabi folk stories shared across India and Pakistan that of Heer and Ranjha, for traces of evidence of the social space that Kishwar proposes exists. In historian Kamran Ahmad’s book, *Roots of Religious Tolerance in Pakistan and India* (2008), Ahmad extends his argument in South Asian mythology of the strong female presence in the love story of

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266 Yoga is considered acceptable reflective of ‘modernity’ as it is considered ‘Westernized’ though it is originally a Hindu, Brahmanical practice. Classical dance on the other hand is considered directly connected to entertainment and the stigma attached with that being soley for men and thus stigmatized for /respectable women’. Rukmini Devi incorporated yoga in her Kalakshetra training for opposite reasons as it was associated with high Hindu culture.
Heer and Ranjha, and also to the place that indigenous culture has for strong women to be accepted as head of the state in South Asia. He explains this as part of the culture’s “psyche”:

Up to the present day, in the middle of the patriarchy, one can see the existence of the strong female in the region. The psyche still accepts a female figure as the head of state. Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, all have had female heads of state: something that is still unthinkable in many other parts of the world. But at the same time it is also important to notice that while on the one hand this possibility exists in the psyche of the region, the general trend of the organized systems is just as strong to keep women out of power (Ahmad 2008, 158).

Here is the paradox that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. At the same time Ahmad reminds the reader that the general trend of the patriarchal system in place has been to keep the women out of power, but that the possibility of this space is very much a part of what he calls the local “psyche”. He takes the character of Heer and shows how in this beloved folk tale, Heer challenges orthodox Islam as represented by the Qazi who forbids her to be with her lover Ranjha. Instead, she challenges the Qazi telling him that her love for Ranjha has been sanctified by marriage as performed by God himself (2008, 157). Thus the character of Heer, in her fearlessness to resist this orthodoxy, models strong womanhood, and in Ahmad’s words the presence of goddess as “powerful feminine/woman was very much an active part of the local psyche” and he describes this from the text as below:

We see the Shakti flowing in the character of Heer very clearly. For Luddan, she is willing to draw her sword and ready to give and take life (94). Her family got her married, without her consent, to Saida, but when he comes to her and touches her, she beats him so badly that he never dares to touch her again (447). When her uncle spies on her she sets everything he has on fire (328). Her power is not just expressed physically but she has strength of emotion and resolve too. She makes it clear to the Khebras (family name of her in-laws) right from the beginning that if she is pushed she will totally dishonor them in public and that is what keeps Saida away from her. When she and Ranjha run away, she initiates the plea for help from the Khans (858).

267 According to South Asian historian Kamran Ahmad the orthodox versions of both Brahmanism and Islam are patriarchal and struggle with the devotional and the Lover archetype, which is in the indigenous psyche of the subcontinent. He discusses the place of the feminine spirit here as follows: Both of these traditions had to struggle hard because in this region the feminine spirit flows particularly strong. The spirit, of what we are calling feminine, was there in most devotional and other imminent spiritual traditions” He says that the “archetype of an absolutely powerful feminine/woman was very much a part of the local psyche” (Ahmad 2008, 158).
Throughout, whenever there is confrontation, she takes a strong stand. In the end at the court, she is the one who fights the whole case and finally when the qazi (priest, Islamic teacher) does not see her point, powerfully chastises. Ranjha does not say anything at all. Then there are other characters like Sethi who are also very empowered in the story. Overall, there is a very strong female presence in the whole story (2008, 158).

Then Ahmad extends Heer’s challenging of conservatism and holding love paramount to the clash with the formal, patriarchal religions like Islam and Brahmanism as in their orthodox forms they clash with what he calls the “strong devotional tendencies and with the Lover archetype in the indigenous psyche of the subcontinent” (p.158). Ahmad sums up that in the text Heer Damodar gives the reader a model for a lived spirituality beyond all religious discourse (2008, 173).

As mentioned in the previous quote Ahmad clearly sees Shakti in Heer’s character. The figure of the mother, the goddess, and the earth, shakti maaM has always been integral in South Asian cultural traditions, as seen from the role of women in all rites of passage in the domestic sphere. The goddess was an exceptional woman, but the ordinary mother could become the goddess if her motherhood was threatened, as the shakti in her would be activated.268 These themes are continued in present day representations of goddess stories, theater, and television programs in India. For the ordinary woman to activate the goddess in her, she has to endure extreme suffering, hardship or misfortune.

Let me test this theory of exceptionality on two legendary Pakistani female public figures in history. In Pakistan Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, was the first women to enter politics and run for election although she died mysteriously soon after. The next woman was more successful: Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who held two terms as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Bhutto was assassinated in December 2007 on her return to Pakistan from

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268 I am referring to themes in folk literature and mythology. I am inspired by a presentation that I attended about the representations of the goddess figure in Indian local television programs in India, by Kalpana Ram, anthropologist at Australian National University. She showed this transition of an ordinary woman, who when pushed to her limits becomes a channel for the local goddess and gets justice for her.
exile. Indira Gandhi is another example of a woman Prime Minister in the region, who like Bhutto inherited a family dynasty through her father. Benazir Bhutto came to power after undergoing extreme suffering with the loss of her father and exile; this was the key for her transition to the status of “exceptional woman” and her welcome by the common people of the region. Her bitter opponents were fundamentalist elements who declared her womanhood in politics “un-Islamic”, but I want to stress that she had the support of the masses.

All these women had a history of similar transition to the exceptional status. Fatima Jinnah had proved her exceptional status by dedicating her life to Jinnah the father of the nation, which included never marrying. Her defiance of societal norms and her apparent celibacy attested to her exceptional status. On the other hand, Benazir Bhutto did not defy the institution of marriage and motherhood and in fact, in a practice now considered archaic by most families in Pakistan, went for a completely arranged marriage to Asif Zardari. She has been one of the most loved leaders by the masses of Pakistan, most of them in Sind Province, second only perhaps to her father Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who knew how to appeal to the poor with his slogan दूSlave, kaprah aur makaan (bread, clothes and shelter). Interestingly, much like Rukmini Devi, she availed herself as the model of symbolic domesticity through her green and white Pakistani-Islamic dress from the day she was sworn in as Prime Minister. The white dupatta (scarf) never left her head, a marker of her respectability and an emblem of the popular held notions of pardaab and piety. Like the domesticated female characters in Devi’s bharata natyam repertoire, Bhutto’s reign also didn’t see any drastic changes at policy level for the women questions in Pakistan. Though it was in her leadership that the first “official” Culture Policy document was drawn and published in Pakistan, at the same time she didn’t take any concrete action to remove the “No-Objection-Certificate” (NOC) that the British had enforced to keep a check on anti-colonial resistance in the theatre scene at the end of the nineteenth century. Dancers
continue to require a bureaucratic NOC approved by the public, which is a hassle and includes being humiliated by its negative wordings that degrade *naach* (dance) as “vulgar activity”.²⁶⁹

Out of the handful of classical dancers in Pakistan who have become institutions in themselves with their commitment and dedication to the dance forms against many odds, all of them have been married at some point or other and two of them continue to be so. In addition to being once married and now a widow, Indu is the only one who is known primarily as a teacher and not a performer as she didn’t formally pursue her career as a bharata natyam dancer. She did, however, perform occasionally in army circles and educational settings, as well as some stints at big theater productions and on television.²⁷⁰ Out of the next generation of female dancers²⁷¹ in Pakistan are the Odissi dancer Sheema Kirmani, Kathak dancers Naheed Siddiqi and Nighat Siddiqi, and bharata natyam and contemporary dancer Tehreema Mitha. Naheed Siddiqi was exiled from Pakistan during Zia’s time due to her television dance program *Payaal* and on her return she qualified for this exceptional status having undergone the trails of exile. Indu was always “different” in Pakistan with her Hindu sounding name and passion for bharata natyam, her Christian family and Muslim husband and daughters. Her daughter Tehreema on the other hand had a tougher time gaining acceptance when she entered the Pakistani dance scene as a professional. She was not married at the time and didn’t have respectability markers of age, marriage and tradition. She also did contemporary dance, which is a marker of Westernization and is problematic as it is being flaunted

²⁶⁹ Indu, personal correspondence, 2006.

²⁷⁰ Between 1972-74 Indu was a dancer on Pakistan Television (PTV) (Karachi Studios) in a *Rasg Kahani* (Dance Drama) with her good friend Begum Mehr Nigar Masrour (wife of Air Vice Marshal Masrour Hussain), who was the choreographer, in Karachi Arts Council Production “Lalkaar” (Outburst). For this she went by the stage name “Mariam Osman”.

²⁷¹ I am focusing on issues around female dancers. The issues and stigmas that male dancers face is a separate story that will have to wait for future work, but which I take up briefly in chapter four. Pakistan has one seasoned male Kathak artist Fash-ur-Rehman, and Sheema Kirmani has two talented students who perform and tour with her trained in both odissi and bharata natyam, Mani who I interviewed in 2003.
in the public domain.\textsuperscript{272} She eventually moved to Washington D.C and started her own company by the name of Tehreema Mitha Dance Company.\textsuperscript{273}

I conclude this section with the argument that the “positive”, “feminine” social space for exceptional women that Kishwar and Ahmad refers to does no doubt exist in South Asia. Indu has worked to expand this space, to narrate the story of the everyday lives of women—not just exceptional women but ordinary women in Pakistan who could also be women in any part of the world. Thus I call this expanded space that Indu has delicately carved in Pakistan a “Feminine Space,” a space where societal injustices can be taken to task in a creative, aesthetic and non-violent manner.

5. Conclusion: Bharata Natyam, a Methodology for New “Imagined Communities”

Susan Foster argues in \textit{Choreographies of Gender} (1998) that the difference between \textit{choreography} and \textit{performance} makes evident the process of corporeal significance, and connects dance to other cultural practices and larger systems of cultural values. For her it is choreography that resonates with other systems of representation that together constitute the cultural moment within which all bodies circulate (1998, 10). Like Foster, I have taken one of Indu’s choreography as thought process and read out from it to excavate an important part that continues to be largely occluded in the narrative of the woman question in South Asia today. Further on this journey O’Shea’s work helped me to

\textsuperscript{272} Contemporary dance is marker or westernization and a woman performing it on stage is flouting her western-ness. Other markers like Yoga, aerobic exercises etc are okay as women do not perform it on stage, it is acted out in a woman’s only space and doesn’t venture in the public domain.

\textsuperscript{273} She specializes in both her mother’s work within the pure bharata natyam as well as her own contemporary work and her work as the only Pakistani contemporary dancer and in the United States is very interesting study, but also outside the scope of this present work. A Professor at Toronto University is currently writing about her work.
conceive of Indu’s chosen dance form of bharata natyam as a space where new communities can be imagined (Benedict Anderson 1991, qtd O’Shea 2007, 166) through an informed understanding of this occluded past.

Earlier scholarship on bharata natyam focused on revival of the form as product and agent of the Indian national identity, which was part of late colonial and early post-colonial nation-building project (Allen 1997, Coorlawala 1996, 2005, Gaston 1996, Meduri 1996). Instead O’Shea points to the unwritten competing projects within the anti-colonial and postcolonial nationalisms. O’Shea has convincingly argued in her 2007 work how bharata natyam today addresses concerns of the local environment and its immediate historical moment. What concerns does bharata natyam address in Pakistan? Do the practitioners of the dance, students of bharata natyam and teacher Indu, represent an imagined community of pre-partition-united India? If so, then following O’Shea’s argument, which competing projects out of the many groups do Indu and her students/school represent, or are they completely new? O’Shea argues that the history of the bharata natyam revival continues to inflect the work of twentieth century dancers and thus inform present day dancer’s tactics and strategies to deal with different social and political concerns. In this chapter I turned to this history for insight into these queries:

I suggest that Rukmini Devi’s project was a contemporary classicist one, wherein she created new work based on the tenets, but not necessarily the form, of past practices, introducing innovations to bharata natyam that neither departed from tradition nor duplicated it. This notion of classical—as constituted by overarching values but not specific forms—allowed Devi room to experiment without compromising an aesthetic that she saw as fundamental to an Indian heritage. This reactivation and redefinition of the last lent a critical edge to Devi’s project that is useful today as it was in the mid-twentieth century. By extracting the

274 In O’Shea’s more recent (2008) article “Serving Two Masters? Bharata Natyam and Tamil Cultural Production” in Peterson’s Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India she counters the previous scholarship’s stance that bharata natyam’s existence as a respectable urban practice depended on its ability to contribute to national identity (Srinivasan 1983, 85, Meduri 1996, Coorlawala 1996, quotes O’Shea). For O’Shea it was more than just national form and instead emerged as a space to imagine communities.

275 For instance Tamil identity in relation to bharata natyam history. Similarly the project of Pakistani-Muslim identity in relation to this history has also been ignored.
theoretical principles from Rukmini Devi’s project in the same way she extracted concepts from past practice, today’s performers and viewers can promote a critical classicism that continually reevaluates itself (O’Shea 2007, 169).

O’Shea calls Devi’s project a “contemporary classicist one”, which helps me put Indu’s “anthropological approach” to bharata natayam in perspective. In this chapter I build on this process that O’Shea suggests has begun with regards to the work of Rukmini Devi\textsuperscript{276} and find that Indu’s work is an excellent example of this “critical classicism” in bharata natyam. I have taken one of Indu’s bharata natyam choreographies with a radical theme and female character to read from it the cultural moment that this piece was born, and the past and future of that moment with regards to the woman question in Pakistan. I have found that Indu has succeeded over a period of time in delicately choreographing a unique inclusive space for the feminine voices that were occluded before. I now want to emphasize two aspects crucial in choreographing this inclusive feminine space.

First, Indu is a trailblazer in carving this “acceptable-space” as she raises a subject considered taboo, i.e. non-domestic sexuality, in the context of a respectable setting that could be any mother and daughter. While classical repertoire rarely addresses societal norms, Indu is not shy to do so in her work, even while staying within the classical bharata natyam terrain. Indu challenges societal norms in many places in her repertoire whether it be to question the space for the performing arts in society\textsuperscript{277}, or the space for minorities (will be discussed in next chapter) or for women’s independence. Here I would like to emphasize the importance of the “respectable” context where her work is performed, as the composition of the audience is a key in defining a respectable space. In Pakistan today her stories are danced in the “normal” context of educational setting or “family” audiences, or were on “foreign soil” during martial law. Indu and Tehreema have been very

\textsuperscript{276}See for details of Devi’s project and different people’s take on it (O’Shea 2007, 168).

\textsuperscript{277}Discussed in \textit{In the Park} in chapter one.
resourceful and always managed to find a venue for their performance. During the martial law ban it was on “foreign soil” (e.g. foreign embassies), or in the selective army circles, or often the beautiful garden of home or farm house belonging to members of the elite class. The dancers continue to dance in respectable spaces that Indu carved out for herself with her subtle ingenuity.

The second important aspect is the strong will and strength of resolve and independence of the female characters who inhabit Indu’s choreographed feminine spaces. naayika in erii maaM is one of those strong women characters, similar to the choreographer and the dancers, who break the norms of society. The dance erii maaM, premiered in 1992, marked a breakthrough moment in Indu’s choreography of strong, unconventional woman characters. It also was such a time for women in Pakistan, as Benazir Bhutto became Prime Minister, the first in world history for a Muslim country. This was also the birth of new hope for the nation. This new dance was for the modern independent woman who can take care of herself, but at the same time is close to her indigenous roots, to her mother to whom she is sharing her most intimate secret, her broken heart, her undomesticated sexuality, and her decision and strength to raise her child alone.

O’Shea discussed how Devi’s dance dramas shifted from the first-person to the third-person narrative, which successfully separated for the audience the expression of sringara from the dancers who were performing the characters. This strategy successfully mitigated the expression of eroticism (2007: 120). In contrast, Indu empowers her female characters and makes a shift back to the first-person narrative style of the devadasis while keeping within the Kalakshetra form (e.g. through controlled hip movement) and the low-key sringara representation, which works for the Pakistani audience. At the same time Indu is adamant that her dances not be overtly devotional, unlike what has become a trend in bharata natyam across the border in India after Partition, though she acknowledges retaining what she refers as the “bhakti/sufistic” aspects of the repertoire.
As for bharata natyam being a “strict discipline”\textsuperscript{278}, surely that doesn’t imply that it is unchanging. ... Thus themes have changed from time to time. While the bhakti/sufistic sentiments expressed in classic music and its lyrics are still retained by us, we sometimes interpret these with a more modern thematic context in which the portrayal of a woman as a masochistic figure would be totally at odds with the concept of woman’s empowerment (Indu 2004, 85).

Indu’s genius is in choreographing this inclusive feminine space, which also accommodates multiple voices, as it doesn’t aim to align with any specific religious or cultural context. This in turn leads me to access the secular as well as occluded non-devotional “bhakti/sufistic” aspects of the dance’s repertoire that Indu has retained as mentioned in the quote above.

Thirdly I argue that Indu’s shift away from representations of the deities opens space for bharata natyam’s original multiplicity of expressions of sringara and for my strategic revivalism of the Lover archetype. Devi’s low-key approach to sringara was to remove content with sexual nuances from the repertoire but she reified it in the process. When Devi removed the sexual nuances from the bharata natyam repertoire she removed the content that dealt with the divine as lover archetype from the bhakti material and left the devotional aspect only. With it the intense, intimate and very personal Sufi expression of the relationship with the divine as the beloved was lost when Devi sanitized the repertoire. While Indu does not mean to bring it back she does so nonetheless, through her efforts to remove the excess “bhakti shakti”\textsuperscript{279} and her turn back to her characters as human. Nonetheless Indu’s aim here is different but complementary to mine. Thus Indu’s expansion of this space now allows me to access an extra-temple past of bharata natyam or the devadasi where her dance thrived in both a secular and a religious context. Secondly the religious context included not just devotional sringara but also sringara expressing the lover and beloved route to accessing the divine, which is shared by the Sufi mystics all across South Asia. This complete history was

\textsuperscript{278} The interviewer Fauzia Minallah had questioned her for \textit{News Line} magazine (March 2004) about her response to criticism of the Indu mixing bharata natyam with modern dance and Minallah used the words “strict discipline” for bharata natyam.

\textsuperscript{279} Indu, personal correspondence.
occluded once the form became an important part of the nationalist project at the end of the twentieth century and continues to be so in the Indian context.

In the epilogue of his book (2008) Ahmad gives his thoughts on possible social interventions into intolerance in Pakistan and India and he emphasizes the importance of the connection of what he calls the “collective psyche” of this region to “the feminine or yin elements”.280 He explains the composition of these elements as follows:

If emotions are at the heart of the yin dimensions of the psyche, music, art, dance, poetry become the language of this dimension. In Pakistan, at least, we have not been able to sustain our musical and artistic heritage. Reviving these modalities, reconnecting with the anima, valuing the feminine within, are an indirect intervention into the growing dryness, rigidity and intolerance in the collective psyche of the area (Ahmad 2008, 187).

Ahmad’s call as well as Kishwar’s reference to a “positive space” in South Asian “cultural traditions” both urge a revival of the feminine modalities, a step that Indu’s choreographies take even if only before a select audience of spectators. This is a much needed step for the Pakistani nation.

While chapter one explored how Indu’s choreographies take me to a space beyond communalism, this chapter aided a return to a feminine space in this region, which accesses wisdom native to the people of South Asia. In this chapter I looked at occluded expressions of the nartaki,281 an Urdu term to describe the figure of the female dancer that is occluded today in the sub-continent. Indu, in the unique isolated context of Pakistan, is able to make the most of her unique circumstance, her non-dependence on patrons, to preserve and cultivate this local South Asian space that she sees and which is beyond geographical, religious, and gender boundaries. The next chapter will look into some of the concerns with the problematic “minority question” post 9/11 through the

280 Ahmad, Roots Religious Intolerance ,187.

281 I want to use this word as opposed to the commonly used nautanki wali, which contains the stigma of an entertainer who dances for entertainment of men. A nartaki is simply a female dancer.
case study of Indu’s male students, most of who come from a minority Christian community of the much ignored kacci aabaadii (slum areas) in the capital city of Islamabad. In the present political scenario what definitions of political identity do they challenge? Since the dance form has an ability to express political meaning, how does Indu’s dance express the present historical moment in Pakistan, complicated by the war on terrorism and the resulting racism against Muslims around the world and particularly in the United States?
CHAPTER FOUR

Choreographing Inclusivity:

The Tree, the Dancer, and the City

1. The Tree

International Dance Day, Islamabad Club, April 28, 2006, Islamabad

It is a historic day for dance in Pakistan, as for the first time International Dance Day is being celebrated in the capital city. The prestigious Islamabad Club is packed with Islamabad's dance-starved elite, who have gathered to witness cultural performances from Pakistan and around the world. The audience is a mix of local elites and embassy representatives, as well as friends and visiting foreigners who work in the tourism industry. Indu Mitha is participating with her students, who will present, apart from selected items drawn from her bharata natyam repertoire, Indu's latest choreography, Islamabad ka a muqaddas daraaxt (Islamabad's Sacred Tree). In fact it is one of Indu’s dance students, Lucia, a flamenco dancer from Spain, who is behind the “World Dance Day” initiative. It was she who approached the French Cultural Center in Islamabad to host and fund it. She also will dance in Indu’s piece.282 And so it came to be that the premier of “International Dance Day” in Islamabad is coinciding with the Islamabad premier of Indu Mitha’s choreography about a

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282 Lucia was married to a distinguished Pakistani anthropologist, Adam Nayyar, an employee of the Lok Virsa (National Institute for Cultural and Heritage Preservation in Islamabad). The first time I met Nayyar was in his capacity as an external examiner for my Masters dissertation on the “Rubabis,” a clan of Muslim musicians in Lahore who migrated at the time of Partition. For generations before, they were musical custodians of the Guru Granth, a book containing the words of the Sikh Guru. When I met Lucia and Nayyar at the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures (WAC) in 2009, it would prove to be my last meeting with him. Nayyar had been touring with the Pakistani Qawaals and WAC professor Judy Mitoma had managed to invite them to come and perform for her students in Glorya Kaufman Hall in the afternoon of their performance at Royce. He died July 29, 2008, in Islamabad.
sacred tree. Indu was inspired to make this piece by an actual event that occurred in Islamabad in 2003, when a historical and spiritual tree was burned down, an event about which few in the audience are aware. Indu’s choreography is about to change that.

**Islamabad qa muqaddas daraaxht (The Sacred Tree of Islamabad)**

Lucia and Kau, two of Indu Mitha’s female dance students, enter the stage concealed behind an outstretched saree, which they carefully place on the floor of the stage. The audience sees them wrapped in green cloth. Lucia assumes a bharata natyam posture, one leg stretched out and one bending under her, as she narrates the story of the birth of the first bud of the tree through the use of rich hand gestures from the classical repertoire. Kau is sitting in the third position of bharata natyam and her hands are in “khila phool” as she narrates—with joy on her face, slowing rising—the first leaves and buds begin to grow. Lucia joins her and they take upright positions outstretched, their hands depicting the abundant leaves on the tree. Together they embody a tree, a beautiful banyan.

Next, one of Indu’s male dance students crawls onto stage dragging his body by his front arms and torso, like a reptile on all fours. Another lumbers like a dinosaur, while a third hops around like a bird. A woman enters as the first human character to come on stage. She is in search of food. She picks the fruit from the tree, tries it, and enjoys it. (Indu tells me later that this dancer represents the first human society of foragers and hunter-gatherers.) The next entrant on stage is one of Indu’s youngest students, the incredibly talented dancer Nur. She frisks and darts her eyes to the right and left to the rhythm of the tabla, matching the music emanating from the bells on her feet. From her agility and quick movements we make out that she is a svelte deer. She comes close to the woman and sits with her for a bit. (Later Indu explains to me that this depicts a time when there were no weapons made to kill the deer, so the deer had nothing to fear.) The deer gets up and continues to forage around the front of the stage unaware of the approaching danger. A man appears on the left side of the stage, eyeing the deer menacingly. He is the hunter. Nur depicts the deer beautifully, bending her body. With her right hand in the mudra for a deer and the left behind her back, she touches the floor to depict picking the grass and feeding off it. Then, all of a sudden, she falls to the floor as an imaginary arrow hits her side. We now see her squirming with pain, unable to get up. While this is happening center stage, another male dancer enters from the other side. The two men simultaneously rush to the injured deer as if they both want to claim the carcass. They begin to fight, tangled in an arm wrestle. This is the point at which a regal and calm-looking man walks slowly and deliberately towards them, poised to intervene. He is draped in a saffron-colored garment that passes over one of his shoulders and wraps around this body. He stops the fight and bends to caress the injured deer. Then he preaches to the fighting pair and gestures to the audience, stretching his arms wide in an open
circle. He turns and does the same to the tree. At this the audience applauds, in apparent appreciation of the preacher’s gestures of conciliation, or perhaps because of their sudden recognition that the preacher is the Buddha. The lights go dark, as we see the Buddha figure sit under the tree, meditating with his new devotees.

In Islamabad ka muqadas daraxht, Indu addresses the issue of religious intolerance, which seems to be spreading like a virus or disease in Pakistani society during the twenty-first century. In the post 9-11 world, Indu’s work serves as an urgent call to promote inclusivity in Pakistan. In previous chapters I showed how Indu choreographs tolerance and inclusivity by countering communalism (chapter one), and by choreographing composite (chapter two) and feminine spaces (chapter three). This chapter brings together all these aspects of her work. Out of all the works in Indu’s repertoire, Islamabad ka muqadas daraxht best highlights her commitment to bringing forth the voices of the underrepresented in Pakistani society today. The specific voices in the piece belong to those of the non-Muslim community in Pakistan, which Indu links directly to the occlusion of inclusive Islamic values such as love, peace, and good behavior. Indu, a non-Muslim herself, reminds her Muslim audience of these values through a play of contrasts to make her point choreographically, in ways that I will elaborate upon in this chapter.

I follow Indu’s strategy of highlighting contrasts as a structure for this chapter. In the first section I will discuss the contrast between the rich Buddhist history and archeological significance of the land that today serves as the capital city of Islamabad against the twenty-first-century scenario of the tragic fate of Islamabad’s historical Bodhi tree, with implications for Pakistanis and citizens of the world today. The second section of the chapter addresses the bigger minority question through a case study of Indu’s oppressed Christian male students, in contrast with Jinnah’s vision for an inclusive Pakistan as set out in his first address after Partition. The concluding section three seeks to analyze how Indu choreographs inclusivity in her dances and in her social work for underrepresented citizens, especially in the post 9-11 period. I view Indu’s navigation of the city of
Islamabad through the lens of de Certeau’s tactics. In this section I include her work for the educational cause of curriculum building in the field of dance, a marginal discipline within the also neglected Pakistani performing arts. Notably, Indu commits her time and work to a wide range of issues, from the plight of non-Muslim minorities (the Buddhist theme as performed by Christian dance students) and underrepresented Muslims (Bengalis and Kashmiris), to the need for a feminine social space, to her work for the development of dance as a field of study (as seen in her role as advisor for the development team at the PNCA dance and theatre department).

The story narrated in the dance drama in beginning of this chapter is Indu Mitha’s response to a most disturbing event that happened in Islamabad in 2003. Interestingly, I found reference to this particular choreography, *Islamabad kaa muqaddas*, in a book titled *Glimpses into the Soul of Islamabad* by Islamabad-based Pakistani scholar-activist Fauzia Minallah. The ideas contained in Minallah’s book serve as the foundation for my own thinking about Indu’s choreography in this chapter. Specifically, Minallah laments the neglect of hundreds of historical sites and precious archeological treasures in the land comprising present-day Islamabad. She raises the question of why these sites have been neglected by the state:

Mrs. Indu Mitha, a seasoned classical dancer, had created a performance ‘The Sacred Tree’ inspired by the Buddha tree. Her students performed in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. It was very instrumental in raising awareness about the loss of that beautiful tree. However as far as the government is concerned, this crime went unnoticed and unpunished (Minallah 140, 2007).

In short, this is what happened: a 400-year-old Bodhi or banyan tree, revered by the Buddhist community of Pakistan and the South Asian region and beyond, was mysteriously burned one day in 2003. Later it came to be known through the writings of a devotee, who happened to witness one of the earlier attempts to burn the tree, that this was no accident but rather a deliberate action to destroy the site solely on account of its spiritual significance for the Buddhist community. The culprits were some young boys who belonged to a religious school, or madrasah, nearby.
Minallah explains how the madrasah responsible for this cruel act, called Jamia Fareedia, was established by Maulana Abdullah, a cleric at the infamous lal masjid or Red Mosque which became the centre for terrorist activities in the heart of the city of Islamabad in 2007.

The mosque was constructed in 1964. In the 80s, Zia-ul-Haq allotted construction of a home for the head Imam, and later approved an allotment of land for a girl’s madrasah. Since then, the madrasah administration has encroached upon 954 square yards of Capital Development Authority (CDA) land. Adjacent land was allotted for a children’s library and a women’s library. An author’s corner and gymnasium remain unbuilt, but mosque management has illegally intruded on this land as well. Government didn’t take action and over the next four years 7337 square yards of CDA land was encroached upon. Somehow the Government continued to ignore the dangerous activities conducted from this base for many years until 2007, when mosque head Abdul Aziz set up a “Sharia court” and started kidnapping police officers and people suspected of prostitution. In fact, it was some women from this ladies’ madrasah that raided the suspected brothels.

The Lal Masjid came into headlines in 2007 on account of the violent fight that took place there between two brothers who headed it and their team of students and workers, and the armed forces of the state. Maulana Abdullah himself was killed in the 1990s in sectarian violence, but his sons Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Abdul Rasheed Ghazi, took over the organization, which had been established and fuelled by Arab and Western funds for fighting the Soviet war during Zia’s time. These brothers must be seen as a product of the geo-political importance of Pakistan from the time of the Cold War of the 1950s, when the country became an ally of the USA, allowing the strategic use of Pakistani land for fighting the then USSR. This was the time when, under President Zia-ul-Haq and his policy of so-called “Islamization,” Islamic schools (madrasahs) were supported

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283 Asad Munir, “Lal Masjid Siege—Four years on,” Express Tribune, July 2 2011.

284 This term is mostly used with reference to Zia’s policy of Islamization in Pakistan and in literature coming out of the United States about it. For instance see Michelle Maskiell’s paper “The Impact of Islamization policies on Pakistani
to provide free Islamic education of the masses. Jamia Fareedia was the hostel for the boys set up in the Margalla National Park, while a woman's hostel was set up near Lal Masjid. Both of the brothers openly challenged the “writ of the state” (Minallah 2007, 140) until July 2007 when the Government finally took action against them. Events undertaken by representatives of the group that led to this action were several acts of moral policing and an unsuccessful take-over attempt of a military base.

Next thing the public hears is Jamia Fareedia declaring that the Government had not done enough to enforce Islamic law in the country and that they would take things into their own hands and issue a new system according to their narrow interpretation of Sharia; Lal Masjid became their base. This constituted a declaration of outright war with the state and forced the Government to take action against Jamia Fareedia. Thus the city was turned into a battleground between the Government and the two brothers and their small, violent army. Those killed included many innocent boys and women from poor families who had been indoctrinated into their program in the name of an “Islamic education.” The July 2007 conflict at the Lal Masjid was rightly termed by Minallah as the “darkest incident in the history of our quiet and serene Islamabad” (Minallah 2007, 140).

I came across an article about the sad fate of the Bodhi tree, written in a popular blog, *All Things Pakistan*, interestingly posted March 2007, just four months before the crackdown on the Lal Masjid. The author, pen named Mast Qalander, mentions a connection between the students of Lal Masjid’s E-7 sector branch and the Bodhi tree. Some one hundred and twenty seven Islamabad locals and visitors have commented on this blog, which has helped me trace what this tree means in its present context for the locals. Besides this blog, there is not much information available about the tree in regards to the lives of Islamabadis. It seems that for some it was a fun “haunted tree,” for some picnic spot, and for others a place with a mystical energy that was nice for a nature walk or for

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women’s lives” Montana State University Working Paper #69 November 1984. Other terms like “Islamicization” used to refer to the process in general.

Ibid.
meditation. \textsuperscript{286} For the local Buddhist community and for devotees from Japan, Sir Lanka, and other countries visiting Islamabad, it was a very special tree indeed, as all Bodhi trees are believed to be a direct offspring of the original ancient Pipal tree under which Prince Siddhartha Gautama meditated in Gaya, a village near Patna in Bihar, some 2500 years ago. He received enlightenment under this tree and that’s where the Pipal tree (a species of Ficus religiosa) got its name “Bodhi” or “awakening.”\textsuperscript{287}

More importantly, Qalander highlights how this madrasah also encroached on CDA land, vandalized the surrounding area and property, and ultimately attacked the tree:

All these violations of civic rules would be a minor misdemeanor compared to what they did to the Bodhi tree one night. They set it on fire! A symbol of a different faith standing so close to the madrassa was something too defiant for the trainee clerics to tolerate. What was really sad and frightening, though, was not just the loss of an old tree or the act of wanton vandalism but the mindset that wouldn’t tolerate anything that did not fit into their pattern of beliefs (my emphasis). I suppose, the madrassa students were simply replicating the example of the Taliban who, earlier that year, to the horror of the whole world, had blasted the 1500 years old Banyan Buddhas, in Afghanistan. Obviously, the Taliban virus had spread pretty wide and deep into Pakistan.\textsuperscript{288}

While this incident—the burning of the tree—occurred five years ago, I found from this blog that there had been a hue and cry from civil society as a result of a previous 2003 event, as a result of which the Government posted some guards near the injured but surviving tree for its protection. Some branches had been damaged but it was still very much there and living. But as Mast Qalander writes in this article after his 2007 visit to the tree site, he was shocked to see that there was no tree there at all. The concrete kiosk that used to be there was also destroyed, and the bench gone, and he

\textsuperscript{286} It is well known that Islamabad was built on many graveyards and haunted stories are abundant. Some young people like to venture on their own haunted tours of the city at night. In local newspapers there are often news of this aspect of the city. Recently \textit{Tribune Express} Rayan Khan a local resident wrote “The Capital Vulture: Tales from Islamabad’s haunted underworld”. A lot of information is now available online and recently also a facebook page titled “Real Islamabad Haunted Places” (\url{https://www.facebook.com/pages/Real-Islamabad-Haunted-Places-Pakistan/171433656226507}).

\textsuperscript{287} Mast Qalander (pen name), “Bodhi Tree in Islamabad”, on popular Pakistani blog \textit{All Things Pakistan}, posted Mar 17, 2007.

\textsuperscript{288} Ibid.
doesn’t mention any guards or any proof of who was responsible except that he could see construction underway of the madrasah nearby, which demonstrated that the madrasah was still flourishing. There was no local or national news about the repeated attacks and eventual destruction of this tree in 2007, and many readers were surprised to read about it in the blog. Today in 2012 it makes it all the more important to revisit Indu’s choreography of the tree.

Indu’s decision to choreograph a dance about Islamabad’s ancient tree, which at first glance may seem like an issue primarily for the minority Buddhist community of Pakistan, who hold it sacred, in actuality deeply impacts all Pakistanis regardless of their religion. This choreography is her effort to protest against the radical element creeping into Pakistani society, which the majority non-radical middle class and elite have largely remained quiet and passive about in the public domain.

I argue that Islamabad kaa muqaddas daraxht, though primarily a story of a small group of extremists attacking a symbol of worship of another religion, more centrally depicts Indu’s teachings of non-violent protest towards injustices in society, aimed squarely at two audiences: her students as well as the viewers of her choreography. This impulse is evident in different ways in all of her dance pieces. She conceives of the choreographic process as an inclusive space for otherwise controversial issues. For instance out of the pieces that I discuss in earlier chapters, her kathak In the Park (discussed in chapter one) is about inclusiveness in physical public spaces, such as a public park for women. On another level Indu also makes a statement here about claiming space in society for art, aesthetics, and the feminine. caarnN paibair (chapter two) problematizes a singular national identity, and brings attention to shared cultural and ethnic aspects in South Asian region despite the 1947 Partition. In erii manM (chapter three) Indu represents the voice of a woman who wants to keep and raise her child out of wedlock, and thus includes the story from the perspective of a single mother and her non-domestic sexuality, which would otherwise be shunned and excluded in the patriarchal societal setup. Here in Islamabad kaa muqaddas daraxht, Indu addresses the issue of religious intolerance, which seems to be spreading like a virus or disease in Pakistani society during the twenty-first
century. In the post 9-11 world, Indu’s work serves as an urgent call to promote inclusivity in Pakistan. In previous chapters I showed how Indu choreographs tolerance and inclusivity by countering communalism (chapter one), and by choreographing composite (chapter two) and feminine spaces (chapter three). This chapter brings together all these aspects of her work.

In the year 2000 I became Indu’s dance student at her institute, Mazmun-e-Shauq, a name that translates as “a subject of your passion.” This first step into the subject of my passion, which was to learn dance, thus launched me on a decade-long and ongoing journey of re-discovery and re-awakening. This dissertation project is a by-product of that journey, the last part of which involves Indu’s choreography on the burning of the sacred tree. As I study the work closely, I find that it calls me to reinvestigate and rediscover the past of my hometown, Islamabad, a city where I was born and also grew up most of my life. So this tree for me now becomes the metaphor for this journey of rediscovery of an Islamabad I had never known before, and which bears the traces of many religions.

1.1 The Bodhi Tree and Islamabad the Beautiful (1995)

Let me travel a little back in time with you to the birth of Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Searching for books on Islamabad in the Young Research Library at UCLA, I found one titled Islamabad the Beautiful (1995) published by the Capital Development Authority (CDA), which starts like this:

The master plan was prepared in October 1960, which fixed the location of the site, successive stages of development, relations with surrounding areas, and division into various sectors. Situated in the extreme north of the Indus basin plains, the Potohar Plateau is an area of ageless charm. It was the site of the earliest human habitation in Asia, rich in legends, myths and historical events. In the vicinity of Taxila, the famed center of Buddhist learning and civilization, it now has a unique character of its own. Its roots lie in the dim distant past of human history with its gaze turned towards the future. The site is spread over 1165.50 square kilometers, with natural terraces and meadows. Its root lies in the dim distant past of human history with its gaze towards the future (my emphasis). On this area, the people of Pakistan, inspired by their glorious past, chose to build a dream city to take them into the prosperous future of the twenty-first century and beyond (Aqil, 1995, 7).
Unlike so many cities which have grown and developed organically, Islamabad was created by city planners, after which people came to settle there from all over Pakistan. The capital was designed to be neatly divided into sectors, with a clear hierarchy from prime land to mere leftover scraps, from the most posh areas near the government offices and buildings that ran on Constitution Avenue, to the residential areas aligned with the Margalla Hills, and to the official slum areas. All sectors were divided according to letters of the English alphabet and numbers. The carefully “planned city” was created with a good drainage system so that, unlike most other Pakistani cities, the streets never overflow. (This is not the case for the slums which represent failures in the planning of Islamabad city, see section 3.) Housing was assigned to government officers according to their position and status. Among the many pictures of the city in *Islamabad the Beautiful*, I was surprised to find a 1995 picture of myself, wearing a khaki brown army uniform and green hat, with my National Cadet College (NCC) training group. Through this photo I am reminded of my role in Islamabad’s history through my own embodiment of that history. Students in Pakistan get an extra twenty marks on their final federal board exams if they take NCC training. This was an indicator, as late as the 1990s, of the centrality of military preparedness for youth in the national plan. Similarly twenty marks were also given for someone who is “hafiz-e-Quran,” meaning someone who has memorized the Quran by heart. Highest marks were therefore given to those who most successfully embodied military discipline and Islamic religious fervor.

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289 According to a recent newspaper report “In the shadow of Islamabad the beautiful” published in *Dawn* by Kalbe Ali, published August 11, 2011 the official recognized slums are 11 in number and there are 4 unofficial ones, which basically means the government has no responsibility to provide the inhabitants with any electricity or other welfare services. Another report blames the government for not providing them enough emergency support in case of the floods, published in *Express Tribune*, August 12, 2011. “Inadequate monsoon arrangements: Slum dwellers blame CDA, Islamabad administration”
Dissertation author heads the column at right.
Photographer Ghazi Ghulam Raza.

I didn’t even know this picture was taken, and coming across it all of a sudden in the library, when I am looking for material about the creation of Islamabad and its history, reminds me forcefully of my Islamabadi roots. I am from Islamabad, I was born in this city in the mid 1970s and I grew up there. I am therefore what people there refer to as a true “Islamabadi.” I pride myself on knowing the nooks and crannies of my hometown. I am proud of this beautiful, green and serene planned city, one of the few cities in the world designed specifically to serve as a capital. But the land upon which this capital was built boasts a very old history, one that is very rich culturally, archeologically, and most important of all for the topic here, religiously. On the topic of religious pluralism there is a great deal of history to invoke in South Asia as well as in the religion of Islam. This history comprises Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic strands, and includes the rich influences of Sufi saints such as Bari Imam and Golrah, who made this land their home centuries before the birth of Islamabad. In these histories there are many occluded stories, as emblematized by the occluded
Buddhist history that will be my focus for the remainder of this section. In Indu’s choreography for *Islamabad kaa muqaddas daraxcht*, she specifically invokes the occluded voices of the Pakistani Buddhist community living in Islamabad. Let us return to the story that she is narrating and to the moment when the Buddha character enters the stage.

1.2 From Takhshenshilla “Capital of Serpent Worshippers” to Islamabad, “the Abode of Islam”

The audience recognizes that the dancer onstage plays the role of the Buddha, and they applaud. As I write and watch this story unfold before my eyes, I am reminded of the history of this land of the Gandhara, and of the pre-historic sites that are the oldest places in the history of the world where humans are known to have lived. I am reminded that I come from a very rich land of history, culture and learning. So there was this tree, and this amazing treasure chest of history, which brings me back to the Gandhara and Taxila civilizations of which Islamabad is the seat. Let me get into a brief overview of this past.

In India from 250 BC to the middle of the 1st century AD Buddhism was at its peak. According to N.A. Baloch, a historian, educationist, and professor emeritus at the University of Sindh, in his book *Land of Pakistan: Perspectives, Historical and Cultural* (1995), it was in this region during the 5th century BC that Gautama, Buddha, rejected the earlier institutionalized Brahman that had evolved out of the early eras of Vedism in 900 BC (p.1). Then Gautama’s contemporary Vardhamana, or the Mahavira, also rejected the Brahmanical “blood shedding sacrifices” and founded Jainism, which focuses on peace and pacifism. Two great empires arose out of Buddhism, namely the Mauryas (circa 300-200 BC) and the Khushanas, which after a millennium of dominance were overshadowed in 4th century AD with the rise of the Imperial Guptas. The Guptas ruled for a long period, which started to decline between the 6th and the 12th century when Muslims ruled North

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200 Bechart and Gombrich, *World of Buddhism*, 60.
India (8th century in Sindh). Since the region of the Indian-subcontinent is vast with a long history of different invaders, I zoom into the region of North India that is now present day Pakistan. Baloch mentions that this region was more politically aligned with Iran and Central Asia, with such diverse groups as the Achaemeneans, Scythians, Huns, and Sassanians. From the 4th-6th century the Sassanid Persian influence was dominant politically in the region. Present day Lahore had a kingdom, but the part comprising Taxila near Islamabad remained independent or under Kashmiri rule, and before that, from the 4th-7th century, was an important part of the “Buddhist Kushan Shahs or Turkic Shahs of the trans-Indus Gandhara kingdom with Peshawar as their capital” (Baloch, 1995, 3).

Islamabad, the site of this sacred tree, helps access not only an occluded Buddhist history of this region but also moments in an occluded cartography of Asia. The late professor emeritus and legendary Pakistani archeologist and anthropologist Ahmad Hassan Dani addresses the historical importance of the land of Islamabad, with reference to the new capital, in the first ever Congress of Pakistan History and Culture held in Islamabad 1973:

The shift of events has brought back Islamabad to the forefront and placed it in the old Asian highway that once connected Samarqand and Bokhara in the Oxus with Delhi and Agra in the Ganges Valley. The population concentration in the valleys of the Ganges, Indus and Oxus has much to play as a definitive role in history as the old Silk Route that descended from the Land of the Chins and moved across Pakistan to the world of the Persians and the Romans. It is this unique position of Pakistan that once supported the mighty Kushana Empire which was responsible for the growth of the so-called Gandhara Civilization and world famous art bearing the same name. The footprints of the by-gone people have been traced in the different cities excavated at Taxila. They are a great pointer to the direction in which the natural history of our country has flowed. Whether it is Alexander or Timur, Babar or Nadir Shah, the Aryans, the Huns or the Mongols have all trekked the same path and halted on the slopes of Margala where stands today the new city of Islamabad.

We know the past of Taxila and the role it has played in history. What is the future of Islamabad has to be determined by the present actors in history as well as by the historians who are to interpret the coming events (Dani 1973, 20).

The City of Taxila, home of the world famous Gandharan art as mentioned by Dani, lays only five kilometers away from the present day city of Islamabad. Writing extensively on Taxila in his book
The Historic City of Taxila (1986), Dani quotes G.A. Pugachenkova\textsuperscript{291} in his discussion on how the city of Taxila had played an important role in the region for centuries:

Taxila, the region’s capital, was the seat of a famous university where astronomy, mathematics, medicine, Sanskrit and Prakrit grammar were taught. The country’s cities were centres where artistic corporations and guilds of craftsmen were organized, with skills and crafts handed down from generation to generation. Caravans crossing the Khyber Pass descended into the valleys of Gandhara loaded with goods from distant lands, through which the Gandharans got acquainted with the arts and crafts of other peoples (p.151).

Dani says that what modern scholars call “Gandharan” was the unique amalgamated culture of Taxila, and he argues that based on all the archeological evidence it can be seen that the city emerged as “the meeting ground of east and west” (p.151), with everything from Greco-Roman influences to that of the Huns (Hinduism) and the Khushans (Islam). This is particularly evident in the unique face of the Buddha carved by Gandhara School sculptors evolved from a technique of working in stucco, a sculpturing technique that reached its peak during the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century AD, and was imported via Iran from the eastern Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{292}

Earlier evidence from Indian epics and Puranas depict two different cultural trends coming together. One group of people are the Takshaka, the followers of the Naga (serpent) worship or “The Naga Culture,” and the other are the “Aryan Culture,” which refers to the Arya group with their own distinct language, religion, and material culture. Dani argues that in the city of Taxila these two cultural trends met, evidence that can also be seen in the archeological context (p.39). Similarly looking at the later Gandharan archeological evidence, Dani argues not for a borrowing but a unique “synthesizing” which is distinctly Gandharan. Looking at the Gandharan culture of this area it is evident over millenniums that the nature of the culture was assimilative, as is apparent by the presence and persistence of the remains of the people and their beliefs, such as the stupas and the Bodhi tree.


\textsuperscript{292} Berchert and Gombrich, \textit{World of Buddhism}, 160.
As the story goes for the particular Bodhi tree of Islamabad, Buddha performed his “Dhian” or meditation underneath it a long, long time ago. Indu admitted to me that now scientists have found, though carbon testing, that this tree is in fact not that old. The seed of this particular Bodhi tree must have been planted by devotees only a few hundred years ago, but the legend goes that the Buddha himself had meditated under it. For Indu it is the legend that is more important than the actual facts, as that is what the people believe and revere. The people’s beliefs for her are more important than what scientists may say, at least for the themes that she chooses for her dances. It is the beliefs of the people that connect this hundreds of years old tree to more than a thousand years of history and to the arrival of Buddha in this land.

1.3 Indu, the Bodhi Tree of Islamabad and Me: Including Sounds of Silence

This beautiful Bodhi tree that came into my life through Indu’s dance has given me new inspiration in my decade’s long project on dance, to interrogate the stigma faced by women in the performing arts. This is because Indu Mitha’s critical biography has once again helped me see the occluded pluralistic and rich history of the city, which is my hometown of Islamabad. This is what I learned from this self-reflexive writing journey. Taxila has always been, and I myself have visited it many times. Unfortunately, the rhetoric fed to Pakistanis post 1970s of the “Islamic Republic of Pakistan” clouded me, preventing me from claiming it and thus I “othered” Taxila as far away, even though physically it is only an hour or so from Islamabad. Why this denial in me to classify that history as Pakistani history despite my upbringing in a liberal progressive family with a journalist dad fighting for the freedom of the press? It is not only me but also a national denial that manifests itself in every citizen due to certain policy decisions, especially those made during the regime of Zia-ul-Haq’s martial law in the 1970s and ‘80s. Award-winning journalist and writer Zahid Hussain spoke in his presentation at University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) of brainstorming through the
implementation of the Islamization policy of Zia’s years, something he speculated would take probably another twenty years to undo. Money from Saudi Arabia in those decades is also responsible for a certain narrow brand of “Wahabi Islam.” He asserted that the combined effect was the first time in the history of Pakistan of such “ruthless use of religious sentiments of the people.” He went on to say that what we are seeing now is that harvest coming to reap. I can give one example of the type of detailed brainstorming projects that were going on from something I heard from the late genius professor Dani. I had the opportunity not only to be his student, but also to have his close guidance when I along with few other students founded a youth organization, “Indus-Sians,” of which he was the advisor. Fauzia Minallah, whom I quote earlier, was also one of his students. Dr. Dani narrated to our class how he turned down the request from the then President and Chief martial law administrator Zia-ul-Haq to write that the “shalwar kameez,” the official Pakistani national dress, should be declared an “Islamic dress.” Dani flatly refused the President and he explained to us why. This dress is in fact an amalgamation of Central Asian influences, with the pants of shalwar coming from the Kushans while the dupatta or the scarf worn by women around the head or neck comes from the time of the women of the Huns who wore a covering to represent the elite women.

In this grave scenario with a decade of aggressive brainwashing there is a call for deep unlearning, and that is what I attempt to do here, guided by Indu’s choreography of the story of this sacred tree. So let me take you to this tree now before that fateful day in October 2003, as this tree is my guide on this journey of unlearning. Fortunately there is one photograph of this tree by Mr. Tajima Shinji, a writer and a devotee who took this picture during his time in Islamabad. On hearing the tragic news of the tree’s burning, this is what he wrote, which has been printed in Minallah’s 2007 book, Glimpses into Islamabad’s Soul.

293 The talk was titled “Pakistan and End Game to the War in Afghanistan” at the UCLA International Institute, Feb 13, 2012.
When I lived in Sector E-7 of Islamabad, in 1997, this big Banyan tree in the woods nearby had become the very support of our souls and spirit. This sense of deep reverence to the gigantic Banyan tree comes out of respect for nature, which we share, among not only Japanese and Asians but also people around the world.

However during my visit to Pakistan in 2003, I was shocked to find the painful remains of the tree burnt and completely destroyed. It reminded me of Hiroshima, when not only tens and hundreds of people died and maimed, but ‘nature’ was destroyed. I was shocked to hear from my friend, that the tree was not burnt by natural causes such as lightening, but was burnt by people on purpose, because the students of the nearby Madrasah did not like the Buddhists coming here for meditation.

I could not believe the hatred, which compels people to destroy nature. Nature is what we have to treasure and maintain. It has been alive for more than 1000 years and its truck was as big as twelve adults stretching their arms together to hold a trunk. When the whole world is trying their best to sustain ‘natural heritage’, why could not we protect this Banyan tree, one of the greatest natural heritage of Pakistan?

As I was walking besides the painful remains of the burnt tree, I found a small young bud coming up. It also resembled the people of Hiroshima, standing up again, after all the loss and misery of atomic bomb damage. I wished the young bud of the Banyan would grow big and remind us human beings of the meaning of peace, tolerance, and understanding. I wished the young bud of Banyan! Grow big for the future of children in Pakistan.

(Shinji in Minallah’s book *Glimpses in the Soul of Islamabad*, 2007, p.139)

Mr. Shinji, a Japanese children’s writer and a Buddhist devotee, photographed the tree (see picture next page) during the time when he used to go and meditate under it in 2000 when he was living in Islamabad, in an area where the tree was a dominant presence. Investigating the tree further, I discovered that not far from where it stood are Buddhist caves of great archeological and historical importance. Most Islamabadis don’t know that the tree ever existed, let alone the caves. These are occluded places of worship, even as they serve as sites of public reverence for Islamabad’s small Buddhist community. As I said, I didn’t even know there were Buddhist caves in this area until I started looking up material on the tree and found, on Fauzia Minallah’s Facebook page, photos of the caves in the Margalla Hills. While these particular caves are yet to be researched it has been

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204 This tree is in E7, the most elite area in Islamabad, essentially the Beverly Hills of the city. I will get into the spatial hierarchy of the city of Islamabad, according to status and class, in the next part of the chapter.
established that Takht-i-Bahi, Pakistan, has the “most impressive remains of Buddhist monasticism during its first period of expansion, the 1st century AD.” There are shrines around a large courtyard, a meeting hall, and cells for monks, similar to the one I visited with Dr. Dani in Sirkap near Taxila.

Islamabad is rich in these historical treasures, but they remain largely hidden. There is complete neglect of this heritage, and ignorance and failure on the part of the Government to recognize this heritage and wealth that has always been a part of Pakistan’s history—a history that is unclaimed like an abandoned illicit child. There is nothing written about these caves in recent years by archeologists, which is why it was a surprise to find information about them in Minallah’s book. She mentions that these Buddhist caves are not far from a tree in Shah Allah Ditta, a small village that took its name from the shrine of Hazrat Shah Allah Ditta and goes back to the time of the Mughals. The caves are about 1.6 kilometers away from the site of the Bodi tree and were used for meditation by Buddhist monks. In much older works they are mentioned, and according to Alexander Cunningham, Director of the Archeological Survey of India (1871), Hindu pilgrims also frequented the Shah Allah Ditta caves. Interestingly, another popular name for this place is Saddhu Da Bagh (Hindu priest garden), because during the Hindu period worshipers came there to meditate. According to discoveries by Dani, Middle Stone Age tools found there indicate that prehistoric people also used the caves. Unfortunately we do not know any details of these caves since it is only as recent as September 2011, the Government has started to pay attention to their

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295 Bechert and Gombrich, World of Buddhism, 74.

296 I have visited a temple in the diplomatic area, which is also in proximity to a tree that the Buddha is supposed to have visited.


significance and preservation, thanks to successful protests by civil society groups against construction projects too close to the sacred historic site.\textsuperscript{299} I will discuss the role of Pakistan’s dynamic civil society groups in the final section of this chapter.

Whereas local residents are just becoming aware of the importance of the tree and other ancient sites in the region, devotees of the tree have always known its significance. Over the years, Buddhists have visited from far and wide. A bench was placed there and a set of spiritual practices flourished. It was Minallah’s Japanese Buddhist friend, Tajima Shinji, who first taught her about the importance of the Banyan trees and in particular the species that this tree belonged to.

For me this mighty Banyan tree is a symbol of “Tolerance”. It never asks you your religion, race, caste or nationality. It never asks you if you are rich or poor. It spreads its mighty shade and its leafy vault shelters you without any discrimination. Ancient trees are the oldest living things in the world. Generations will come and go but this ‘National Monument’ will live on. (Minallah 2007, 144)

While I agree that the tree is a “National Monument” which lives beyond generations, it is her understanding of the Banyan as a symbol of tolerance that I want to focus on for discussion. While for Fauzia Minallah, the Banyan may stand as a symbol of tolerance, for Indu Mitha, who choreographed its life story, the tree means much more. In fact, in a recent email exchange (March 22, 2012), Indu shared with me that she abhors the word “tolerance,” and doesn’t think that should be the goal to achieve:

I find the term “tolerance” somewhat offensive now after hearing it too often in today’s world. It assumes that one self is right and soooo kind to tolerate/put up with, allow others to have another point of view! The whole point of a democratic set-of-mind is that differences of point of view enrich one-self and that a democracy does NOT give/guarantee the rights of the majority (that would be simply “might is right”), but guarantees the right of all MINORITIES to get equal rights within the LAW(Emphasis by capitalization is Indu’s).\textsuperscript{300}

\textsuperscript{299} Newspaper Tribune article titled “Securing Islamabad’s past in fight with greed: Heritage wins first round”, published Sep 2011.

\textsuperscript{300} Indu, email correspondence, 2012.
FIGURE 10 The Bodhi Tree of Islamabad
Photo by Tajima Shinji (taken with permission from Minallah’s book *Glimpses into Islamabad’s Soul*).
Thus keeping in mind her views above, as well as an overview of her repertoire, I have chosen the word “inclusivity” to represent the core of Indu’s choreographic vision, and this includes for all purposes the commonly understood meaning of “tolerance.”

For Minallah, this 400-year-old Banyan is the symbol of tolerance, a symbol that was burned (an action which itself bears huge symbolic significance) by a small group of men who had recently taken over the land of the Margalla National Park. Thus citizens who had been infected by this new virus-like disease state attacked and destroyed the Tree of Tolerance in Pakistan. From the excerpt quoted earlier from Minallah’s friend Shinji, the tree’s fate reminded him of Hiroshima and the cruel destruction of nature. It is amazing to read his observation about the birth of a new bud despite all this cruelty. The bud of the new banyan has also managed to rise from the ashes, and I call it the bud of compassion and love for all. It is sacred and now must be nurtured. Indu Mitha is one of the gardeners looking after this small baby bud. She is there reminding her students to question, to see beyond what is being fed to them in the madrasahs and mass media. But unlike Minallah’s focus on “tolerance,” Indu urges her students to go beyond simply “tolerating”, as I will explain more in the next section as we come to the last part of the choreography and the final section of the chapter.

Before my introduction to this tree via Indu, I was surprised when I read in a local newspaper that Japanese heritage workers were concerned and helping to preserve Pakistan’s Gandhara carvings that are now a dying art. Since my engagement with this occluded history the pieces have started falling into place for me and I am not surprised anymore. There is a long and deep history of Buddhism in Pakistan, and this land, which is the land of the Gandhara civilization, that has religious significance for all Buddhists and especially for Japan, where around ninety million people (roughly 70% of the citizens) describe themselves as practitioners of Zen or other forms of Buddhism.\footnote{http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2055.html} I’d never realized this connection that was right before my eyes. By underlining an
injustice committed by a religious extremist minority, Indu Mitha has helped me see what was previously invisible, even though it had been unfolding directly in front of me over the years.

Let’s stay with this tree for the moment. So there was this tree growing over centuries, providing a site for religious practice to all types of people who came under its shade. It was an old, sacred tree. And suddenly a group of young men decided that it was their duty to destroy, to burn the tree on account of their belief that no religion should be practiced alongside Islam; that Islam is the one true religion. This tragic event moved and inspired Indu to choreograph a dance about it, and this is how the story goes that Indu’s dance drama narrates. She shows how different groups of people—men, women, and travelers of different faiths—pass by and rest and how some revere the tree. When a group of Islamic extremists comes and burns the poor, beautiful, old tree, it is through the lens of Indu’s choreography that we see the burning as a cruel act perpetrated against all of humanity. So on the one hand what may look like only a tree to some, or only a minority community issue to others, is actually a threat to the entire Pakistani population, for when radical elements act in Pakistan, they threaten the entire social fabric of a society. This brings me to the question of the birth of Pakistan, to revisit and interrogate the idea, the vision, of the new country invented in 1947, primarily for the protection of a then minority Muslim group. I will discuss Jinnah’s much quoted, debated and controversial “secular” vision for Pakistan in the next section of the chapter.

The theme that is emerging from my introduction to this Bodhi tree through Indu Mitha is of the occluded spaces of the minorities, their “othering” as citizens and of exclusive spaces to which they don’t have access. This theme will be treated even more closely in the next section. But for now let me assert that despite the incredible richness of archeological and heritage sites in Pakistan, which would be viewed as treasures by most other countries, it seems to me that there is a conscious and unconscious disowning of these sites by the Pakistani tourism department. The result is that there is no concrete effort to preserve these sites, and furthermore, a blind eye is turned when
they are destroyed. I argue that the Government’s inaction is directly linked to an ambivalence about the identity of the nation state and its relationship with “Islam. Since 1970s onwards this identity has been as “only Islamic.” The repercussions for all social and cultural institutions on account of such tunnel vision are enormous. Moreover, this neglect at the national level is then transferred to the level of the individual citizen. Take my case, for example, that despite visiting numerous sites in and around Taxila with Pakistani’s top archeologist and anthropologist, the late Dr. Dani, in my mind, unconsciously, this history of religious pluralism had become totally disconnected from Pakistan’s identity. I understand now that this was chiefly due to the fact that I was born and grew up in the 1970s under martial law, the “Zia years,” the period in which all traces of cultural and religious diversity were suppressed. This decade of “Islamization” was regulated by a dominant rhetoric, that anything having to do with Pakistan must be solely Islamic. This idea was enforced aggressively through schoolbooks, as well as by a wider discourse circulating in print and the media from the 1970s onward. I see myself now as a prime example of this erasure, which has affected my entire generation and those who have come after.
2. The Dancer

The World Social Forum (WSF), [24th March], 2006, Karachi

To investigate the erasure of Islamabad’s rich pluralistic past, I turn once again to Indu’s choreography *Islamabad kaa muqaddas daraxh*, this time for its premier at the World Social Forum (WSF) held in Karachi in 2006, with the intent to focus on the dancers who appear in this section. Indu was invited to take her male students from Islamabad and she was fortunate to get some funding for their travel to Karachi where they had never been before. A prominent member of the Christian community, Francisca arranged for their train fare as otherwise the students could not have afforded to travel the over eleven hundred kilometers distance.
I want to take you back in the audience and continue to watch this dance from where we left off in 2006. Let us go back to the choreography where Buddha, played by Indu’s student Iftikhaar, has now entered the stage. Next he will change costumes and roles to join three other male dancers to present their Kathakali skills, which Indu has worked hard to teach them for this event. I want to take you back in the audience to continue to watch this dance from where we left off in 2006.

**Islamabad kaa muqaddas daraxht (-Contd.)**

*From the four wings of the stage, four male dancers enter holding dias (traditional clay oil lanterns lit with a wick) and begin to move in eleven-beat cycles in Kathakali movements, swaying their bodies to and fro like a pendulum from right to left. In between these swaying movements, they hold up the dia to accentuate the beats:*

\[ \text{dhin-dhage-dhita tika dhin dhitik kit thin} \]

*Their entry is dramatic. The stage lights are dimmed and the light of the dias illuminates their bodies, accompanied by the sound of the bells on their feet and further emphasized by the dramatic Kathakali movements. The audience applauds as the dancers circle the tree in reverence. (Indu narrated to me later that this group of people have come to burn the forest but not to harm the tree, which they revere. They are farmers who practice “slash and burn” agriculture.) They ask the tree for forgiveness, as there is a drought. We know this because the same woman who had earlier picked the fruit of the tree picks up a bucket near the tree, peers into it, and makes a face indicating a lack of water. She kicks the empty bucket. She prays for rain, makes a gesture to tie something onto the branches of the tree, as if making a “manat,” a common wish ritual in South Asia. Then she turns towards the audience with open hands in a typical local prayer gesture. In the background the singer sings “ Alla megh de paanii de” (“May Allah grace us with rainfall, with water.” The music then changes to a fast classical rain raag which describes how the rain clouds are dancing, “jhum jhum baadal barsaa re aaaaaa”. To this upbeat music four dancers enter dancing the stage: the bucket-kicking woman, a young girl, and two of the male dancers wearing of clothes all white with sky blue dupatas around their necks. They are the rain clouds that have come to pour their rain so that the tree comes alive again.\(^\text{302}\) This is followed by a change in music to a popular Punjabi folk tune, “lang aa ja,” at which Indu Mitha’s four male dancers enter again, taking their position to form a square on four ends of the stage and facing each other.*

\(^{302}\) Here Indu uses the same music as was used in the beginning, which features an ahkaar (or alap in the Hindustani tradition—a vocal improvisation in free rhythm) and a tabla from a famous local Pakistani band Khamaj’s hit single *Terae Binnab* (Without you)
Their costume is a plain white shalwar kameez and the cloth tied around their heads is that of local farmers, an association with which the audience is familiar. With their left arms tucked in at the waist level, bent at a 90-degree angle to their torso, they use their right arms in a pick-and-throw movement out from the chest to the floor of the square, to indicate sowing their seeds. Crossing the length and breadth of the stage, they exit and return in a similar fashion from the wings, except this time they depict cutting the harvest and collecting it, by throwing the right hand in an up-and-down cutting movement in time to the beat, “Dhin dhinna dhinna dhin.”

We see a man and a woman approach the tree and gaze at it for a moment. (“Foreigners come and admire the tree,” Indu would later explain.) The man stays there while the woman leaves the stage and returns with a procession: a young girl and an elderly man wearing a rust colored hat and holding a lantern. The woman and the girl holding a cardboard box with the picture of a temple on it follow closely behind them. Walking slowly, they place the temple depiction at the base of the tree and then sit around it to meditate. The man who had entered with the woman then gestures to a local Pakistani, a non-devotee who comes to enquire what they are doing. Using gestures, the devotee explains the significance of the tree to the local non-devotee. His hands in katha kahani mudra, palms outstretched, right hand on top of the left and joining at the base of the palms, he welcomes the non-devotee to join, but the later dislikes what he sees and expresses his anger by stamping his belled left foot strongly on the floor. He then walks off in a huff.

After a change in music there is now darkness on stage. As the tree and the devotees rest, two men with black masks on their faces and fire torches in their hands enter the stage. They attack the sleeping tree, burning its branches. The tree dancers, Lucia and Kau, crumble down to the floor. Kau on the left side has her face upturned to the sky, her eyes and mouth open in horror and shock, while Lucia crawls with her face down and covered. The masked men, their job done, exit the stage in a celebratory Bhangra dance. After the celebratory bhangra music, which marked the exit of the men, the stage is very quiet in contrast. The green light shines on the crumpled bodies of the dancers and the horrified expression on Kau’s face. (Indu describes this expression to me as the expression from Edvard Munk’s famous painting The Cry.) The whole image is so powerful that the audience applauds.

I cannot disconnect the story narrated above about Islamabad’s Bodi tree from the identity of the dancers who help unfold it. Who are the dancers in this piece? The last scene described above is powerful in its stillness, reinforced through strong performances by Indu’s adult dance students Kau and Lucia. Lucia is the Spanish dancer married to a Pakistani anthropologist, whom I described earlier, and Kau is principal of the morning Montessori school Mazmunn-e-Shauq where Indu gives evening dance lessons. The other females in the dance are students of dance at Mazmunn-e-Shauq, and
the new additions to her dance school are the male students in this piece. The Buddha and the devotees who revere the tree, as well as the men in masks who destroy it, are all portrayed by her new male students from a marginalized Christian community located in the slum areas within the beautiful capital city of Islamabad. For me as an audience member, this is the most fascinating dynamic to watch in this piece, since the male students dancing about this Bodhi tree themselves belong to a minority community. Thus this story, while urging attention to the neglected plight of the minority Buddhist community, through the dancing bodies of these minority Christian men, takes on a wider message about the larger question of minorities in Pakistan. This section thus moves from the context and content of Indu’s choreography, i.e., her theme of an event of injustice towards a Buddhist symbol of worship, to the dancers involved in this narration which brings me to Indu’s male dance students, who are all Christians. Thus this section raises the minority question in Pakistan as it directly impacts Indu (with her Hindu sounding name, Christian background, and Bengali lineage), as well as her Christian male dance students, whom she mentors. I will discuss this current, problematic issue in light of the occluded vision of Pakistan’s founding father, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Lastly, I take Indu’s male dance students to illustrate how Indu choreographs an inclusive space for underrepresented groups in twenty-first century Pakistan.

The following second section is divided into three sub-sections. First I will elaborate on all whom I include in the category “minority,” then will move on to Jinnah’s vision of the place for minorities in his ideal Pakistan, and finally end the section with concrete examples of Indu’s Christian dance students’ marginalization and how she works to counter it.

2.1 Minority Question Then and Now (Post 1947 and Post 9/11)

It is important to stress here that it is not only the minority non-Muslims who are threatened by the radical extremist elements that have infiltrated Pakistan. It is anyone who does not fall into
the narrow definition of a particular wahabi version of Islam. While the latter refers to the majority of Pakistanis, the ones under a direct threat of violence are those who are vocal about their progressive views, and that too is a minority. The unchecked manipulative use of religion in the public sphere has taken a very dangerous turn. A recent tragic example of this is the murder of the Pakistani Minister of Minorities, Salman Taseer, who was a progressive Muslim. He spoke up bravely against the misuse of the blasphemy law in Pakistan—blaming anyone with dishonoring the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h)—that has resulted in citizens blaming whomever he or she has a thorn with or wants out of their way. On January 4, 2011, Taseer was brutally assassinated by an extremist who proudly confessed his crime and now Taseer’s son has been kidnapped.303 The most shocking part of this incident is that the extreme right wing groups feel safe to publically garland the murderer and call him a “martyr,” whereas the horrified non-violent and progressively inclined majority feels further suppressed and frightened to speak up publically.

I would like to bring attention back to the roots of this dangerous trend and the bigger perspective of the aftermath of the 1947 Partition, as I argue that today Post 9-11 these effects have combined with the very dangerous new scenario of the “Talibanization” of Pakistan and the global scenario of the war on terror. The important point here for discussion is the contrast between the ideals of the creation of Pakistan and the reality of what the situation has unfortunately become today. According to some historians the rise of communalism in India can be traced to communalism at the 1947 Partition.304 In a Muslim majority context, this communalism has affected

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303 The Guardian report “Salman Taseer’s son Shahbaz is kidnapped in Lahore”, Friday 26th August, 2011. See also reports from Dawn newspaper August 27, 2011 “Slain Salman Taseer’s son kidnapped”.

the Pakistani mindset that has until now not been groomed to accept difference. Pakistan is regarded as existing only for Muslims, and more recently only Muslims of a certain Arab type.

Unfortunately, the long decade of Zia Islamization injected a concretization of a dominant Arab Muslim space. But Zia is not the only one to blame for this trend. For instance it was during the Democratic rule of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto that the Ahmadis were declared non-Muslim. The persecution and hardships faced by the Ahmadis caused most of them to leave the country over the years. This creates a whole set of complex problems which impact all Pakistanis as there is a whole array of sects of Muslims from Shia, Sunni, Ismaili, Qadiyani, Ahmadies.\textsuperscript{305} Serious tensions arise when a dominant group thinks they have the right to dictate how the others should practice their religion. This promoted a narrow fundamentalist minority view of Islam in an institutionalized manner through media, educational curriculum and new policies, with the result that today these minority extremist voices are the most heard as they dominate public space. On the other hand, the progressive voices are not vocal enough and thus marginalized. In the middle of these two ends lies a complacent majority that follows what they think is the safe option, “majority-is-authority rule.”

Alas, this scenario spreads more ignorance on the core values of Islam, which like most other religions—Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism, or Jainism—preaches universal values of equity, tolerance, and best behavior for all. I will explore these values further with relation to occluded aspects of Jinnah’s ideas of ideals for Pakistan as a nation with regards to minorities.

\textbf{2.2 “The Land of the Pure,” Jinnah and the “Impure”}

First I would like to bring in an occluded aspect of the vision of the founding father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. To begin, I quote political science lecturer Salman

\textsuperscript{305} This complex is linked but beyond the scope of my discussion here which is focused on the non-Muslim minorities, read Naveeda (2010), chapter on the Admediah issue.
Humayun and historian Tanvir Anjum’s paper titled “Jinnah: A Guardian of Minorities,” which states:

The role of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah in the annals of Indo-Pakistan has variously been interpreted implying a variety of perspectives which have earned him a good deal of prestigious titles like the Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, as a strategist, etc. A survey of literature, however reveals that Jinnah’s vision regarding minority rights and his struggle and strategies to safeguard their interests perhaps is the most ignored perspective (Anjum 1999, 70).

I bring in Jinnah firstly due to the occlusion of his vision on the issue of minority rights as pointed out in the above quote. Secondly, in keeping with the contrast that Indu uses in her choreographies as a strategy, this vision helps me contrast and check in where the nation stands today in 2012 against the dream of Jinnah. Thirdly, I see similarities in the core goals of Jinnah’s work and my reading of the themes of Indu’s work in that they both focus on ensuring the representation of minority voices, issues and people. To support this argument I present an excerpt of Jinnah’s first speech to the people as a nation:

I cannot emphasize it too much. We should begin to work in that spirit and in course of time all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community, because even as regards Muslims you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis and so on, and among the Hindus you have Brahmans, Vashnavas, Khatris, also Bengalis, Madrasis and so on, will vanish. Indeed if you ask me, this has been the biggest hindrance in the way of India to attain the freedom and independence and but for this we would have been free people long ago. No power can hold another nation, and specially a nation of 400 million souls in subjection; nobody could have conquered you, and even if it had happened, nobody could have continued its hold on you for any length of time, but for this. Therefore, we must learn a lesson from this. You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State.\(^{306}\)

In the quote above I see Jinnah return to what has been discussed in literature about him of his struggle for unity in pre-Partition India amongst people from different groups, especially for tensions between Muslims and Hindus. For this he was titled as “Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity.”

unity”. He worked towards this goal both before and after Partition. It is also very clear from this quote that there is a clear separation between state affairs and religion. So I argue that for Jinnah there was no need to declare Pakistan an “Islamic Republic” in 1956. In this speech Jinnah also goes on to reassure Pakistanis with the example of England’s history of strife between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants but how that has changed and that is an example for Pakistan to follow with hope:

Today, you might say with justice that Roman Catholics and Protestants do not exist; what exists now is that every man is a citizen, an equal citizen of Great Britain and they are all members of the Nation. Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.

Once again the above quote shows Jinnah’s secular orientation with regards to the matters of the state. Jinnah was consistent both before and after Partition in his commitment to minority groups or “underdogs.” M. S. Sharma, a Karachi-based Hindu journalist, had a conversation with Jinnah in 1948 in which Jinnah expressed how before Partition the interest of the minority Muslims of India were his priority and that after 1947 he turned this attention to the non-Muslim minorities. Jinnah said to Sharma in the interview conducted in 1948:

Now, my dear fellow I am going to constitute myself as the Protector-General of the Hindu-minority in Pakistan (emphasis is my own) (2010, 88).

This quote is recorded in an article titled “Jinnah—Two Perspectives: Secular or Islamic and Protector General of Minorities” by Liaquat H.Merchant, the President of the Jinnah Society among other affiliations, in a 2010 compilation The Jinnah Anthology published by Oxford. I want to

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307 Wells, Jinnah Ambassador Unity, 54.


309 His other titles include Managing Trustee of the Jinnah Foundation and Executive Trustee of Quaid-e-Azam Aligarh Education Trust.
Jinnah didn’t live for long after the creation of Pakistan, just a little more than a year, but even in that limited time he addressed the issue of minority rights in his speeches and also took concrete steps for their representation. For instance, he chose a non-Muslim poet, Azad, to write the National Anthem of Pakistan, an act which was challenged and changed by his successor Liaquat Ali Khan soon after his death. I argue that like Jinnah, Indu too is committed to the cause of the underrepresented and these are the themes that call out to her and she uses her tool—her dances—to choreograph dance dramas to tackle these issues. These include the occluded voices of the Kashmiri people separated on two sides of a hostile border, Bengalis in a similar situation, as well as women and environmental groups. While this is clearly evident in ‘Islamabad kaa muqaddas daraxcht’, her penchant for addressing such themes exists outside the content of her choreographies as well. Here I would like to bring in the unique case of her male dance students, who all come from a marginalized Christian community in the slums of Islamabad. In the last ten years, Indu has striven to present her work with them in many different platforms that otherwise would not be accessible to them. I have had the opportunity to learn a dance and perform with them through Indu, and to
glimpse their plight as marginalized figures—as Christians and as male dancers in a patriarchal Islam-dominated society.

2.3 Indu Mitha’s Christian Male and Muslim Female Students: Class Tensions

In the summer of 2011 I was invited to attend an evening of cultural performance at Lok Virsa, and there I saw Iftikhar and Nasir, two of Indu’s students, dancing. I’d been told by Indu that now they are employed full time in the National Performing Arts Group of Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) and arranged for an interview with them through a friend that took place in March 2012. In the interview they stated repeatedly how it was all thanks to Indu Mitha that today they had come such a long way from dancing with a small group and performing disco dance at random events mostly for free, to the wider range of platforms where they still continue to go and perform as her students. They stressed that their identity in the dance world is only as “Indu Mitha’s students.” In an article titled “The Struggles of Pakistan’s Christian Sweepers,” published November 2, 2011, in the reputed magazine Newsline, journalist Amal Aslam reports that a substantial number of the twenty-three million Pakistani Christians work in “public (for the municipal government) or private sector sanitation (in homes, private offices or for private waste companies)” which goes back to the British Colonial times:

In mainstream discourse, “Christian”, “sweeper” and the derogatory term coora are used interchangeably. Few are inclined to try to understand the historical context of how such a large proportion of this minority are in sanitation-related jobs. Sweeping in pre-Partition India was a job reserved for the lower castes. A large segment of lower Indian castes converted to Christianity after 1850, under British rule, to improve their lives. The British, too, callously utilised caste differences in the interests of convenience, economy and efficiency deriving from the needs of an urban government. This colonial legacy inherited by the local government of Pakistan, remains in practice to date. In fact, after Partition even greater numbers of Christians were drawn to this profession; several landless Christian agricultural labourers who migrated to Pakistan took up the task of sweeping in large cities in order to survive. Shahzad painted houses for a living but had to quit because of the reluctance of Muslims to allow a Christian into their homes. Today, he is a sweeper and says that as a Christian it is easier to find a job as a sanitation worker. Defeated, he states, “For
centuries our forefathers had no choice but to sweep, so why should I expect to lead a life that is any different?" 

From the scenario above it is clear that for someone from the Pakistani Christian community hired otherwise chiefly as menial labors, stigmatized thus as coora or similarly canaar, a respectable blue-collar status of a government servant pursuing their passion is a huge success story. In the latest interview with the three students (Ifikar, Aftab and Nasir) they repeatedly emphasized how it was only due to Indu Mitha that they are recognized; otherwise they wouldn’t have any respectable identity.

To illustrate their marginalized place in Pakistani society, let me go back to the first time that I ever met Indu’s “boys,” as she calls them. It was when I was still a new student and I took part in Indu’s baaGhiice maaM or (In the Park), which Indu was invited to perform at the famous Rafi Peer Theatre Festival (2003). 

In my first meeting with them I remember a sharp tension in the room when our regularly scheduled dance rehearsal included these boys for the first time. Indu introduced us but there was discomfort as there was a big class difference between Indu’s “girls” and her “boys,” terms she uses due to her seniority to refer to her students in general. In short, the girls are from an elite class and an occasional girl like me from the higher or lower middle class, but still from well-to-do non-conservative families. Due to the big gap and class difference between Indu’s male students and female ones, when the former came to our class, the girls would not talk to the boys, nor the boys to the girls, and we would all sit on opposite sides of the room. I tried to talk to the boys when I could as there was an uncomfortable silence/distance lurking in the room and now, looking back, I feel they also felt they could talk to me somewhat because of that little effort. Indu

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311 Rafi Peer Theatre first organized their theatre festival in the year 1974 as a workshop. The only year that there was an International Dance Festival in Pakistan was through the efforts of Indu and Tehreema. But the problem is that they didn’t get the credit for it and even though Indu’s daughter, Tehreema, was the one who conceived and helped get the event together, in which she was performing, along with Naheed Siddiqi and Sheema Kirmani, Tehreema never got the credit for her idea or her role as a founder/creator of the event as Rafi Peer brothers are very good in taking all the credit.
took the boys under her wing and began to teach them classical dance from day one, something they really appreciated as in South Asia classical dance and music “Ustad-Shagird” (Teacher-Student) tradition, master teachers generally test their students for a long time or some never teach them the “real” stuff till they feel they have earned the right or proved themselves as a worthy student for the master teacher. So the boys started to come to Mazmun-e-Shauq as well to practice for the event at the Rafi Peer Theatre Festival, where we would all practice for the piece baGhiice maaM (In the Park).312

About Indu’s female students, they belong chiefly to an elite class, as it is only the elite class that would want their daughters to come and learn classical dance. In some cases it is because they want their daughters to learn about their South Asian culture instead of the largely westernized culture adopted by the elite of Pakistan. Another reason may be that the parents come from a cultured and educated background and value the importance of their children also learning about their culture through dance. Indu’s senior-most student after her daughter Tehreema is Sofia Khawaja, who began learning dance from Indu when she was only ten years old. She is the granddaughter of late Professor Khawaja Masood, who was a connoisseur of classical Indian dance along with being a top intellectual, mathematician, and scholar in his own right, with a personal interest in the performing arts. Another example is of a student who is the granddaughter of legendary Pakistani singer Malika Pukhraj. As discussed earlier, Indu herself comes from a highly educated and important family (and later married a man who rose to the rank of General in the Pakistan army). Her father, Rudrah, was one of the most accomplished philosophy teachers in the sub-continent, part of the cream of pre-partition Indian society, which consisted of the movers and the shakers of Indian history. For example he was responsible for calling Gandhi back to India. Her husband, Mitha, rose to the rank of Major General in the army before his controversial court martial post 1971. In short, there is a big contrast between Indu’s status as the wife of a highly ranked army

312 Earlier I had performed with them on stage for Ajoka’s “Zanani” theatre and dance festival.
officer, the female students that come to her from a certain circle and class, and her male students from a marginalized minority community.

There is no doubt a stigma that all dancers in Pakistan face. For that reason Indu has struggled to have any student, male or female, take up dance as a profession in Pakistani society. For Indu’s male students from an occluded class of Pakistani Christians, there is the added baggage that comes with being a male dancer and a non-Muslim minority. Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay’s edited volume, *When Men Dance: Choreographing Masculinities Across Borders* (2009), takes up the issues that male dancers have to deal with regarding stereotypes of masculinities and in different dance contexts from ballet, modern dance, popular dance, and from all over the world, including England, Germany, India, and the Middle East. For my purposes the “hypermasculine dance style,” which Shay discusses in his essay on Egypt, seems relevant in Pakistan’s case, as I will now present through Indu’s selected movements for her boys.

In addition to choreographies such as *baGhiice maaM* (*In the Park*), *Islamabad kaa muqaddas daraxht* (*The Sacred Tree*) and recently other solo bharata natyam repertoire, Indu has also taught these students a dance that she has never taught to any of her female students. She made it into a new theme especially for them titled *qadiim jaadugar*, in which she used Kathakali movements she had learned pre-Partition from Shri Lalita Shastri. My suspicion is that she chose this to present her boys in a more “masculine” light according to the dominant Pakistani masculinity. I saw this dance from backstage when they performed it at the Rafi Peer Theatre Festival, Lahore. I’d never seen this dance prior to the festival because Indu had rehearsed it with the boys at a space provided by the Pakistan National Council of the Arts. So let’s go watch this performance now.

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313 Something that even dancers in the West struggle with, I mean dance as a profession if it does not contribute much to the economy of a society it will not have much cultural value either. Dance history scholar Janet O’Shea emphasized in her “World Dance History” class about how the cultural value of a dance form relates to economics. E.g. Bollywood dancing is happening is connected to the place of India in the global scenario.

314 For some events Indu had some male dancers who were in theatre perform but they were not a regular feature of her dance class just learned some movements for a dance drama for an event.
qadiim jaaduugar / Ancient Wizards Choreographing Masculinity / Respectability

Ta hita hita tai hita tai ta tai. Tai hita hita tai ta tik ta tai
Tak tai dbitta dbit tai dbitta

These dance bols\(^{315}\) are of the dance drama qadiim jaaduugar (Ancient Wizards) that Indu choreographed for her new male students. Indu chants the bols herself in the audio recording of the music that accompanies the dance. Her singing adds a beautiful, dramatic, and eerie touch to the chant, and helps takes her audience back to an ancient time. The dance movements that Indu choreographs here are large and circular. They match the grandeur of the carefully thought out dress, with its sky blue shiny satin silk color and majestic headdresses that all complete the transformation of the skinny (undernourished) Christian boys from the slums into grand magicians of a distant time. I feel that Indu choreographed this dance piece for these boys so as to present them in a more respectable light, to counter the stigma that is associated with them as both from a Christian community as well as male dancers in an Islamic patriarchal society. In the case of dance in Egypt, Shay argues that “Choreographing masculinity is vividly demonstrated in the artificial creation of a masculine style of dancing that would prove to be acceptable to Western and Westernized elite tastes, sensitive to the already shady reputations of dancers, both male and female” (Shay 2009, 296). In the post-colonial context of Pakistan, the trend in the elite is also towards Westernization and they are Indu’s majority audience. In this piece Indu doesn’t choreograph a new tradition of dancing but selects from her dance repertoire a Kathakali piece (distinct for big, grand movements catering to dominant notions of masculinity). She specifically teaches her male students with an awareness of the multi layers of stigma that effects them, as dancers in general in South Asia,

\(^{315}\) As discussed in an earlier chapter dance bols are different from tabla bols, the latter are lyrics that the tabla plays, and kavita bols, which I have discussed in an earlier chapter that have poetry and meaning.
as male dancers in specific and on top of that from a already marginalized religious community. In this scenario, the theme of wizards and ancients gives the dancers an aura of power, and the movements embody strength, assertion and agency, aspects desperately missing in their daily life experience of a “feminized” minority that is constantly pushed out of their homes for the expansion of Islamabad—a city in which they live but can never fully lay claim to as their own. In the next section I will get into this dichotomy of visibility and invisibility with relation to the spatial hierarchy ingrained in the city of Islamabad, their place in it and how Indu upsets it through her patronage.

3. The City

Islamabad kaa muqaddas daraaxt (Cont.) Rafi Peer Theatre Festival, Lahore 2007

From the right side of the stage near the tree, the group of devotees returns in slow, quiet, but determined steps. It is the elder man, the woman, and the girl, but this time the woman leads the procession. She is carrying a big white cardboard dove while the man and the girl hold a placard bearing three Urdu words: “ravadarri-mohabaat-aman” (Tolerance/Good Character-Love-Peace). On the left side of the stage a few moments later enter Indu Mitha’s male dancers, who play the part of a small, loud, obnoxious group of men, accompanied by some women in black cloths with their faces covered so that only their eyes are visible. Holding big sticks in their hands, they all strike their arms and fists in the air and shout slogans, “murdabaad” (down/death to them). Their placards say, “kafir but parast ko maar Daloe” (Kill these infidels and statue worshippers!) The leader in front of the group of men dances and points to the audience as if to say, “Look, we caught them,” as he smirks and looks pleased with himself. He moves his arms and body in big dramatic gestures while the drum is playing. He ends with a big pointing movement, his arm stretched to the devotees, and halts in that still stance. The two groups face each other on the stage and hold their respective contrasting poses. This last scene depicts the very powerful contrast between the loud, obnoxious, ignorant but self-righteous (madrasah) men on the left side of the stage, and the devotees who sit facing them at a 45 degree angle, very still, holding up their peace dove and placard that says “Good character, Love and Peace.” In their stillness and unmoving, quiet resilience there is great subtle power. (My emphasis in bold)

--------------------------------- Lights Out ---------------------------------
This scene above illustrates a key aspect of Indu’s personality and choreographic style: contrast. Indu draws out the sharp contrast between the loud, aggressive protest of one group with dramatic movements and gestures, and the serene, still, composed motionless stance of the group of devotees. The latter’s non-movement speaks of their dignity and integrity. This strategy of using contrasts allows Indu to both make her point and challenge and empower her audience to decide for themselves with which group they agree. The use of contrast as a device graphically illustrates the difference between one approach and another, and also keeps the audience involved as full participants. They must decide what they think. Contrast is a particularly useful tool for Indu at this point in time because of the danger associated with direct communication in twenty-first century Pakistan. Contrast is a form of indirect speech and, arguably, because it cannot be proscribed by the authorities, functions as an act of resistance.

Ahead I use key concepts of the strategy and the tactic proposed by French theorist Michel de Certeau in his book, The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), to discuss how Indu navigates through the obstacles she encounters in this context to find spaces to present her work in Pakistan in the twenty-first century. First I will establish how Indu is the “other”, which de Certeau associates with tactics used to cope with the strategies laid down by institutions and structures to control these individuals. For this I discuss how Indu is always perceived as “different,” first visually and then through her ideas. I argue that Indu tactically navigates the city of Islamabad, and in the process she choreographs inclusivity. Then to illustrate how she navigates the city of Islamabad tactically I take an imaginary walk with Indu in the city of Islamabad to the yet undiscovered parts of my hometown, which teaches me to see things that have always been there, but had not yet been visible to me.

316 Note that in the 2007 version of this choreography, Indu has also added a group of women, covered head to toe in black with only their eyes showing. This was Indu’s response to the July 2007 event of the Lal Masjid in which women had also been involved. In the original choreography premiered in 2005, and then again in 2006 in Karachi and Islamabad, it was the group of men alone.
3.1 Indu as the “Other”

*The Practice of Everyday Life*, one of De Certeau’s most influential works, was written at a time when he along with other people like Foucault were trying to think of ways to write differently from others in academia. Their writing is part of the political movement against colonialism and is pre-race and gender studies, and is trailblazing in its attempts to think through how underrepresented populations can be included in academia. This work is aimed towards a working class point of view and the examples cater to people who have been conceptualized by ruling classes as mindless and passive. De Certeau is trying to think about things that people would relate to at that time and so his writing evokes the complex texture of everydayness. De Certeau’s *strategies* and *tactics* can be distinguished by the “role of spaces” and the “types of operations” in which they are involved. So while strategies “produce, tabulate, and impose spaces” where the operations take place, tactics “use, manipulate, and divert” those spaces. “Use” and “consumption” are important concepts here. He gives the example of the gap between a product and the advertisements that a person is assimilating or consuming. So this gap, for De Certeau, is opened up by the varying use that the consumer will make of the products. A second important point is that strategy is defined as the calculation of power relationships when a subject with will and power can be isolated, which requires making a clear distinction between one’s “own place” and the “environment”. Tactic, on the other hand, refers to the “art of the weak”. De Certeau finds it a more adequate schema to highlight this aspect of the weak, which has not been highlighted before and has therefore been invisible. Tactic has no place of its own, as the space of the tactic is that of the other. So tactic is what De Certeau says stays within the “enemy’s field of vision” (p.38). Though there is an absence of power here, the important point is that the tactic of the weak is in the clever utilization of the moment. So while strategy bets on place, with the hope that place will resist the erosion of time, tactic bets on possibilities in utilizing time to its advantage. De Certeau applies his analysis of tactics in relation to
bodily actions, and to minute and unnoticeable aspects of physical responsivity, to bring home the idea that one has resources available to them and they can be engaged along many different registers.

I find De Certeau’s analysis of tactics useful to analyze Indu’s work in her context. I argue here that Indu is a minority, the other, and that since “the place of the tactic belongs to the other” (xix) according to De Certeau, thus Indu uses tactics to choreograph dance in Pakistan and to navigate the city of Islamabad. Indu shared with me that since the first day when she arrived in Karachi from Lahore after Partition in 1951, she realized that she was perceived as different, first visually as how she dressed, secondly due to her non-Muslim name, and thirdly because her ideas were also very different from those of most people in the army circles that she was in due to her husband’s occupation. Let me elaborate. In Chapter one I discussed in detail Indu’s family background, their closeness to Gandhi and thus Gandhian principles manifested deep into Indu’s personality. She prefers austerity and this is reflected in her simple cotton saris for everyday wear versus the fancy silk material and foreign imports popular amongst the elite at that time. Indu mentions how the initial boost in Pakistan’s economy from the rise in the price of jute resulted in the Muslim League administration importing foreign goods and materials instead of promoting local products. While army wives were using foreign imports to decorate their homes and themselves, Indu committed to her Gandhian ideals by promoting local products and looking for traditional materials, even decorating her house with ethnic and folk things from Sindh and Quetta.

Secondly, her name “Indu” sounded Hindu to most people, and so she was assumed automatically to be Hindu. Indu shared with me how soon after she got married in 1951 she was gently asked to change her name to a more Muslim sounding name by her husband’s aunt. Later her mother-in-law started to call her Mariam just because it was tedious to explain to inquisitive people that Indu was not a Hindu, though they were progressive enough never to try and tell her to change her beliefs and convert from Christianity to Islam. Indu didn’t mind as long as she was not expected
to convert and even used the name “Mariam”, given to her by her mother-in-law, as her stage name when she performed in Karachi in some big scale theater dance drama productions with her friend Mehrunissa in the 1970s. But even then she never changed her name in her passport and also declared her religion as “Christian” for administrative purposes. Up to 1971 Indu also insisted on wearing the bindi, which is taken in Pakistan as symbol of Hindu women. Indu wore it simply because it was the one singbar (womanly decoration) she liked, otherwise she doesn’t wear any make up except kajol (traditional black liner), despite the fact that she knew it was problematic. She admits that it was simply her stubbornness why she should stop wearing something she liked because of ignorance of people who mistook her for Hindu due to it. She did eventually stop wearing it one day during the 1971 war, when she was to attend an official army function with her husband when the heavy mechanical complex was being opened at Taxila jointly by the Pakistan president and the Chinese representative of their president. She describes that:

I realized it was not the day to flaunt an INDIAN relationship, so I didn’t use it and my husband laughed and said I wouldn’t dare to tell you to do that and I answered I am not a fool to rush where angels would fear to step. So also I have never WORN IT AGAIN. I AM NOT AN ON TODAY OFF TOMORROW PERSON” (emphasis Indu’s).

Thirdly, apart from her visual markers of difference Indu says “the other BIG reason for being perceived as DIFFERENT (emphasis Indu’s) was due to my (small) knowledge of and interest in dance.” Not just any dance but bharata natyam, a form which in Pakistan has marginal status, within the already marginal place of dance among all performing arts, due to the dominant discourse of “Islam” against it and Pakistani politics. The incorrect association of both her name “Indu” and the dance form “Bharata Natyam” as being related to “Hindustan,” the hostile neighbor, had added to establishing her as the other. Thus the practitioners of the dance form have to, in de Certeau’s words, find a way of “making do” for its survival. What were the tactics used by a bharata natyam

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317 Indu, email correspondence, April 24, 2012.
318 Indu, email correspondence, April 4, 2012.
dance teacher and choreographer like Indu to continue to dance bharata natyam in Pakistan? As I discussed in the previous chapter, Indu’s work was seen as subversive in the context of the political project of “Islamization” of the 1970s that banned dancing, and also later democratic governments who haven’t paid much too much attention to changing those anti-dance policies. Her work is a tactic in itself, its mere survival—a political scenario after partition that didn’t allow the prospering of classical arts, particularly dance, and at some stages banned women who dance—is a testimony to this.319

What I am arguing here is that Indu knows what it feels like to be the other, to be a minority, and to be different from everyone around you. She grew up in a home of philosophers where everyone had different religious and intellectual beliefs (Chapter one has more details) and it was only her mother who was a practicing Christian. Her grandfather had been a high-caste Brahmin who converted to Christianity. And now she married into a Muslim family which respected her secular orientation, even if she decided to bring up her daughters as Muslim. She feels strongly for the protection of the precious right of anyone to choose their religious, spiritual, or non-spiritual orientation, and that is the space that she strives to create and protect in her choreographies. Indu is othered in twenty-first century Pakistan due to her Hindu sounding name, Bengali lineage, and Christian upbringing, all of which mark her as different. Then post 1971 she also experienced being othered in the 1971 war’s aftermath when her husband, the late Major General A.O.Mitha, was wrongly court martialed, which resulted in her family landing on the streets, ostracized from army circles and those they thought were their friends. Indu mentions that her husband was often teased and questioned by troublemakers about Indu’s “Indianness” due to the above-mentioned factors of difference.

319 A good example of Indu’s tactical dance is saKi sunaibri, which I discuss in the introduction of the dissertation, as she carries forth the story of Krishna but as an anthropomorphic character of a local hero and as a story of any man and woman in love.
Now that I have established how Indu functions as the other, the minority, I will proceed in the next sub-section to imagine what a walk in the city of Islamabad would be like with Indu. Once again I turn to De Certeau’s article, “Walking in the City”, to argue that Indu navigates Islamabad tactically and in the process sutures otherwise occluded and thus disconnected parts of the city.

### 3.2 Navigating Occluded Spaces in Islamabad with Indu Mitha

I left Islamabad in August 2004 for the United States. Since then much has changed in the city, particularly the increase in security barricades and surveillance at every corner of Islamabad. A recent article by US journalist John Diaz, on an East-West Center exchange to Islamabad, hints at a contrast between two very different images of the city:

**Islamabad**——From the terrace of a restaurant in the Margalla Hills, 30 minutes of winding road away, Pakistan’s capital is a picture of nocturnal serenity. A band plays, an outdoor grill wafts spice-scented hints of delicacies to come, and dark patches in the quilt of lighted cityscape fail to distinguish between open space and neighborhoods that are coping with routine power outages.

Up close, and in daylight, Islamabad resembles a city under siege.

Fortresses abound. Heavily armed security guards are poised at entrances to almost every site of significance, public and private. Most well-heeled homeowners include a guard post at the entry to their estates as part of the cost of living in Islamabad. Thoroughfares transition into obstacle courses of concrete blocks before potential terrorist targets, such as the Islamabad Marriott that was bombed in September 2008, leaving 54 dead and 266 injured.

Tall walls and razor wire are installed everywhere. To an outsider, it’s not easy to detect which fortified ground is a school, an office or a government building. They all look like prisons.320

The scenic view of the city as described by the journalist in the article in Islamabad reminds me of De Certeau’s contrast between the “synoptic, unified view” from the top of New York’s World Trade Center with a person walking in the city who is “tactical” and takes shortcuts in spite of strategic grids laid down by the city planned by the top and best architects in the world (in

320 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sunday April 15, 2012.)
Isla mabad’s case, Doxiadis Associates, a modernist Greek architect). In “Walking the City,” De Certeau discusses the contrast between the “walkers” and the view from the top of the World Trade Center as follows:

The ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmanner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. (De Certeau, 1984, 93)

So to experience what de Certaeu calls in his essay walking as “poaching” and to attempt to access occluded spaces and histories, I will imagine that I am walking in Islamabad side by side with my teacher, mentor, and now informant and subject of research, Indu Mitha. As I write this dissertation in the reading room of the beautiful Royce Hall, on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles, I prepare to stroll the streets of my city, Islamabad, with my teacher and mentor Indu ji, as an act of imagination. Ji is the common honorific used to show respect for an elder in Urdu and Hindi in South Asia, and for this imaginary walk I will refer to her as such. In my imagination of the city I am exploring the city by foot, something I have not done much of, as growing up in a class privileged to own it is the trend it seems that anyone who has a car doesn’t walk in the city. They either drive somewhere to go for a hike, or a run, and the only public transport that one uses is either a cab or vans for the common labor class of the city. So walking the city for the sake of exploring it is really a new experience for me today and I do that with Indu ji by my side. As I sit on my computer in Los Angeles imagining this walk, in spring 2012, I travel through time and space and access my memory and rely on my memory maps of the city to imagine what such a walk with my teacher in Islamabad would be like.

Walking in Islamabad with Indu ji

It is Tuesday evening and my regular bharata natyam class with Indu ji has just ended. Since she has time before her next class she suggests I join her in a stroll around the neighborhood. From
her institute Mazmun-e-Shauq on street 10, sector F-8/3 we walk across the street to the path which runs parallel to a prestigious women’s college, O.P.F. Girls College, which I attended until my London University A’ Level Exams. We decide to walk along Margalla Road pass the Naval Complex and soon we see the grand structure of the Shah Faisal Mosque on the left. I grew up going to this mosque for Friday prayers and often also in Ramadan I would go for *tarawee* (night prayers during fasting) prayers right after my dance classes at Mazmun-e-Shauq—something that amused my father, how I would go for dance and then also for extra Ramadan prayers in the same evening. I also got married in this mosque, which is right next to the most elite sector of E-7. I have been on these streets many times, but Indu ji suggests a different route. She wants to take me on stroll off the main roads on a trail that leads into the woods. Soon we are before an open space and I see the remains of bark and burned trunk of what must once have been a huge magnificent tree.

“What is this place?” I ask my teacher. Indu ji says there was once a bodhi tree here that was burned down by the madrassah boys. She points between the trees to a building structure in the distance. She wanted to show me this site as I had been away when this tragedy happened. I paid my respects to the remains of the tree so sacred for Buddhists, and the place so dear to many locals for picnics, and for others one of the haunted sites of popular spooky stories in Islamabad.

I am reminded at this moment of a quiet Buddhist temple/monastery that I had visited in the Diplomatic Area of Islamabad, which is on the road that led to Quaid-e-Azam University (QAU) where I was a graduate student in Anthropology. I visited this small hidden monastery with a like-minded friend who knew of its existence, as otherwise there are no signs to mark it. The building seemed deserted at first. I rang the bell at the gate and an old caretaker came to let us in. Once through the gates we went up the stairs to a room with a huge Buddha statue—a place to pray and meditate. Another time, I think it was the summer of 2005, I read in the local newspaper about the Festival of Lights celebration at the temple, and attended along with many diplomats, foreigners, and local people who were interested in cultural events, as well as the local Buddhist community. Now
looking back I realize how much things have changed in Islamabad in just the last few years. That had been an openly advertised public event; anyone could attend. Today the whole Diplomatic Area is sealed off for the general public, and events are “By Invitation Only”.

On my springtime walk in Islamabad, I meditate deep in my thoughts on these traces of Buddhism of which this tree was reminding me, until I hear Indu ji say that we need to move on as there is another stop to make before we head back to the institute. We walk back to the main road, past E-7 and towards the sector F-7/4 Jinnah Super Market, which is a most popular hang-out and shopping place for youth and the middle and upper class of the city. I can walk these roads blindfolded as I am an Islamabadi, a term used for someone who is from here, and this market grew along with me over the years. As we cross behind the market area we come before one of the buildings of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), where I used to come for music classes with the late music teacher Ustad Fareed Nizami. We walk towards the building I know so well, but Indu ji passes it and heads towards a white wall that has been erected to separate the PNCA from the kacci aabaadii or squatter settlements of the city. As I enter this opening in the wall, one I had never paid attention to before, I feel like I am entering a completely different world; one that is within, but not quite in, the space of the planned city. Indu ji tells me that we are here because her new male students from the Christian community live in this neighborhood and she wants to say hello. I follow her, amazed that even though I have always passed this road on the way to classes or the market just opposite, I have never thought to enter past the walled enclosure. This gap in the wall, which is the entrance, is always open, with no security guard, barricade, or even a gate. It is open for anyone to enter. Unlike the prison-like mansions of the elite that journalist John Diaz wrote about from his experience in Islamabad, here are the homes of the least privileged class of the city, most of them from the minority Christian community.

With this widened vision through this simple walk in the known but yet unknown part of my hometown, I am reminded of how Jinnah’s vision of a Pakistan, where all minorities are equal
citizens, remains unrealized. This is the case especially for Christians in Pakistan whose status remains at the lowest ebb in society like their history as occupational sweeper and “untouchable” class in Hinduism but despite converting to Christianity as resident of Islamic Republic of Pakistan not much changed unfortunately in that discriminated status. In Islamabad, the Christian community’s space is very clearly marked, as the majority of them live in slum areas called *kaccii aabaadi*. The name literally means settlements that have houses that are *kacca*, or not fully made, versus *pakka*, fully prepared, houses usually made with cement.  

Most of my interaction with people from the Christian community when I was growing up was with the labor working class. I remember that when we lived in an area called F-6/3, a very posh area of Islamabad, where some government residences are assigned alongside the non-government ones, there used to be a *kaccii aabaadii* standing opposite to my house. Our house was assigned to my mother who was the head mistress at a semi-government college, “Islamabad College for Girls, F-6/3.” Where the wall of the college ended the enclosure where the *aabaadii* started.

The *aabaadii* stuck out like a sore thumb in the middle of the huge posh mansions, wide streets, and side-walks of the F-6 sector (the F series is generally considered a higher status area than the further-from-the-mountains G or H series). Traversing inside the walled enclosure, one can glimpse a random arrangement of houses built on top of one another, colorful and random wires, cables and antennas sprouting from different directions, the streets and houses full of people, kids mostly dirty and dressed shabbily. The majority of the cleaning staff at the Islamic College for Girls was from the “Colony,” the name by which the *kaccii aabaadii* was popularly called. And now I am inside one of “those Colonies.” In Islamabad these slums can often be found next to the otherwise elite spaces such as F-6 (French Colony), F-8 (Paris Colony), and Saidabad, which has also been

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321 The word *pakka* comes from cooking analogy of “uncooked” versus “cooked” food.
transformed into a tourist site by the “Model Village” project- which is another controversial story in itself.322

We reach a door and a woman welcomes us in. She is the wife of Indu’s dance student and she tells us her husband has headed to Indu’s school, after finishing his tailoring responsibilities, to dance. So we hasten back to the institute since her male students have only free time after their day jobs to come and dance with her. We head straight back to Mazmum-e-Shauq, as it is time for the evening senior female students. Indu wanted her male students to be there to rehearse for an upcoming event.

Indu’s tactics and the City then and now

My walk with Indu is followed by a (non-imaginary) meeting with Indu Mitha’s Christian dancers at her institute Mazmum-e-Shauq. I now have met, performed and also interviewed them, although these interviews were led by a friend, also Indu’s student, Raana Dilruba Yasmin, in my absence.323 These interactions have opened my eyes to a most obvious hierarchy in Islamabad. In the book Pakistan at the Millennium (edited by Charles Kennedy, Kathleen McNeil, Carl Ernst, and David Gilmartin, Oxford University Press, 2003), Frank Spaulding writes of Islamabad’s Master Plan that the residential sectors were subdivided in accordance to a “class hierarchy” (p. 355) and urban functions were disposed on the basis of this “hierarchy of allocation.” He goes on to elaborate that “while the elite were allocated spacious and comfortable living accommodations, low ranking government servants were assigned to cheaply built, government subsidized housing” (p. 356). The

322 “Saidpur Village” is controversial development story, as now it has been made into a resort space, a “Model Village” for tourists, local and international, to get the feel of a “real Pakistani village” in the heart of the new, modern city of Islamabad. I heard that the previous inhabitants of the village were removed, given lands somewhere else to make this a space for tourism. It is in the foothills of the Margalla Hills and now is considered prime land. Farmers continue to live on one side of the developed area and now work in the resort area as well. These laborers are the ones who provide food to the Capital. Civil society groups have raised their voice to the CDA against this.

323 March 2012, assisted by upcoming Sitar player and singer Shabib Sen. I am thankful for both their assistance in conducting this interview and also for video recording it. See attached video links for details.
prime property in Islamabad is an area close to the mountain ranges called Margalla Hills, in the E sector, and further down is the F sector. The majority of the Christian community in Islamabad is not really a part of the planned city as they live in what may be termed as encroachments or slums. The slums are in an interesting spatial relation to the rest of the otherwise perfectly planned city of Islamabad. Indu’s work with these students helps suture this spatial hierarchy in the city. For Indu’s Christian male students from the kaccii aabaadi, if not for her they would not have the access and opportunity to learn dance from a master teacher. This training has also led to many opportunities to perform in venues in the normally off limits other parts of town.

Taking a walk in Islamabad with Indu reveals to me how well Indu knows every corner of the city and also how she is able to navigate the otherwise unconnected public spaces of the privileged class and the most underprivileged one. Indu’s tactics in navigating the city is even more impressive in view of the new increased security scenario which makes Islamabad harder to navigate in the last eight to ten years. I was surprised when, on my last visit to Islamabad, Indu reminded me to send a copy of my passport in order to get security clearance to attend a performance of her students at the Islamabad Club, despite the fact that my family is a member of that club. Imagine needing one’s passport to gain access to a dance performance and that too of one’s own teacher.
FIGURE 12 A kacci aabaadi in G-7, opposite Jinnah Super Market
Taken in March 2005 by sociologist Azeema Faizunnisa (used with her permission).
Despite all these hindrances, and also an occasional incidence of a boom blast, or a threat of one, which make it so difficult to commute in Islamabad today, life still goes on as usual for people of the city and for Indu’s work too. Though I was away for most of these last eight years I found it amusing with what matter-of-fact manner Indu would remark that she had so and so performance scheduled at this gallery, which was cancelled due to a bomb threat, so she just shifted the performance to another place. In short, for Indu the show must go on. And it is the same for her audiences. Despite the heightened security measures at every corner of the city, whenever there is an entertainment event in Islamabad, it is like the audience is starved for it. Indu avails any opportunity to present her student’s work, and is also resourceful and tactical to create performance opportunities when there may seem to be none. For this she has found in the Capital support from different international organizations, embassies, or local development organizations or non-governmental organizations with more progressive interests. Occasionally this has included government-supported programs as well.

Secondly, apart from insight into Indu ji’s tactical navigation of the city, my walk with her also raised quest *kaccii aabaadi* ions for me about the city planning and its connection to the processes of historiography in the country. Spaulding noted these *kaccii aabaadi* as an example of the shortfalls of the planning process, as due attention was not paid to the “local topography of the area.”

In the Doxiadis Master Plan, the lowest structural level for the human habitation in the city was defined in direct relation to the plane represented by the table upon which he erected his scale models. While other factors contribute to this feature of the city’s social topography, one does find that in general, it is in those areas where the topography dips below this putative plane of human habitation that one finds the *kaccii aabaadi*. To have controlled for such a development would have required Doxiadis and his associates to realize that the planning table upon which their scale models rested was a poor substitute for the *reality of the area’s topography* (my emphasis) (Spaulding 2003, 360).

This neglect of the local topography mentioned in the quote above could be linked with the vision of the man behind this project of a new capital: military dictator Field Martial Mohammad
Ayub Khan. His vision it seems was in the creation of Islamabad as a fresh start for the country, but one based on forgetting and disconnecting with its past.

Capitals are not built, nor do they exist, just for the sake of, shall we say, utility. Utility is important, but at the same time the capital of a country has to encompass much bigger vistas, and provide light and direction to the efforts of the people.

I pick up this focus on a disconnect with the past pointed out by Mathew Hull’s (2010) essay “Uncivil Politics and the Appropriation of Planning in Islamabad” by a quote from Doxiadis who was the project’s “Greek modernist architect-planner” (Hull 2010, 453):

Islamabad was “to be created without any commitments to the past.”

It was Ayub Khan’s vision that Islamabad be created with a conscious disconnect with its past, and I argue that many of the problems of the minority question in Pakistan today are connected to mishandling of its past. With the result that the great planners of the city completely neglected the important role of the indigenous topography of the land and today the kaccii aabaadi in the heart of the city, and the state of the people living there are a sharp reminder of this neglect.

This raises many questions for me about how history and the role of the individual bodies in that history who are being written about. I am reminded here as I write that I accidently find my body in the archives of a history of my city, Islamabad, in the Young Research Library at the University of California at Los Angeles. That photo of me with my military unit surprised me, the dance history scholar-anthropologist, and also started me on this journey of questioning my part in the body of history. There is more than one narrative of history. What I write here is a product of that negotiation between my two bodies: One is my bound body, the one in an army uniform and bound in a book published by the Central Development Agency (CDA) of Islamabad, representing a “College Girl in National Guard Training.” The other one is the writing body, the body which is visiting multiple archives and finding deeply layered histories which have been buried in the annals.

In my writing I struggle to present them both as I realize that I have to be inclusive to them both.

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324 Hull quotes on p. 453, (Doxiadis 1965:26).
4. Conclusion

In *Choreographing Empathy* (2011), Susan Foster takes the example of Alutiiq choreographer Tanya Linklater whose works combines “native aesthetic and community values with contemporary dance” and shows how Linklater is part of movement of indigenous choreographers who are reasserting their voices and reclaiming lands that were taken away from their ancestors for generations due to colonization. She makes the connection that in the process, dancers like Linklater, bring changes in the conventions of theatrical dance. And more importantly for me is that:

In so doing, they are implementing processes of remapping and re-membering that are entirely distinct from Western cartographic and archival practices. … If the choreography helps viewers to contemplate where they have come from and where they might be going, it serves not so much as a repository of knowledge but as an orienting tool for determining and affirming a system of beliefs (Foster 2011, 179).

I see Indu’s work as part of the indigenous movement of artists that honors the baggage of history that they have to work with even if it is problematic. Indu engages with this history and does her part in what I see is a simmering movement of a dynamic civil society in twenty-first century Pakistan. Indu plays her part in this by selecting themes that address occluded groups, whether women, non-Muslim minority groups, or Muslim minority groups like Kashmiris.

In the last scene of *Islamabad kaa Muqaddas daraxht*, the only part of the dance drama where she uses text, Indu chooses the indigenous vocabulary and three Urdu words—“Rawa darie-Muhabat-Aman” to represent the values she cherishes. Of these “rava darii,” is insufficiently translated as “tolerance” and Indu had a strong reaction to that term. She is not satisfied with the English word “tolerance” as an ideal as for her it falls short as the ideal is towards “love” and not simply putting up with the other. Thus I argue that inclusivity is closer to her ideals. The notion of inclusivity today becomes occluded, principally due to the dangerous precedent set by the misuse of religion as the

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325 Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 179.
slogan for the creation of Pakistan in 1947. There is already too much written and continually debated about whether Jinnah had a secular vision versus an Islamic one for Pakistan. But most people would agree with Jinnah’s stance on the freedom of all citizens to pursue their varied religious beliefs, and I argue that includes differences amongst Muslims as well. Unfortunately this vision of the founding father was neglected and as a result today Pakistan has to tackle complex issues varying from the extreme case of ostracism through laws against Ahmadies as non-Muslims, to other groups like Qadianis, Islamilies, and Shia minorities to lesser degrees.

Indu navigates this complex scenario tactically and, being a choreographer, choreographs inclusivity on and off stage. An offstage example is how Indu created a space in her residence’s front garden for her Muslim husband to be rested next to a plot for her non-Muslim body to be rested when her time comes. Indu’s husband passed away on Dec 4, 1999. He had decided long ago that he would be buried on a plot of land in a farm his daughter Yameema owned in Pakistan, and Indu Mitha writes in the “epilogue” of his book:

Long ago, we had realized, that we could have our graves side by side only on a private land, as no cemetery would admit a body ‘belonging’ to a different religion. (Mitha 2003, 388)

This tells me so much about Indu’s approach to every aspect in her life and her work. For me the space that Indu creates through her dance is a sacred space. Here I must elaborate that Indu wouldn’t describe this space as “sacred”, but her goal is to create space for all schools of thought. For me this is what makes it sacred, as it can be secular, spiritual, or whatever one wants it to be, as up to the audience. While for Indu this space is secular, for the post-1971 generation her daughter Tehreema and myself, the space is sacred as it allows this multiplicity of interpretations and thoughts. She creates her work for multiple audiences. All of her work has this flavor though normally more subtly portrayed than in Islamabad kaa munqaddas darasht, where she states her stance for this inclusive space outright, as she is portraying a real life event. So when her male students enter this sacred space, almost all of them are from a small Christian community, which is an
interesting development in Indu’s work in the twenty-first century. First the tree, then the dancer, and finally the re-imagined city.
CONCLUSION

Choreographing Jihad

My “jihad” in the promotion and acceptance of dance in Pakistan is based on my belief that no art form worth its name is narrowly confined to any religion, faith, historical time or lifestyle. Art evolves like language. For example, Britons today do not easily understand the King James Bible, once considered a literary standard, or even speak “the King’s English” which was dinned into me in my school days.

Dance in Pakistan needs to be understood by people of our time; hence it must have understandable lyrics, gestures and costumes that hold meaning for us (my emphasis).

(Indu Mitha, excerpt from Interview for Newsline, Dawn March 2004)

The woman invoking the Islamic spirit of jihad for the survival of dance is none other than eighty two year old Pakistani dance teacher, choreographer Indu Mitha. For Indu’s jihad her tools are her dances, her choreographies. Her usage of the term Jihad here also subtly addresses the complexity of the term, firstly towards a non-violent internal and personal struggle and secondly she connects a word used in the Islamic context to connect to her work with a dance form struggling to
find its space within that context. Her choreographic vision as well as her struggle can be read in the above quote as Indu tactically, and creatively takes her primary dance form of bharata natyam forward in twenty-first century Pakistan, despite bharata natyam’s potent ability and inherited tainted history of a multiply refigured dance form, from a practice that straddled religious and secular performance context to a reformed Hindu dance form to a secular context. Indu also destabilizes the gender dynamics from the dances that she learned from her teachers pre-Partition. Though her style and training was in Kalakhetra bharata natyam she continues to select modern themes and unlike the repertoire she learned Indu choreographs non-domesticated female characters, for instance women not afraid to stand up for themselves, or issue of non-domestic sexuality, or breaking societal norms.

More importantly in the present Pakistani context of her dance Indu strives to unhinge her art form from the claim of any one religion, or one version of history. In this process she taps into concrete social processes (Harvey 2000, 184) that have existed for a long time but occluded in recent Pakistani history and I have zoomed into these processes in more detail. Thus in the process of this unhinging of her art form and her repertoire from alignment with any one religion or nation state politics Indu helps choreographs in and thus energizes this space which I call Space of Hope. It is not a utopian space but one that has a historical precedence and one can access this space through Indu’s life history and work.

The reason why Indu becomes the portal for this space is partly due to her unique liminal existence, from her different visual appearance and her ideas to her life’s work in dance Indu is in her words “perceived different”. In chapter four I elaborated on this with reference to her work with male dances from a marginalized Christian community from slums of Islamabad. The other reason Indu resides in a liminal space is unique to her generation who was born and grew up in a united Indian sub-continent and then had to live through Partition. Indu’s being and work is the
backbone of this entire dissertation and both reside in the in between or liminal spaces that Mufti argues is a most productive space to understand the aftermath of 1947 Partition on social and cultural institutions of the region. Indu’s critical biography thus helps me access the Space of Hope. In the field of poetry and text Pakistan’s national poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s work has the same subtle resistance and tactics from the liminal space. He is also from the same generation of artists as Indu--the generation of artists, poets who were born in the early twentieth century and lived and suffered directly through the trauma of 1947 Partition. Indu’s teachers Urza and Zohra Sehgal were also two similar examples, now only Zohra Sehgal is alive. I argue that this liminal space that is accessed through Indu’s life and work is like a prism through which one can access a variety of occluded histories and groups.

In the four chapters I discussed the forgotten shared spaces beyond religion and nation, the marginalized and occluded feminine space post martial law and Islamization decades of the 70s and 80s and the increasingly conscribed spaces of the minorities in the twenty-first century Post 9-11. The quote at the beginning of this section also reveals both the place of dance in Pakistani society today and of Indu’s activism for and through dance. For Indu there is an urgency to protect dance, especially classical dances in Pakistan, and to deal with the crucial issues of inclusivity that are responsible for its threatened extinction. Both are part and parcel of the same package and that comes down to choreographing an inclusive space that I discuss in chapter four, which she terms as her jibad in the quote above.

Due to this unique positionality of Indu’s life and work in Pakistan, they become foci to probe broader questions of the place of outliers, i.e. Muslims in India, and Non-Muslims and “non Pakistanis” in Pakistan (Post 1971), in the aftermath of the 1947 Partition of India. Choreographing (in) Pakistan: Indu Mitha, Dancing Occluded Histories in “The Land of the Pure” thus stages the untold history of these minority voices of classical dancers and musicians, and certain marginalized groups; in the
process, questions arise as to whether their marginal status are due to factors connected to the aftermath of Partition, or to a redundant pre-colonial baggage, or both. I would argue that it is both. Indu’s life history and repertoire allowed me to tie the different decades in the history of Pakistan with different imaginaries of the state. In this case the marginal dance form of bharata natyam’s journey in Pakistan with Indu allowed me to investigate the different imaginaries of the state at different moments of its history through the cultural production of that time. Indu’s work seen in light of the past of the dance form shows how practitioners of bharata natyam are bringing changes in the repertoire beyond the revival era nationalist agendas alignments. Instead of reinforcing the official agenda of the nation, as was the case with the revival era practitioners, Indu’s bharata natyam destabilizes the nation instead. Indu’s bharata natyam is problematic for both a Hinduized nation of India as well as her supposed Hinduness through her name, her dance form’s name and its temple history destabilizes the Islamic nationness of Pakistan. Indu’s bharata natyam is thus undoing both the post-colonial nations of India and Pakistan. Thus O’Shea’s call to consider bharata natyam as a “vehicle for imagining community” (2007, 103) urges me to ask an important question: Can Indu’s bharata natyam as a metaphor for the nation of Pakistan be the model for a shared South Asian identity and space?

Indu uses the terminology of jihad in the quote at the beginning of this section to make her point to counter what seems to be the dominant language of power in Pakistani society especially Post 1971, when Pakistan lost the eastern wing and Indian support supported this end. Pakistan by its insecurity complex via India has become now trapped into the Great Game and a complex and difficult relationship with the United States vis a vis it has become a victim of aftermath of US wars in this region. This has made Pakistan increasingly militarized national culture. The role of the army and now the growing tensions of the civil society with the army are reaching their climax from this year as the dynamic Civil Society slowly gains strength. What is crucial now for Pakistan in the twenty-first century is to disturb the comfort zone of the silent non-violent majority because
unfortunately most Pakistanis have become too tolerant of a narrow wahabi definition and representation of “Islam”. In this context firstly all non-Wahabi Muslims are threatened and obviously those that are clearly non-Muslims are easy to spot and target. This is the context in which Indu Mitha continues to dance, choreograph and raise her voice for issues that she feel strongly about, enough to also call it her Jihad.

She carries her jihad spirit to work for the advancement of a theater and dance department which was to start in Islamabad. Since 2001 Indu has been to set up the curriculum for the first ever Department of Drama and Theatre, with dance as a separate component of the program. This was a long process of meetings and proposal writing and commitment that Indu worked on along with a team of artists representing the different performing arts, Drama, theatre, television. The National College of the Arts (NCA) Islamabad branch was set up as a new offshoot in Islamabad, of the NCA Lahore an already established prestigious program for the Fine Arts, Architecture, and Photography. Even in the prestigious Lahore institute dance was never in the curriculum and Indu Mitha worked very hard with the team. Unfortunately after years of working on it but it all fell apart when the budget cuts resulted in the end of this department which was to be the first ever program on dance studies in Pakistan. Though this was very disappointing Indu is not one to cry over spilled milk. Indu carries on with her work dancing, teaching and choreographing, for constantly finding creative spaces to share her work and views. In 2010 I attended Indu’s recent guest appearance in a theatre production which was the first production under the umbrella of this Theatre and Dance Department. It was supposed to be the launch of the department. Indu played the part of “Haryalie Mai” the green mother in the comedy Cant Pay, Won’t Pay in August 2010.

326 The newly added Rawalpindi campus is “envisioned as a second campus” to the prestigious National College of the Arts, Lahore, according to their website (www.nca.edu.pk/intro.htm).

327 This comedy was an adaptation of Dario Fo’s work and was directed by Calire Pamment who was also heading the drama section of this department that unfortunately never came to be.
According to a UNDP report\textsuperscript{328}, 62\% of the population of Pakistan, is under 25 years of age, so basically a young country. This is an exciting time in Pakistan’s history, as the country can go in any direction from here, deeper down into its current dramas, or rise up to a new era. I would like to vote for the later, and sense new possibilities, estimating from the young generation of Pakistani writers, artists, musicians, actors, dancers, and creative people who are all ready and working towards a change. A Pakistani culture that moves past the old narratives, stories of hate, and dominance of defense in the culture, to a newly imagined place rich in regional culture and a plethora of voices that have long since been silenced.

I realize through my engagement with Indu’s life history and work of occluded histories, that these narratives were always right before my eyes. The veil was lifted as I struggled along my path to answer questions that started with the stigma and status of all the performing arts in Pakistan; worst which are the place of dance and the controversial figure of the nartaki. Pakistan’s Indic past is occluded, and also symbolic to me as Pakistan’s softer, feminine side! Pakistan gave her up in exchange of the Buddha, but now unfortunately even the Buddha is occluded; it’s all a matter of degrees. Indu’s feminine space is a non-violent, creative urging for a vision of a Pakistan as an integral part of South Asia (Farzana 2009, 210). Faiz, an occluded, Pakistani poet, creates that space through his poetry signaling to the composite culture that persists in the Urdu language, while Indu creates it through her dance repertoire. Indu reminds me of occluded histories and a need for a serious rethinking of what was hastily claimed and not claimed. One of Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s rare works in English it was written to accompany a documentary about this figure of the nartaki and a past that Pakistan has yet to claim in its entirety. Her being, her dance, her aura and her antiquity all call on an alternate, more comprehensive and complex history of present day Pakistan.\textsuperscript{329}

\textsuperscript{328} United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and International Labor Organization (ILO) report 2012.

\textsuperscript{329} See appendix 3 for the poem titled “The Unicorn and the Dancing Girl”.
I use the metaphor of the veil, not in the Western, post-colonial and Orientalist understanding of a veil before a harem, but as used in Sufi understanding and literature. It looks is something that is there that shields one from seeing the Beloved, the Divine. It looks very solid but actually as the seeker progresses in one’s path and is blessed veils are lifted, until a point comes that as Rumi says, “I was knocking on the door, and I realized I was knocking from inside” there was no veil as the Divine is within you. As the four veils of this dissertation are lifted, I find myself in submission to a deeper awareness, one that is an expansion of my understanding, from that first lesson of *salaam* from my dear teacher, Indu Mitha.

**FIGURE 14** Salaam at end of Islamabad Club performance of Indu’s students, 2010.

*Indu Mitha stands in the middle of the class at Mazmun-e-Shauq and I stand facing her mirroring her actions. It may not have been her intention, but I have been taught a deeper meaning of salaam. It is about forgiveness, and not simply tolerance but about inclusivity for all; not only those with similar beliefs, and appearance and group as you.*
AFTERWORD

Choreographing resistance—Feminine Space

Indu has been an active member of the Pakistani “Women Action Forum” (WAF) since the 1950s when she moved to Pakistan after Partition. I have discussed the gender dimensions of some of her dances in chapter three with reference to her bharata natyam repertoire, here I want to return to her kathak choreography baGhiice maaM or In the Park from chapter one, as recently Indu shared a new ending that she created for the piece but has yet to be performed. Like I mentioned in chapters one and four, this piece facilitated my introduction to Indu’s male students and later I also performed with them on stage for the Lahore Theatre Festival organized by the Rafi Peer Theatre. It is interesting to see a shift in Indu’s activism, and how it has become more and more pronounced. In the original ending of In the Park, as shared in chapter one, the girls must leave the park, following the entry of the boys, the “invaders”. Since then Indu’s friends from Women Action Forum (WAF) and others have objected to the ending and questioned why the girls had to leave the park. Indu shared with me that at that time she had thought this was a more realistic ending and also that this way the audience members would have more sympathy towards the girls. Now Indu has decided to make a new ending for this piece. In the new ending she has choreographed their return on a poem by a well-known Pakistani poet Habib Jalib, which I have translated from Urdu 330 below as:

In this time we are not helpless

Now we are no more helpless, like we were before—

   We remember all that you did to us

   It is your illusion that we are not awake

   We know how to make our own destinies

330 See Appendix 2 for the original Urdu poem.
We are not content with our fate behind a wall

You (men) do cruelties to us and expect us to treat you like our god

We are your equal partners not your devotees

Why should we live in the world like we are disabled

We have brains, we have knowledge, we are not ill

We know how to make our own destinies

We are not content with our fate behind a wall


It is the feminine space that Indu is choreographing which is related to the space of inclusivity. The seeds of an integrated culture were planted a long time ago, the seeds that the Bodhi represents, but the plant has not been nurtured. Some artist individuals, like Indu, are nurturing that plant secretly in certain private spaces. Now is the time to harvest that plant for all to share in its bounty. The sacred tree of Islamabad was burned but the roots remained. A new bud survived and found its way out of the darkness and into the light of the capital city of Islamabad. If nurtured with love and respect, one day it can grow into a new Bodhi tree for all the people of Pakistan to share.

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331 It seems common nowadays to refer to feminism as being expressed through an assumption of someone else’s (the disabled’s) “true” weakness, which is problematic.
APPENDIX 1

KAVITA BOLS IN MAHTAAB

mehmil maey xhamishii k laiаa-e-zulf maaеe дholie
khамoshi ke mehmil maey baith k Raat kee тareeki aeee
camkaey barushe-shab k motie vеe pyае pyае
Raat kee dulhan ke pyaе pyaе motie chamkee

(In the silence of the dark, beautiful night
Shine the ...............pretty stars like pearls)

аavat jaavat taal tale
аavat jaavat taal tale
lacak lacak lanT naa jaave
lacak lacak khisak khisak
kasak masak mohini muurat
sarak sarak sundar suurat
man mohat mahtaab
man mohat mahtaab
man mohat mahtaab
(The coming the going the rhythms
The coming the going the rhythms
flexible, flexible, afraid it make go back
flexible, flexible, (sound of dragging feet)
(no meaning .......
beautiful face)

qaafilaah teraa ravaаM bemannat-e-baange daraаb
goshe-insaan sun nabiiM saktaa terii aavaаz-e-pааk

Your caravan is going without an a bell to guide it ....
No human being can hear your pure voice...

(Indu’s sings)
aaвat bai jaавat bai caudaа dinnM meM caаd caадaа
badlii meM chup ke chup chupaa
shакal badal bai adal badal rааа ke rааа sarуап
raаt raаt har rаt rаtiili rаain rаain нaaзuk har nаshilii
paibai paibai aаi нaa наveli saаb pe jo нiklii ruuб ruuпaliir
raunak dekh laiаа scarhаали
raunak dekh laiаа kraаali
cauдbiirM kii jo rааt caRbii
njaааа dekh taаre ghabраае

(This second Kavita bols describes in rhythm the changing faces of the moon. First the new moon like a new bride her radiant beauty makes “Laila” the night feel shy and then also worrisome and jealous. And when the fourteenth day of the moon came and she was in full bloom the radiance made the stars worry too.)

Ghaazab bai phir terii nanhii see jaan Dartii bai

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(It's such a pity that still you little thing are afraid)

tamaam raat terii kaampi guzartii bai
(All night you spend shivering with fear)

thaRak, thaRak, dil thaRke
dhaRak, dhaRak, dar dhaRke
tiRkiT, tiRkaT, dbaarik, tiRkiT, taa traa ka dbaa [3 times]

(Kavita bol describing the sound of the beating of the heart of the moon in the bols of the tabla in the third line above repeated three times.)

kamar kaas xauf ke hai xatir-e-saibair tujh ko
daale haasn kii kyaa mil gaei xabar tujh ko

(The stars are afraid of the granduer of the moon as well as the approaching dawn
They know what is the end of beauty and that its nature is transitory)

ghaTne baRhne kaas samaa aamkoM ko dikhaataa hai tu
hai vatan teraa keidbar kis des ko jaataa hai tuu

[repeat 3 times]
APPENDIX 2

(Poem Translated in Conclusion)
APPENDIX 3

THE UNICORN AND THE DANCING GIRL

In Pakistan as elsewhere in Asia
And Africa time past is time present
And in the past — the past
Which neither man nor history remembers —
There was no time.
Only timelessness.
The timelessness of the city of dead
And the graves of nameless saints
With their tattered flags
Which never rallied anyone to any cause
And their earthen lamps which shed no
Light on the mysteries of human darkness.
The timelessness of the unicorn
Presiding over pots and pans
Over weapons and vanities
Of the city of dead
Who is not even a unicorn
Is not even a legend
For even a legend is a memory
And the memory is in time
But the past is timeless
Like the eternal snows of
Timeless mountains
The eternal sands
Of timeless deserts
And the waters
Of the timeless sea
And written within this eternity of silence
The music of time began
In the leap of a lonely spring
Out of the encrusted womb of a wilderness of rocks
The joyous limbs of the dancing girl
Defying the motionless unicorn
And dancing waters on their festival
March to the sea.
Thus time was born
And cities arose on the plains
Attracting an unending caravan
Of human feet arching in and
Out of the timeless mountains
Parthians, Bactrians, Huns and Scythians,
Arabs, Tartars, Turks, and White Men.
But as time unwound its first
thread
the unicorn which is the past
grabbed it in its blind hoofs
and spun it round and imprisoned it within itself.
And time became
The endless drone of the waterwheel
The creaking of the wooden cart
The hum of the spinning wheel
The closed spectrum of light and shadow
The heat and cold of the seasons.
Although men matched their strength
Against the wheel
To fight and create
Much that was good and beautiful
Buildings
Gardens
Paintings
Carpets
Ornaments
Music
But everything moved within
Its own remorseless orbit
Even the dance of the dancing girl
Imprisoned within the circular whirl
Of her own limbs
And the gaze of eager eyes in a close-set circle.
For the wheel was fate
And custom
And the will of the unknown powers
Which predestined all beauty
To death and decay after its span
And mighty cities to dust.
And small men gave up
The fight
And accepted the yoke
To circumambulate their
Allotted round of days
Like blindfold oxen.
And the wheel was fate
And the yoke was ‘karma’
And fear and want and pain
And withering of age
And death with its mercy
And the tyrant with no mercy in his heart.
Until the present
And then the striving and the strain
The sorrows and dreams and passions and yearnings
Of numberless beings
Over untold centuries
Snapped the yoke
And broke the wheel
To unleash an orgy of frenzied movement
The wheel clanking away on steel tracks
Speeding on metalled roads
Whirling on airfields
In giant factories
Explosives ripping up the timeless
Mountains to release power
Earthmovers ploughing through timeless sands to admit water
Men and women
Boys and girls
Unyoked from fate and ‘karma’, and
Custom and the dream of an unknown will
The joyousness of the dancing girl
Rippling in abandon through the young flesh
Of countless limbs
And the unicorn reduced
At last to a mere design on a fabric
A mere decoration on the wall.
And yet
Time present is still time past
In faces
In places
In custom and ritual and the grave of the nameless saint
In hunger and want and pain and the withering of age
The birth of time out of timelessness
Is beset like all births
With travail, and hope, and joy and apprehension.
And its birth in Pakistan as elsewhere in
The newly liberated countries of Asia
And Africa
Is as yet only a small flag of freedom
Raised against
The banne red and embattled host of
Fear and want and hunger and
Pain
And the death of human hearts.

[In the 1960s Faiz wrote this script in blank verse for a short documentary on Mohenjodaro. It was never produced.]


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