

DOCTORAL THESIS

Towards a British Natyam

Creating a 'British' classical Indian dance profession

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Towards a British Natyam
Creating a 'British' classical Indian dance profession

by

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Abstract

Towards a British Natyam considers what it takes to establish a ‘profession’ – through the specific lens of classical Indian dance in Britain.

My thesis is that classical Indian dance forms have not as yet been able to determine an autonomous professional field in Britain, governed by its own values and principles, or in Bourdieu’s terms, *doxa*. To permit the development of such a field, I argue for a critical examination of the frameworks – cultural, socio-economic and political - within which South Asian dancers in our contemporary era create their work. Honouring the call for decolonial work to ‘unmask and deconstruct the western hegemony’ in the field of humanities and other disciplines, my thesis unmasks and deconstructs systemic inequalities in the British cultural sector. In this light, the work to establish an autonomous field of South Asian dance in Britain is, I argue, inextricably linked with the wider and necessary work of decolonisation, decentring white supremacist modes of knowledge formation, and centring pluriversality in dance artistry. In making this case, my thesis contributes to the understanding of the impacts of cultural/racial stereotyping and labelling through the lens of dance.

Drawing on ethnography, social history and sociological theories I argue that the development of an autonomous professional field for classical Indian dance forms is essential both to prevent their fetishisation on one hand and their submersion within the dominant ‘technical habitus of Euro-American contemporary dance on the other. The work for this I suggest, requires a transformation of the ‘national cultural canon’ so as to allow the values, narratives and conventions of a multiplicity of art forms the space to thrive. Such a transformation will allow the flourishing not only of Indian classical dance forms and their practitioners but of every person who is thereby given a greater range of pathways towards fulfilment and meaning.

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Dedication

For all those who have worked towards a 'British Natyam'
Past, present and to come.

கற்றது கை மண் அளவு கல்லாதது உலகளவ

Kattradhu kai mann alavu. Kalladhadu ulugalavu

Avvaiyaar (Tamil woman poet)

What I know, is the size of a fistful of earth.
What I don't, the expanse of the spinning globe

(my translation, with thanks to Geetha Sridhar)

Towards a British Natyam

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Introduction

Flourishing or fragile? The contradictory context of classical Indian dance forms in Britain.

9th May 2015 saw the Grand Final of the first ever series of the televised competition the *BBC Young Dancer*, held at Sadler's Wells in London. A show loosely modelled on the *BBC Young Musician* launched in 1978, it aims to discover 'the UK's most gifted and dedicated dancers aged 16-20 in four categories; Ballet, Contemporary, Hip Hop and South Asian Dance.'¹ For this final, the winners from each category, together with two 'wildcards', performed in front of a 'judging panel made up of some of the biggest names from the dance world'.²

The choice of categories was inevitably contentious, but for the world of South Asian Dance,³ to be one of only four categories chosen by the BBC to represent British dance was momentous. Mira Kaushik, former Director (1989 – 2019) of Akademi in London, an organisation committed to the promotion of South Asian dance in Britain,⁴ felt that it was '... the best news for the position of South Asian dance in this country' (Kaushik, 2017, Interview 1). The selection of South Asian Dance was all the more significant thanks to the framing of the show, as a serious event with

¹BBC *Young Dancer* Website, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5Qt0hQdlMx4csFNtZCjvRG/history> (accessed 26.2.2019).

² Ibid.

³ I use both 'classical Indian dance forms' and 'South Asian dance' as collective terms to refer to the classical Indian dance styles of (primarily) bharatanatyam and kathak, but also odissi and kuchipudi. I use the latter term in contexts (such as the *BBC Young Dancer*) where this is the label use by the institution discussed. See below for a further discussion of these unsatisfactory collective groupings.

⁴ Akademi is the only organisation exclusively devoted to promoting South Asian dance in Britain. There are several other organisations promoting South Asian arts, but they promote both music and dance, or dance as one of several South Asian art forms.

strong and realistic links to the dance profession – unlike more spectacular or celebrity-driven dance talent shows like *The Greatest Dancer* or *So You Think You Can Dance*. The *Young Dancer* self-consciously considered ‘throughout the process...what the professional life of a dancer is like’, because ‘these young people will hopefully enter the professional world in a year or two’ (Hackett, BBC blog, 2015). This alignment with ‘the professional world’ is partly what made the inclusion of South Asian dance as a category both so important and so gratifying. To quote Kaushik again,

...all this time South Asian dance has been perceived to be a community activity. In this context, where it is put alongside ballet, contemporary dance and other forms, where professionals are working and in a field where professionals are aspiring to create professionals, the inclusion of South Asian dance is big and good news.

Kaushik, 2017, Interview 1

While this competition effectively elevates South Asian dance to a status comparable to that of ballet or Euro-American⁵ contemporary dance, a very little exploration betrays a different story. In 2015, while all 10 of the contemporary and ballet finalists were either enrolled in or about to commence specialist full-time training courses in their respective dance forms and had their sights on a professional dance career,⁶ the position for the South Asian dancers was much more equivocal. Of the five finalists, only one, Vidya Patel, was clear about pursuing dance as a career. Of the others, one was studying physiotherapy,⁷ one was studying Sports Science while hoping to ‘pursue [dance] further’, a third was studying Civil Engineering and a fourth was studying for A-Levels and went on to take up a degree in Dentistry.⁸ The situation for the second round of the

⁵ I thank dance artist Jane Chan for highlighting to me the importance of using this term rather than cementing the binaries of ‘East’ and ‘West’.

⁶ The career intentions and experience of all dance artists in the competition can be found on the BBC website. For the 2015 dance artists, these can be found here.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/3tRg7qMclgMJ0ZY4HBriQQS/2015-dance-artists> (accessed 10.12.2019)

⁷ This dance artist, Anaya Bolar, has subsequently decided to take up dance professionally.

⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/3y0fSYWMMHyg8hgryZk5n552/jaina-modasia> (accessed 26.2.2019); <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/fj5tZY8kFSv2w7gbbqK4qw/sivani-balachandran> (accessed 10.12.2019); Ranjan, personal communication, April 2018.

competition in 2017 was very similar.⁹ Again, all the contemporary and ballet dancers were engaged in or about to embark on full-time professional training. Of the South Asian dancers, two were enrolled in medical school and hoped to combine a career as a dancer with a career as a medic. The remaining three aspired to a career in dance, but their pathway to achieving this was far from clear.

There is still no vocational training school available for classical Indian dance forms in Britain (see chapter 3) despite efforts to create one, meaning that while the 2015 category winner Vidya Patel expressed a desire to pursue a ‘dance degree’ – she was not able to pursue a degree in her own style, kathak (at least in Britain), because there was no such course available.¹⁰ The *Young Dancer* 2017 category winner Shyam Dattani likewise voiced his intention to take a vocational qualification and train full-time. A year later he had enrolled in a Business Management degree, working overtime to maintain his dance practice while studying for his degree.¹¹

Even if such a course were to exist, in terms of subsequent employment opportunities, there remain very few companies in Britain that are able to offer dancers who have trained in classical Indian dance forms regular paid work. Shobana Jeyasingh’s and Akram Khan’s dance companies continue to be referenced as providing such opportunities.¹² However, while Jeyasingh’s earlier work was rooted in and explored the vocabulary of bharatanatyam (the dance form in which she herself trained), her choreographic interests have taken her work away from a focused exploration

⁹ Find information on the 2017 dance artists here <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/4BGhz5dvR804r5hPK10tzZq/2017-dance-artists> (accessed 10.12.2019).

¹⁰ It should be noted however that she has worked continuously and very successfully as a professional dance artist since this point even without such additional training, featuring in works choreographed by Richard Alston (*An Italian in Madrid*, 2016), Gary Clarke and Shobana Jeyasingh and in commissions by Akademi and Sampad. In Akademi’s contemporary dance production *The Troth* (2018) (choreographed by contemporary dance choreographer Gary Clarke) Patel was one of two classical Indian dance trained performers.

¹¹ Shyam Dattani, Personal communication, 6.3.2019.

¹² At Navadisha 2016 for example, a senior ACE officer put forward these companies when I raised with him the problem of employment opportunities as an issue (Fieldnotes, 20.5.2016).

of this form, and the company now employs predominantly Euro-American contemporary dance trained practitioners.¹³ Khan's work has a more explicit connection to kathak, the dance form in which he received his early training. His website describes the company as 'embracing an artistic vision that both respects and challenges Indian kathak form and contemporary dance.'¹⁴ In practice, however, most of his dancers are again, primarily Euro-American contemporary dance trained. In fact, in 2019, there were only three companies that could be argued to represent classical Indian dance forms operating within the comparative security of being Arts Council national portfolio organisations (NPOs).¹⁵ Two of these, Aakash Odedra Company¹⁶ and Sonia Sabri Company, frequently tour solo shows, thereby limiting the need to employ more dancers, and Odedra's first ensemble piece, *#JeSuis*, used exclusively Euro-American contemporary dance trained practitioners. The third company, Balbir Singh Dance Company, like Khan's, has a dual dance focus on kathak and contemporary dance and again uses at least as many Euro-American contemporary as classically Indian trained dancers. Thus, while for Euro-American contemporary trained and ballet dancers, excellence in the competition can lead to career opportunities (2017 Competition winner Nafisah Baba, for example, was subsequently offered a role as guest artist in Phoenix Dance Company's production of the *Windrush*), such opportunities are limited for classical Indian dance practitioners because of the lack of training schools or dance companies to

¹³ In the Company's description of its work, there is no reference to a particular interest in South Asian dance forms. Rather, the company self-defines as 'restless, inquisitive and intrepid', taking its inspiration from 'the complexities and contradictions of the world around us' <https://www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk/about/> (accessed 1.10.19). It is difficult to see what more Jeyasingh needs to do to show that, while she may draw on bharatanatyam when her exploration takes that direction (for example, she used bharatanatyam and odissi dance artist Sooraj Subramaniam in works such as *Material Men* (2015), *Material Men Redux* (2017) and *Bayadere – The Ninth Life* (2017)), this is no longer her primary interest.

¹⁴ <https://www.akramkhancompany.net> (accessed 1.10.2019).

¹⁵ Thus, Aakash Odedra's Company emphasises its specialism in 'South Asian dance' (<http://www.aakashodedra.co.uk/about-us/> (accessed 1.10.2019). Sabri's Company self-defines as 'presenting Kathak dance in a contemporary context' (<https://www.sscsco.org.uk> (accessed 1.10.2019). Balbir Singh's Company, like Khan's, emphasises a focus on two dance forms – kathak and contemporary: 'Creating dynamic dance through a synthesis of Kathak, live music and contemporary dance' (<https://www.balbirsinghdance.co.uk/about/> accessed 1.10.2019). There are many more companies that work with classical Indian dance forms (particularly bharatanatyam and kathak), including Urja Desai Thakore's *Pagnav*, Nina Rajarani's *Sristhi*, Amina Khayyam Dance Company, Seeta Patel Dance and Kamala Devam Dance Company. However, all these companies continue to operate within the precarity of project-based funding.

¹⁶ Aakash Odedra Company became an NPO in 2018 originally under the name Leicester Dance Theatre.

offer them. Kathak dancer Vidya Patel has had continuous employment since her success in the *Young Dancer* competition, but a significant part of this employment has been as a guest kathak artist for Euro-American contemporary dance companies or as a kathak dancer within contemporary dance works. While South Asian dance benefits from the profile and the kudos of being an equal fourth professional dance category alongside ballet, contemporary dance and hip-hop, the reality behind the dancers sharing the stage space in the finale is one of very different levels of opportunity, infrastructure, visibility and acceptance.

As this thesis shows, the story of the emerging professionalisation of South Asian dance, or of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, is one in which contradictions such as those seen with the *BBC Young Dancer* are pervasive. South Asian dance is sufficiently significant to be selected as one of only four categories chosen to represent British dance and yet there is no vocational training school in classical Indian dance forms for the young dancers it showcases. The dance forms have received considerable mainstream recognition: Akram Khan, a choreographer whose roots are in the classical Indian dance style kathak, is considered one of Britain's "leading triumvirate of choreographers" (Jennings, 2015: np);¹⁷ in 2006, the classical bharatanatyam artist, teacher and choreographer Nina Rajarani won the Place prize, "Europe's most prestigious award for choreography" (Lim, 2006: np) for a piece rooted 'completely in bharatanatyam and Carnatic music' (Rajarani on Manch UK, 14.05.2020); a growing number of members of the South Asian dance world have been honoured for their contribution to dance in Britain.¹⁸ And yet there remain very few companies to offer young dancers employment.

¹⁷ This characterisation of Khan as a top British choreographer is widely accepted – he is referred to elsewhere as Britain's most famous choreographer and is listed as one of three named 'world class artists' in the Arts Council report 'Dance and the New Portfolio'. The others are contemporary choreographers Wayne McGregor and Hofesh Schechter.

¹⁸ These have been Queen's honours, somewhat ironically awarding the recipients varying degrees of authority in relation to the British Empire (Order of the British Empire, Member of the British Empire, Commander of the British Empire and British Empire Medal). Recipients include: Ram Gopal, Nilima Devi, Shobana Jeyasingh, Mira Kaushik, Akram Khan, Naseem Khan, Nina Rajarani, Piali Ray, Bisakha Sarker, Sunita Golvala, Geetha Upadhyaya, Sujata Banerjee, Pratap Pawar, Pushkala Gopal, Vikas Kumar, Chitra Sundaram, Anand Bhatt, Aakash Odedra.

Given this status quo, it is perhaps hardly surprising that although hundreds of students each year attend classes in classical Indian dance forms (see chapter 3) and undertake examinations held either by Imperial Society for Training in Dance (ISTD) or by their own institution, there remain very few who take up dance as a career. A lack of vocational training means that companies that might be interested in employing South Asian dancers struggle to find dancers trained to a high standard due to lack of supply.¹⁹ Younger students who might consider taking up a course in South Asian dance are put off by the lack of obvious career progression due to the small number of companies, and therefore the apparent lack of demand. The sector is thus caught up in the archetypal ‘vicious circle’.

In this way, despite the high profile of sector members, and the influence the sector has undoubtedly had on the wider world of British dance, South Asian dance in Britain remains in many ways a fragile and tentative entity. Almost 50 years after researcher and arts policy advisor Naseem Khan wrote her influential book *The Arts that Britain Ignores* in 1976 (a work that highlighted the vast array of cultural activity that took place in Britain, unfunded and largely unacknowledged) and despite the Arts Council England’s explicit commitment to cultural diversity for over 30 years, many classical Indian dancers still feel that classical Indian dance is ‘not what is wanted in the UK’ (cited in Gorringe, Jarrett-Macauley and Srivastava 2018: 35). This study has at its heart these contradictions - the tension between a sector that apparently flourishes but still feels ignored; between the numbers of children up and down the country who flock to attend classical Indian dance classes and the handful who go on to make it a career; between the perception of

¹⁹ Jeyasingh observed back in 1993, ‘One of the greatest challenges I face every year is recruiting dance artists’ (Jeyasingh in Brinson 1993: 56). In 2021, the situation has shifted, but not so very much. Dance artist and choreographer Amina Khayyam comments: ‘As I start to make a transition from performing to ‘choreography’, I find myself in a dilemma. I have at least five years of work ahead, and the issue for me is that I haven’t been able to find dancers that are a good fit for my work. Though dancers are trained well in kathak, yet they are not versatile and are too hung up on their training and relationship with their ‘Gurus’ (Khayyam personal communication 21.5.21). Dance artist and choreographer Seeta Patel feels similarly. For her, it is not only a question of the calibre of dance artists, but of their availability to commit for a touring project – ‘there are good dancers coming up...but without availability to work in the way I need – i.e 8 consecutive weeks’ (Patel, personal communication, 2019). Tellingly, for her 2019 ensemble production of *Rite of Spring*, 4 of the 6 dance artists in the ensemble were recruited from outside Britain.

some that 'British dance is defined by its diversity' (Wayne McGregor, *BBC Young Dancer* Final 2019, 18.5.2019, BBC 2) and the perception of others, as evidenced by the dancers cited above, that Britain's dance culture remains essentially homogenous.

The study

Treading carefully amidst the dreams of young classical Indian dance practitioners reaching for a viable working life in dance, the key questions that have driven this research are: how far and in which ways have classical Indian dance forms established a professional field in Britain? What are the factors (infrastructural and ideological) that have helped or hindered its development? Importantly, what steps might be needed to make its position more secure?

These overarching questions necessarily summon a number of others. What does it mean to be a professional? To be a professional dancer? To be a professional classical Indian dancer – in Britain? Who determines what counts as a 'good' standard and how should this be attained? In a world that increasingly demands what choreographer and dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster calls the 'hired body' – one that 'does not display its skills as a collage of discrete styles, but rather homogenizes all styles beneath a sleek, impenetrable surface' (Foster 1997: 255), what does this mean for the practitioner of classical Indian dance forms? Is it possible for practitioners of these dance forms to find a niche in the world of British professional dance on their own terms, without being reshaped within the hungry eclecticism of Euro-American contemporary dance?

My study therefore considers the what, the where, the who and the how of the professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms in Britain. It necessarily also rubs up against a further question: the why. Why professionalise? Who is to say that this is a desirable outcome? This question is especially pertinent where professionalisation involving engaging with the wider world of professional British dance arguably imposes as many constraints as it offers advantages.

As an illustration, take *Shivobam* (lit. ‘I am Shiva’), choreographed by Akshay Prakash and Prakash Yadagudde in 2017, a solo bharatanatyam recital performed at the Bhavan Centre in July 2017 to a packed auditorium. The audience members were overwhelmingly of South Asian heritage (I was one of fewer than 10 audience members of non-South Asian heritage in an audience of about 300, Fieldwork notes July 2017).²⁰ Several in the audience displayed the depth of their connection to and knowledge of the codes and conventions governing bharatanatyam by keeping the *talam* with their right hands; others shook their heads or ‘tutted’ in appreciation.²¹ The artists in the meantime were evidently likewise enjoying themselves. Performing for an audience whom they knew would have a basic level of competence with their artforms’ conventions and codes allowed them to take the space to play with their forms. The mridangist (M. Balachander) excelled himself in conjuring percussion accompaniments to Prakash’s *abhinaya* – the stumbling walk of an old man; a swarm of bees; the sudden and incandescent anger of Shiva. Dancer and percussionist riffed with each other – throwing each other suggestions to be run with or discarded in that moment. Watching the performance therefore involved the thrill not only of strong technique and narrative, but of risk. These performers were figuratively throwing each other juggling balls. Would they keep them up in the air, or would one drop? The context of the Bhavan permitted such play and improvisation, leading to a 45-minute *varnam* (something performers confess to avoiding for inexperienced audiences).²² What would happen to this playfulness and invention if the piece had to tour to theatres less elastic on time frame? What is the impact on the improvisation that is the creative

²⁰ The Mountbatten Hall has a 294-person capacity.

²¹ Where in the Anglo-European context shaking one’s head and ‘tutting’ connotes disapproval, in the Indian context shaking one’s head, and a particular pattern of ‘tutting’ can often signal intense enjoyment or appreciation. These are just a couple of examples of the contingency of embodied language, which I discuss further in chapter 4.

²² The bharatanatyam dance artist Uma Venkataraman, for example tends to choose shorter pieces for performances in Britain (‘I try not to do a single piece that is longer than say 15 minutes’) on the basis that ‘audiences may not necessarily be prepared for sitting through a 45-minute *varnam* – they might be uncomfortable...’ (Interview, 6 March 2018). In adopting this approach Venkataraman adopts the same strategy as that employed by artists such as Ram Gopal and Uday Shankar back in the 1930s and 40s. To make his performances more accessible to Euro-American audiences, Gopal ‘prune[d] the traditional dances of all repetitive movement’ (1957: 55). See David 2001 for more on Gopal’s approach.

heart of the *varnam* when needing to honour technicians' contracts for a specific time period or when considering an audience mindful of parking meters or the time of their last train home?

The performance of *Shivoham* started late. Equally, several of the audience members arrived 'late'. Would a prompt start have breached the implicit contract between the performers and the audience established for this particular event? There were long speeches during the interval which from one perspective were 'unprofessional'. From another perspective, however, these speeches that customarily honour the performers (including the musicians) and their lineage (by naming their gurus) are fulfilling an important aspect of expected etiquette. To not do so could be seen as equivalent to failing to present a cast list – or in other words, could be construed as highly '*un*-professional'. If 'professionalisation' is not to mean adherence to a culturally arbitrary set of rules, it is clearly vital to establish what in fact it does mean, which will allow a better understanding of whether or not it is important.

Through a discussion of this specific case study of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, this study raises wider questions about what it means to professionalise an art form; about how art forms travel, how they are transmitted and transformed; about how far art forms are tied to or transcend a particular national identity. This in turn feeds in to further-reaching discussions about migration and identity, about universalism and particularism in art forms, and about the endeavour to resist cultural homogenisation while avoiding separatism.

In 2003, dance scholar Christopher Bannerman commented, echoing the findings of the Leverhulme funded South Asian Dance in Britain report (Grau 2001),

Of course, there are barriers to the continued development of South Asian dance in Britain. One of these is the lack of a school for professional training and, as a result of this, the lack of a clear pathway of professional opportunity. This will continue to be an inhibiting factor until proper provision, mirroring that available for ballet and contemporary dance, is established.

The following year, a memorandum submitted to the British Parliament by the South Asian Dance Alliance as part of the 6th report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, made this point a parliamentary concern:

A serious barrier to the continued development of South Asian dance in Britain is the lack of a school for professional training and, as a result of this, the lack of a clear pathway of professional opportunity.

Memorandum submitted by the South Asian Dance Alliance, April 2004²³

The question that above all propels this doctoral research is why, almost 20 years after this matter was raised in parliament and despite the talent in the sector, the energy of the agencies, the commitment of teachers, and the (overall) goodwill of the Arts Council²⁴ are we still in this position? Indeed, the issue was highlighted far earlier. Naseem Khan wrote in her 1976 report that

A school of Indian classical music and dance could have many advantages, not least of providing a recognised standard of tuition...a central institute ...would be able to train teachers, set standards and act as a focus of interest for Indian music and dance.

Khan 1976: 64

And even in 1976, Khan observed that ‘people in the field have talked *for years* of the value of a well-run, demanding and disciplined music and dance school that could provide a high standard of tuition’ (ibid. my emphasis).

It is easy to point fingers, and many in the sector do point fingers. The lack of progress is attributed to Asian parents and their unwillingness to support a child’s choice to pursue a career in the arts (Courtney Consulting 2021: 37); to the fractious relationship of the dance agencies accused of

²³ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmcomeds/587/4051105.htm> (accessed 10.6.2021).

²⁴ In 2018, for example, South Asian dance forms were explicitly named as a priority in ACE corporate strategy. I modify my reference to ‘goodwill’ because of the constraints that restrict any policy based on ‘good will’ without attention to systemic change – as this thesis discusses.

pursuing their own agendas at the expense of a vision for the wider sector (Courtney Consulting 2021: 80, 81); to the lack of commitment among dancers accused of a sense of entitlement and a lack of preparedness for hard work (Courtney Consulting 2021: 104); to the Arts Council and the marginalisation of classical in favour of ‘innovative’ dance work (Courtney Consulting 2021: 85; Kedhar 2020).

There may be an element of truth in each of these accusations or explanations, but none of them represents the whole story. In 2016, I attended a major sector conference organised by Sampad Arts in partnership with New Dimensions Arts Management, *Navadisha 2016*. At this conference I experienced both the excitements and the frustrations of a sector which has come so far and has so much to offer, and yet in some ways remains stuck with the same challenges and questions it faced when it made its first steps to anchor itself in Britain. How do we ensure high-quality training - and who determines what this is? How do we produce work with a sufficient appeal to tour widely and sustain the costs and demands of touring without compromising the artistic and aesthetic integrity of our forms? As I shared in the highs and lows of the conference, immersed in common exhilaration and indignation, a part of me – the part that had enrolled as a doctoral student - took a more observant approach. If only the sector could have access to that information – to the stories of the journeys of other dance forms, of the wider narrative of migration and diaspora; if it could remember so much that seemed forgotten of even relatively recent battles and victories; if it could understand the way it has been positioned by the history of colonialism (Thobani 2017; Purkyastha 2017) – could this provide some sort of self-understanding to provide it with the clarity and the determination to move forward? And if so, could my research help provide this information?

It was and remains a lofty ambition, and yet this is my hope. This is because my interest in this field, in its thriving and surviving, is not only academic, it is personal. I address this below, considering my personal investments in the field as part of a broader discussion of my

methodology. First, however, I outline my theoretical framework, and the place my work takes in the existing literature on South Asian dance forms in Britain.

The theoretical framework: Squaring decolonisation with Bourdieu

This thesis, as discussed above, is about dancers and their work – how they prepare themselves for work, how they find work, and importantly, how their work is valued. As such, my study focuses less on the specific dance pieces that a dancer might perform and more on why they decide to perform what they do; less on individual dance companies and more on why it is that certain dancers and dance companies receive more attention than others; on why within the broader landscape of dance in Britain, certain companies thrive while others languish.

My study falls therefore across the areas of dance studies, cultural studies and sociology, and draws on scholarship in all three areas. In considering the representation and reception of art forms originating from a former colony (India) within the context of a formerly colonising power (Britain), this thesis has swiftly and inevitably come up against the continued power imbalances that are the legacy of colonisation. It is therefore also necessarily situated within the growing discourse around decolonisation. Indeed, while my discussion of ‘professionalisation’ takes its starting point from sociologists of profession (Ackroyd 2016; Brante 1988; Evetts 2013, 2014; Wilensky 1964), it soon becomes evident, as I point to above, that when discussing the professionalisation of South Asian dance forms in Britain, what is important is not so much *what* might be considered professional but *who* determines what this is. A significant factor in both facilitating and recognizing the ‘professionalisation’ of South Asian dance forms rests, I argue, not in anything the sector itself can or should do, but on the need for the wider British dance (and cultural) sector to recognize that there are ‘many professionalisms’.

In making this argument I build (within the dance studies context) particularly on the work of Anusha Kedhar (2020), Avanthi Meduri (2008 a and b, 2010, 2020), Royona Mitra (2015, 2017), Prarthana Purkyastha (2017, 2020), Priya Srinivasan (2012) and Sitara Thobani (2017) (discussed below) as well as on broader work on decolonisation by Paulo Freire (2017), Achille Mbembe (2009, 2010), Walter Mignolo (2007), Anibal Quijano (2007), Edward Said (1995) [1978], and - particularly in relation to the British context - Paul Gilroy (2000, 2009) and Stuart Hall (1997, 1999). Part of the work of decolonisation rests on exposing 'the primal significance of cultural conflict and its relation to political processes' (Gilroy 2009: 671), which entails a critique of that perception of multiculturalism which presents 'economic, social, cultural, and political differences ...organized laterally or combined like the slices of a circular cake' (Gilroy 2009: 672), without recognising the inequities that favour one set of cultural practices over another. For this critique and its relation to the British context, in addition to the authors named above, I have drawn on artist and activist Rashheed Araeen (2011) and cultural theorists Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon (1995).

My work has also become increasingly rooted, in ways I did not anticipate, in the sociology of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002). Since, not to put too fine a point on it, the theoretical model of a dead white man may not seem an obvious starting point from which to theorise South Asian dance in Britain, I will briefly explain both why I found myself drawn to his thinking and why I feel it provides a helpful and appropriate frame for this study. Though Bourdieu himself resisted biography, his work is nonetheless usefully contextualised by reference to his personal circumstances. While he rose to the highest echelons of French academia, he was raised in a small French peasant village by a postal worker father who never completed his schooling and a mother who left school at 16 (Friedman 2016a). He never forgot his origins and within his acquired sphere of academic privilege, battled with a sense of un-ease all his life (ibid.). This

apparent poster-boy of meritocracy perceived all too clearly what he understood as the fallacies of this ideology, and the philosophical underpinning provided it by Rational Action Theory (RAT).

For Bourdieu a serious problem with RAT was its ahistoricism:

...this narrow, economist conception of the “rationality” of practices ignores the individual and collective history of agents through which the structures of preference that inhabit them are constituted in a complex temporal dialectic with the objective structures that produced them and which they tend to reproduce.

Bourdieu 1992: 123

He vehemently resisted philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of the ‘original project’, which he read as ‘this sort of free and conscious act of self-creation whereby a creator assigns to himself his life’s designs’ (Bourdieu 1992: 133). His sociology is premised therefore on a profound recognition of the structural limitations on an individual’s choice and ability for self-fulfillment. Against the meritocratic conviction that ‘the best will make it’, and despite his own phenomenal success in this respect, Bourdieu reminds us again and again of the limits of unconscious, unacknowledged and unspoken structures of domination that seat themselves insidiously (or to follow Foster (2009: 7), in-sinew-ously) into our very musculature. Yet this recognition is not a counsel of despair. On the contrary, Bourdieu’s repeated summons to reflexivity urge us to examine our unexamined thoughts and practices as a way of contesting a dominant culture, which, though tending to inertia, remains a ‘site of struggle’, a state of ‘no more than a temporary equilibrium, a moment in the dynamics through which the adjustment between distributions and incorporated or institutionalized classifications is constantly broken and restored’ (Bourdieu 1990: 141). Before the Black Lives Matters campaigners brought the importance of such recognition and questioning to the fore, Bourdieu is urging us to be ‘woke’.

Bourdieu's commitment to the use of his theoretical concepts as tools, evolving in response to their use (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), has meant that they possess a malleability which allows their use in ways that he himself did not envisage (Thatcher et al. 2016). The now ubiquitous spread of his concepts of 'social' and 'cultural capital', for example, in itself points to their value and of how, whatever the limitations of his framework, it remains 'enormously good for thinking with' (Jenkins, cited in Wainwright et al 2006: 553). His constant probing into structures of domination, particularly those so 'rooted in our collective unconscious that we no longer even see [them]' and '... so in tune with our expectations that [they] become hard to challenge....' (Bourdieu 1998: np), has meant that I have found his theoretical tools of great help in the attempt to radically 'unmask and deconstruct the western hegemony' in the field of humanities and other disciplines (Mbembe 2010: np.). His emphasis on embodiment meanwhile, through his concepts of *habitus* and *hexis* (see chapter 4), make him especially useful when considering the embodied art of dance. While Bourdieu's own work did not focus much attention on issues of race and ethnicity, giving greater attention to questions of class (1984) and gender (2001), as sociologist Derron Wallace remarks, despite this, 'his concepts have long been used to interpret the outcomes of racial, ethnic and class minorities' (2016: 38). Thus 'perhaps he has more to say on issues of race and ethnicity than we give him credit for'.²⁵ The twin focus in his work on the use of his theoretical tools as firstly, inherently malleable and intended to be adapted to circumstance and secondly, a means to reveal structures of domination, is in part why they have been used so productively by more recent theorists such as Sara Ahmed (2007), Ghassan Hage (2000) and Wallace (2016). These writers bring his concepts into the twenty-first century and into the work of decolonisation and the recognition of the violence inherent in colonialism's 'laws of race' (Mbembe 2010: np). As the focus of this thesis moves from the tensions within the concept of professionalism associated with

²⁵ Derron Wallace, interviewed on *Thinking Allowed A Special Programme on Pierre Bourdieu*, BBC Radio 4, June 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07gg1kb>. I am indebted to Wallace and all the contributors to the excellent volume *Bourdieu: The Next Generation* (2016) in helping me to grapple with and reach a deeper understanding of Bourdieu.

class and income to the related yet distinct tensions associated with ethnicity and race, my work draws more on Bourdieu as reflected and refracted through these more recent thinkers.

The place of this work within broader scholarship on South Asian dance in Britain

There is a growing canon of perceptive and detailed work looking at the evolving shape of South Asian dance (and specifically classical Indian dance forms) in Britain, in part fuelled by the noted powers of self-reflection and articulation of dancers in the sector.²⁶ This work covers a range of areas, discussing everything from the pioneers who practised classical Indian dance forms in Britain (David 2001, 2010c; Purkayastha 2012) to the specific contribution of individual dancers, companies or institutions (Banerjee 2014; Kedhar 2011; Meduri 2008a; Mitra 2015). Over the years, a growing number of articles based on meticulous research on specific areas have helped to open a window onto the practice of these dance forms in Britain, considering the performance of dance within the temple (David 2005b, 2010b, 2012); the creation of a classical Indian dance faculty within the Imperial Society for Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) and its impact on pedagogy (Prickett 2004, 2007); the place of these dance forms in relation to the ongoing debates around multiculturalism and identity (Kolb 2018; Meduri 2008 a and b; 2020; Mitra 2015, 2017; Purkayastha 2015, 2019). This research has served as an essential resource and springboard for my thesis.

Though lacking the depth of a sustained argument, a collection of essays forming a special edition of the journal *Choreography and Dance* - Alessandra Lopez y Royo Iyer's *South Asian Dance, The British Experience* (1997b) - provide a useful overview of the sector for anyone new to the field, including a fascinating historical account by Naseem Khan. My examination of training (chapter 3) draws

²⁶ The nature and the history of classical Indian dance forms have meant that the field has a disproportionate number of dance artist/academics or dance artists-turned-academics. When a friend from outside the sector warmly observed how unique it must be for me to combine such a depth of practical knowledge of the art form with academic rigour, I found myself wryly reflecting that on the contrary, within our sector this is a norm. I think it is true to say that the majority of academics working on classical Indian dance forms within Dance or Dance Studies programmes are or have also been dance artists.

on another chapter in this volume (Grau 1997), which presents a comprehensive survey of available training in South Asian Dance in Higher Education in the late 1990s, as well as on articles by David (2003; 2013a) and Prickett (2004, 2007). Prickett (2004) looks at Akademi's work with the ISTD and David (2013a) considers the faculty's subsequent name change from the South Asian dance to the Classical Indian Dance Faculty (CIDF). A history of the CIDF by faculty member Chitra Sundaram (2014) commissioned by ISTD for their website has provided essential background and context.

Avanthi Meduri's set of articles (2004, 2008 a and b, 2010, 2012, 2020) on a variety of aspects of the sector collectively provide a body of work that has helped to position my study. Meduri (2008 a & b) presents a detailed look at Akademi, focussing on the decision in 1997 to change its name from the National Academy of Indian Dance (NAID) to Akademi, South Asian Dance in the UK. She also considers the politics around the emergence of the problematic label 'South Asian dance' and some of the (continuing) arguments about its use. Though brief, Christopher Bannerman's (2003) summary of South Asian dance in Britain written for the South Asian Diaspora Arts Archive has served as a clear record of the sector's achievements (at least until 2003) – a record I have often returned to, to remind myself of what is critical when otherwise getting swamped by data. Janet O'Shea's (2007) *At Home in the world: Bharatanatyam on the global stage* has helped to place the specific case of classical Indian dance practice in Britain in a global context.

Five longer works have proved of particular relevance to this study, with its focus on professionalisation and what this might mean. These are Andrée Grau's report - *South Asian Dance in Britain, Negotiating Identity through Dance* (2001); Priya Srinivasan's *Sweating Saris, Indian Dance as Transnational Labour* (2012); Stacey Prickett's book *Embodied Politics* (2013a); Sitara Thobani's *Dancing on Empire's Stage* (2017) and Anusha Kedhar's *Flexible Bodies* (2020). Grau's report uses the three central themes of institutionalisation, aesthetics and identity to analyse the position of South Asian dance in Britain. Grau makes several important observations that I pick up on and explore

further in this work. She highlights the conflicted understandings of professionalism, in particular ‘the difference between professionalism as an approach to artistic practice and professionalism as belonging to the economic realm’ (2001: 64). In terms of institutionalisation, she considers the impact of differing institutional self-definitions and priorities on the development of the dance forms, contrasting the approaches taken specifically by Akademi, South Asian Dance in the UK and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Grau’s attention to how ‘ideology, economics and aesthetics are inter-related’ (2001: 71) is a theme I pursue throughout this thesis.

Priya Srinivasan’s *Sweating Saris*, in highlighting dance as labour in its sweaty and stained corporeality, together with the historical alignment of ‘Americanness’ with a white ‘modern dance’ (deliberately distanced from its ‘Oriental’ ancestry) has proved a rich resource for my work. While Srinivasan’s focus is the geographic and political context of the United States, many of her observations hold equally true for the British context. Her discussion of the way that Indian dance was deliberately separated from the American modern dance project in the 1940s, paving the way for ‘Indian dance to emerge as an ethnic minority form’ (2012: 23), performed discreetly and politely by the model Asian American minority, has informed my argument particularly in chapter 3, where I discuss a similar Othering of Indian dance forms within Britain. Her attention to the ephemerality and movement within dance, which ‘destabilizes fixed notions of identity’ and ‘challenges monolithic understandings of citizenship’ (2012: 10), has informed my perception of how we might construct Britishness. Finally, her interweaving of the personal and the discursive; the attention to sweat and sound with an understanding of how the intimate labour of the body shapes and is shaped by the broader currents of political power and policy, has inspired my own attempts to imbue the personal with the political, and the political with the personal.

Situated within a wider discussion of how dance can disrupt and challenge the status quo, effecting or suggesting change through bypassing or making use of powerful institutions, one chapter of

Stacey Prickett's book examines South Asian dance practices as 'diasporic forms ...firmly situated in the British dance ecology' (2013a: 9). The chapter provides a detailed account of the achievements of the sector, in terms of training, performance and institutionalisation, looking at its steps towards professionalisation, and the way in which it has worked with mainstream funding bodies and other institutions to broaden its accessibility and 'influence the wider dance ecology' (2013a: 185). While I build on Prickett's work, drawing on the research work both of this chapter and of the other articles detailed above, my reading of the place of South Asian dance forms in Britain is rather less optimistic, as I discuss later.

Sitara Thobani's work looks at the colonial discourse that has shaped both the relocation of classical Indian dance forms from temples to theatres within India in the beginning of the 20th century, and their subsequent relocation to the diaspora. Focusing particularly on classical Indian dance in the British diaspora, her analysis reveals the parallels between the ways in which South Asian dance in Britain aligns itself with Eurocentrism and the way in which the earlier reconstruction of the dance forms in India aligned itself with British Victorian values and priorities. She presents an incisive analysis of the tensions within the sector and of how these have been shaped and determined by orientalist and nationalist readings of these dance forms. Her work highlights the accumulation of binaries that align the traditional, the classical and the 'community' on one side (often most prominently championed by women) and the innovative, the contemporary, and the 'professional' on the other (a sphere in which men play a disproportionately significant role). Thobani's work is important in highlighting the role played by 'the cultural politics of colonialism on the transnational present' (2017: 22) of classical Indian dance forms, which continue to be read in ways that emphasise their correspondence with 'religiosity, sensuality, antiquity and tradition'. I am interested particularly in her contention that 'the temporal injunction to 'be contemporary' ...serves to produce an evolutionary schema' which presents a 'progression'

from a 'static culture (Indian classical dance)' towards a 'dynamic modernity (Contemporary South Asian dance)' (2017: 30) and how this plays out in the world of professional performance.

Anusha Kedhar's monograph *Flexible Bodies* (2020) which explores and challenges the 'presumed naturalness and expectation of dancers' flexibility (2020: 2), including, particularly for South Asian dancers in Britain 'the flexibility to perform both South Asianness and Britishness, to be simultaneously exotic and legible, particular and universal, different and accessible, other and not other' (2020: 3) has been a tremendous resource. I am indebted to Kedhar in particular in appreciating the challenges that the demand for the 'flexible' or 'versatile' dancer place on classical Indian dancers seeking to work in Britain, and for her cogent positioning of British South Asian dance within Britain's wider economic story.

Moving away from academic texts, in-house histories and reports from several of the organisations studied have provided essential research background, together with reports by arts organisations such as the Arts Council and One Dance UK. These include a number of Akademi's and Sampad's conference records together with records from a significant conference organised by the Centre for Indian Classical Dance in Leicester (CICD), *Moving On* (Menski 2011). Akademi, Sampad and CICD have also published in-house histories: *Akademi, a Retrospective* (an online resource), *The Sampad Story* (Bashir, 2010) and *Karman* (Brown and Menski 2012). These are primarily celebratory documents, deliberately framed to mark achievement rather than to discuss challenges or identify institutional patterns. Other documents produced by the institutions studied, both in hard copy and online, have formed a vital component of my research. Ramphal and Alake's research into career progression routes for graduates of the Centre for Advanced training set up for Classical

Indian Dance styles, *Developing Progression Routes for Young Kathak and Bharatanatyam Dancers: A Research Report* (2010),²⁷ has provided helpful insights into the training options for young dancers.

In the course of my PhD studies, I took an interruption to work with colleagues Anita Srivastava and Delia Jarrett-Macauley on a research project investigating the feasibility of establishing a degree course for South Asian dance in Britain. The resulting report, the *South Asian Dance Feasibility Study 2018*, has likewise provided important material, particularly on training. Arts Council reports, including *Dance Mapping* (Burns and Harrison, 2009), *Navigating Difference – Cultural Diversity and Audience Development* (ACE, 2006), offer pertinent reflections on the role of South Asian Dance in Britain within the context of broader discussions on dance and diversity while the Arts Council's *South Asian Dance and Music Mapping Report* (Courtney Consulting 2020) provides a fascinating insight both into the viewpoints of practitioners within the sector and into the Arts Council's positioning in relation to it. Finally, articles from the on-line magazine *Pulse*, (a South Asian music and dance quarterly, focusing particularly on dance), and its hard copy forerunners, *Pulse*, *Extradition* and *ADiTi News* have been an invaluable resource, enabling me to hear dancers' voices, note their achievements and hear their anxieties over the years.

Developing and building on all the above resources, the particular contribution of my study lies in its focus throughout on the 'professionalisation' of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, and the way that a particular understanding of professionalism can impact on the choreography and the material conditions that produce South Asian dance. While the concept of professionalism, as Bourdieu (1992) points out, is in many ways culturally contingent, I argue that it remains useful as a way to describe occupations with certain distinctive characteristics, which I suggest are skill (the need for training), their pursuit as a means of livelihood and legitimacy. The precise skills required, and how their standard should be assessed varies for each profession – and part of

²⁷ I thank Avanthi Meduri for telling me about this work and advising me to pursue it – and Anita Srivastava of New Dimensions and Alex Henwood of Dance Xchange Birmingham for finding it for me.

‘professionalisation’ is setting the measure and the parameters by which these skills and occupational requirements are assessed. The growth of ‘organisational professionalism’ (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2013) has contributed to assigning the character of ‘professionalism’ to an arbitrary set of (largely commercially driven and disciplinarian) attributes. Against this perverted and prescriptive takeover of the concept, I propose that it is vital to reclaim ‘professionalism’ as related to the spiritual and material well-being of the ‘professional’ – as a safeguard both of high quality and fair pay. Beyond the commitment to excellence and income however, the precise characteristics of professions will be as many as there are professions. Hence I make the case for ‘many professionalisms’.

My thesis is that classical Indian dance forms have not as yet been able to determine an autonomous professional field in Britain, governed by its own values and principles, or in Bourdieu’s terms, *doxa*. To permit the development of such a field, I argue for a critical examination of the frameworks – cultural, socio-economic and political - within which South Asian dancers in our contemporary era create their dance work. Honouring Mbembe’s call for decolonial work to ‘unmask and deconstruct the western hegemony’ in the field of humanities and other disciplines, my thesis unmasks and deconstructs systemic inequalities in the British cultural sector. In this light, the work to establish an autonomous field of South Asian dance in Britain is, I argue, inextricably linked with the wider and necessary work of decolonisation, decentring white supremacist modes of knowledge formation, and centring pluriversality in dance artistry. In making this case, my thesis contributes to the understanding of the impacts of cultural/racial stereotyping and labelling through the lens of dance.

My work is closest to the detailed and excellent analyses of Thobani and Kedhar, who also examine the violences of colonialism continue to play out in the fields of British culture today, specifically in the perceptions and representations of classical Indian dance forms. Where Thobani highlights

the continued and restrictive understandings of classical Indian dance forms in terms of antiquity, religiosity, and constrained femininity, and Kedhar interrogates ways in which the representations and requirements of professional dancers are ever more inflexible in their insistence on flexibility, my work contributes distinctively through its focus on the mechanics by which dancers become professional – and how echoes of colonialities impact the journey to becoming a working dancer from their very first dance classes to their pursuit of dance as livelihood.

Methodology: Ethnography, auto-ethnography and self-consciousness

The research for the specific purposes of this study took place primarily between 2016 and 2020. It draws on interviews with 51 dance artists and arts administrators in the sector, the attendance of 49 live performances and many more on-line (see appendix 1). I have taken part in sector conferences (Navadisha 2016), round table meetings and discussions and have attended classes both in person and latterly (during the Covid-19 pandemic) over Zoom. I have largely taken the role of a ‘participant observer’ (Becker and Geer 1957; Whyte 1979; Jackson 1983), a research practice by which the researcher gathers material as much by participating in activities in the field (e.g. taking part in discussions, participating in classes) as by gathering material as the researcher positioned outside the field. Such ‘performing as a way of knowing’ is particularly important in acknowledging that ‘not all knowledge is verbally based and that people use kinaesthetic as well as intellectual intelligence to process information’ (Grau 2001: 35). It recognises that an embodied experience of a dance form allows for a richer ethnography (David 2013b). It is also important in accessing the unedited and sometimes more authentic views of people in the field gleaned through gossip, hearsay and informal conversations (Lancaster 1994, Kedhar 2011, Hamera 2011). This intensive period of research builds on a much longer standing relationship with classical Indian dance forms in Britain developed over more than 30 years. In this way my ethnography also takes the character of what dance ethnographer Peter Harrop calls ‘long ethnography’ (2013: 3), meaning the acquired understanding of a field over an extended period of time.

My relationship with classical Indian dance, specifically bharatanatyam, began when I was seven. My father's work placement in the temple town of Madurai in Tamilnadu,²⁸ South India, meant an end to the ballet classes I had been taking in Birmingham in Britain – leaving my parents looking for the nearest available equivalent. This, they were told, was bharatanatyam – and since that time, this has been my dance form. By the time I returned to Britain as a teenager, I had embraced bharatanatyam, Tamil and Madurai to the extent that clinging to bharatanatyam was a way of holding on to a place I had not wanted to leave. I therefore spent several years stubbornly trekking from my home in Oxford to the Bhavan in West Kensington every weekend to practise my *adavus* with my guru, Prakash Yadagudde. My first job after university was as Education Officer for Akademi, under the leadership of Mira Kaushik. I then worked as a research assistant for Professor Andrée Grau on the Leverhulme funded project on South Asian Dance in Britain²⁹ before returning to Akademi as Dance Development Officer, working with Kaushik to produce, among other things, the conferences *South Asian Aesthetics – Unwrapped* (2002) and *Negotiating Natyam* (2005). I combined this with working variously as a dancer, dance animateur and dance teacher in London, Exeter and Birmingham, including a stint as education officer (and briefly apprentice dancer) for Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company and a memorable summer spent working on *Images in Varnam* (2001) with Mavin Khoo Dance.

In many ways therefore, this story of the changing fortunes of working as a classical Indian dancer in Britain is inextricably intertwined with my own personal story. I have known some of those interviewed for the study, both personally and professionally, for over thirty years. I met one of my interviewees, my teacher at the Bhavan, Prakash Yadagudde, when I was 16 – and another, Bisakha Sarker as a fourteen-year-old in Oxford, participating in a dance performance on Tagore.

²⁸ He went to India with a mission organisation, USPG (or the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) and worked within a theological college, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary (T.T.S) which promoted liberation theology and sought actively to disentangle Christianity from Eurocentrism. My earliest bharatanatyam performances were in T.T.S chapel, to a Tamil Easter song composed by the campus's resident musician, Swamikannu, in the Carnatic music tradition.

²⁹ This resulted in the report *South Asian Dance in Britain – Negotiating Cultural Identity Through Dance* (Grau 2001).

I have known Amina Khayyam since my early twenties, when we both attended classes at the Bhavan (she in kathak) and worked together on combining kathak with bharatanatyam, fuelled by her particularly potent brand of ginger chai. Shane Shambhu has been a friend since, along with the dancer Jasmine Simhalan, we toured the country's backwaters in a rickety mini-van for the rural touring scheme Live Music Now! At one time or the other I have worked, both as dancer and as writer/ administrator, for all three of the organisations that formed the core 'South Asian dance alliance' (Akademi, Sampad and Kadam).

My long-standing embodiment of bharatanatyam means that the daily ache in my knees reminds me of the toll intensive training can take on the body, especially when undertaken on hard floors or in insufficiently heated rooms. I relate all too closely with the battle to motivate oneself to practice, alone and in the confined space of one's living room because there is no available group class. Similarly, the humiliation and frustration of being assessed on one's deficit – judged for what you cannot perform rather than credited for what you can (see chapters 4 and 5) – is something I relate to from personal experience.

While a long-standing insider of the field, I have at the same time always been positioned as somewhat apart – because I am white, and because I have two white, London-born parents who had never heard of bharatanatyam before I started learning it. My engagement in bharatanatyam and fluency in spoken Tamil as a blonde, blue eyed child earned me entirely unmerited attention while growing up in Madurai, and the status of something of a curiosity. My technical lapses were sometimes overlooked due to my sheer novelty, and the most banal Tamil conversation was sufficient at times to earn myself and my siblings extra fizzy drinks (at that time *Limca*, or *Thumbs Up*) in restaurants. On one occasion, after my return to Britain, I was given £1 by a stranger of South Asian heritage because I had spent the bus journey singing my old school songs to myself (which were variously in Hindi, Bengali, Sanskrit, Tamil and English). My engagement in bharatanatyam has therefore always been accompanied by a certain self-consciousness, and an

awareness of myself as Other. In this way, even before I placed a deliberate distance between myself and the field by looking at it as an ethnographer, I have always been an ‘Insider-Outsider’.

Of course, as cultural anthropologist and novelist Kirin Narayan (1993) eloquently reminds us, the character of ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’ is as subject to variation as any other form of identity such that the ethnographer, as with the subjects of their field of study, exists in a permanent dance of alienation and belonging, of ‘insiderness’, of ‘outsiderness’ – and primarily, of ‘shaking it all aboutness’. Where I felt my ‘outsiderness’ on the grounds of my ‘whiteness’, many of my (brown) interviewees revealed their equally complex relationship to the cultures and subcultures of the practise of classical Indian dance forms – of times they felt accepted, and times they felt ‘Othered’ on account of their gender, their sexuality, their Britishness, their Indianness, their ‘being from a different part of Indianness’, their economic background, their religion, their lack of religion. Akram Khan has spoken of feeling like an ‘outsider’ on account of being ‘Bangladeshi’,³⁰ while Nina Rajarani describes a sequence of levels of acceptance almost like a stack of Russian dolls.³¹ Having said this, the visible and non-negotiable epidermal difference of my skin colour marks a more substantive difference between my experience and that of many of my fellow practitioners - because of the very societal white-centredness that this thesis explores.

As discussed in chapter 3, dancers of classical Indian dance forms in Britain overwhelmingly have a South Asian heritage - and are brown skinned. As a white bharatanatyam dancer, I have not had to contend with the day-to-day racism of being told to ‘go home’ or being asked where I am ‘really’ from.³² My experience has been marked by sometimes extravagant delight at my (unremarkable)

³⁰ ‘... when I went to Kathak Kendra I would always hear whispers that ‘he’s Bangladeshi..he’s not real’ - almost like I’m not from the family, not from the lineage of the great masters’ (Akram Khan at Darbar, 9.11.2017).

³¹ ‘So, there is that mindset that the best dancers come from India. Then if it’s bharatanatyam, it has to be South India - so I am not someone who lives in India, nor am I South Indian – nor do I have an artistic family background...’ (Rajarani interview, 2018).

³² I have, however, been with my (brown) husband when he has been called a ‘terrorist’ and a ‘Paki’ and taunted with an extremely poor simulation of *adimi* (the sliding side to side neck movement of bharatanatyam). This taunt was all the more ironic considering that of the two of us present, *adimi* is indisputably more part of my embodied repertoire than my husband’s.

accomplishments from some (particularly Tamil) communities, and by sometimes extravagant disappointment at my white skin from some (particularly white) audiences. During a season I spent performing in an Indian restaurant as part of the Edinburgh festival (1999), I was told both ‘to colour my skin with teabags’ and that ‘I danced very well’, but that ‘it was a shame I was white’. There have been times when I have shamelessly basked in unwarranted attention, and many times when I have wholeheartedly wished to be shorter, dark haired and brown skinned – to be less conspicuous, to ‘fit in’.

Where my experience aligns with that of many of my interviewees is in the discrimination I have faced because of the codes and conventions of my artform: through embodying the dance form a school will bring in for the students to learn about ‘India’, but not book as a regular after school activity; through the assumption that anyone who is a dancer ‘must be able to do the splits’; through the refusal to see that the reinterpretation of a *padam* about a woman spying on the love affairs of her neighbour can have as much contemporary relevance as a dance piece about risk in the modern world.

Through this ‘long ethnography’, my research draws both on deliberately recorded field notes and formal interviews, together with years’ worth of less formal ‘head notes’ (Sanjek 1990; Grau 1999): lived experience, snippets of conversation and friends’ realities. Just as inevitably, this has presented me with both the ‘gains and losses’ (Hastrup 1995: 157) of the participant observer. The role has often allowed me ‘privileged’ access to the field (Hastrup 1995: 157) and has supplied a real passion to understand it better. At the same time, there have certainly been occasions when I have been reticent to ask questions that I know touch upon sensitivities within the field, such as which caste an artist might belong to, or how much they might charge for a performance. There has also been the risk of exploiting or misusing information gained from participants in the vulnerable informality of day-to-day exchange rather than from the clearly signalled formality of

an interview, and there have been times when I have almost forgotten myself and my role and had to suppress the urge to dispute an (in my view) particularly ill-judged opinion.

The best I can say is that in recognising these shortcomings, I have attempted to overcome them. As all data is incomplete, and all data in being presented is interpreted, there seems to be no perfect way out of this conundrum of being an ‘insider/ outsider’, compassionate yet critical, seeking for belonging while seeking to remain separate. As the social anthropologist Kate Fox observes, it is now almost a requisite part of any ethnography that the ethnographer prefaces their work with a penitent disclaimer emphasising the limitations and unavoidable subjectivity of their work (Fox 2004). I can only echo her wry conclusion that ‘while participant observation has its limitations, this rather uneasy combination of involvement and detachment is the best method we have for exploring cultures, so it will have to do’ (2004: 4). Having said this, I attempt to mitigate some of my implicit bias by ensuring that my interviewees come from a range of contexts in the field – independent dance artists, representatives of institutions, young artists still learning their art forms and established artists secure in their position. Information gained formally from interviews, from curated or recorded conversations is balanced by information gained informally by standing around in theatre lobbies, changing rooms for dance classes and late-night conversations in hotel rooms.

A proper understanding of where we are demands at the very least a broad knowledge of our history. Along with ethnographic research therefore, a part of my research has been historic, and there are points at which my ethnographic interviews have crossed into the arena of oral history. What were classes in classical Indian dance forms in Britain like in the 1960s and 70s? What was the audience response? What were the primary motivations behind a certain (historic) decision? In making sense of the now, this work moves back and forth between history and ethnography, the past and the present. The third point of this triangulation is theory – or those different lenses

which can help make sense of data in different ways. These lenses are taken, as discussed above, from sociology, in particular Bourdieu, as well as from theories of decolonisation.

All through my research, writing has been key to my research process, through writing field notes, performance reviews, notes on transcripts as well as through reflecting on my data through the lens of theory I have read. Some of these notes I have sent to friends in the field for their responses. Some writing has been published by the sector online magazine, *Pulse*. As cultural theorist Ann Gray contends (2002: 59), this writing has helped me to ‘clarify ideas’ that would have remained ‘vague’ unless ‘thought through on the page’. The dialogue and questions provided by my supervisors (initially Ann R. David and Andrée Grau³³ and subsequently Ann R. David, Avanthi Meduri and Alexandra Kolb) have been invaluable throughout both in directing my research and in ensuring the reflexivity of my stance. I highlight some of the boundaries and limitations of my research below. Before that however, I address the perennially vexed topic of the label ‘South Asian dance’ (David 2005a; Meduri 2008 a and b).

‘South Asian’ or ‘Classical Indian’ Dance forms?

‘South Asian Dance – what the fuck is that?’ Akram Khan, Navadisha 2016

This was a question Akram Khan pondered in his keynote address at *Navadisha 2016*. As he makes clear, ‘South Asian dance’ is not a term with a self-evident meaning - and it is one that many within the sector have been and remain unhappy with. Despite this, throughout this work I refer variously to both ‘South Asian Dance’ forms and ‘classical Indian dance’ forms, the justification being that in doing so, I follow the model of the sector itself. The London based organisation Akademi is

³³ Andrée died suddenly in September 2017. This represented a huge loss to myself and many others. I remain grateful for and encouraged by the one and a half years I enjoyed with her supervision. This thesis in many ways represents a development and continuation of the work we started together in 1999 on the SADiB report.

‘Akademi – South Asian dance in the UK’. The Birmingham organisation Sampad champions ‘South Asian Arts and Heritage’. An invitation was sent out in 2018 by Dance Hub Birmingham asking for tenders to research the feasibility of a ‘South Asian dance’ degree. The competition the *BBC Young Dancer* has as one of its dance categories, ‘South Asian dance’. The phrase ‘classical Indian dance’, though slightly less prominently used, is nonetheless well recognised. Notably, the relevant dance faculty of the ISTD is now called the Classical Indian Dance Faculty (CIDF), moving from the title ‘South Asian Dance Faculty’ in 2002 (see David 2013a). The Liverpool based arts organisation Milapfest advertises its summer school, Dance India, as offering ‘a unique week-long intensive training programme in Indian classical dance’, not South Asian dance.³⁴ The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is the home of ‘Indian classical arts’.

Pragmatically, ‘South Asian dance’ is the term used in Britain, by those within and outside the ‘South Asian dance’ sector to refer to the range of dance forms originating from the Indian subcontinent (which includes India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal), including folk dance forms, Bollywood dance, and other forms not considered ‘classical’. Emerging from the US State Department, a bureaucrat’s term used to refer to post-partition India and its neighbours (Khilnani 2003; Meduri 2008a), the unpoetic phrase (Khilnani, cited in Meduri 2008a) crossed into academia and thence into the British arts establishment, adopted by dancers and arts officers in Britain in the late 1980s (Grau 2004). For a while, dancers and institutions within the sector seized upon the term almost with a sense of defiance (see for example Meduri 2008 a & b on Akademi’s decision to change its name, mentioned above) in that the more geographically vague term ‘South Asian’ seemed to offer space for exploration beyond the sometimes stifling constraints of being ‘Indian’ dance. More recently practitioners and institutions have, with equal determination, rejected

³⁴ <https://www.milapfest.com/dance-india/> (accessed 28.1.2019).

the term, proud instead to champion the specificities and parameters of being ‘classical’ and ‘Indian’.

The label ‘classical Indian’, however, as suggested by the need to escape ‘stifling’, brings with it its own challenges (Lopez y Royo Iyer 2003; Purkayastha 2017b). The specificity of ‘India’ can be seen to exclude countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka where the classical dance forms, particularly, in the case of Pakistan, kathak, have also emerged and evolved. Meanwhile, the term ‘classical’, is an uneasy adoption of a European term, which ‘needs to be divested of its total Eurocentric bias’ before providing a ‘more fruitful avenue of understanding’ (Jeyasingh 2010: 182). Though often presented as equivalent, the indigenous categories *margi* and *desi* clearly do not fully translate to ‘classical’ and ‘folk’ in the loaded sense both these terms have within Euro-American dance studies, carrying with them the idea of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art.³⁵ The importance of being labelled a ‘classical dance form’ in itself only arose as an issue for Indian dance forms ‘as part of the movement to reinscribe Indian dance forms in modern artistic practice and give them a status, equivalent to that of classical ballet in the West’ (Lopez y Royo 2003: 156).

In relation to both these collective terms, for several practitioners, the very label ‘dance’ is unhelpful. As dance anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler (1999) has argued, ‘traditionally in many societies there was no category comparable to the Western concept [of dance]’ (1999: 13; see also David 2014; Meduri 2019). For these practitioners the line between what is in Euro-American terms ‘dance’ and in Euro-American terms ‘drama’, in Indian performance art forms is so blurred as to make the division unhelpful. These performance forms could or should as readily be

³⁵ They do suggest different levels of formalisation, with *margam* translating to ‘of the route, or pathway’, and *desi* to vernacular or provincial. *Desi* also translates as ‘seen’, supporting the commonly held belief that *margi* forms relate to texts such as the *Natayasastra* or *Abhinayadarpana*, while *desi* forms are passed down without such written codification. See for example <http://www.nadanam.com/dance/margi-and-desi/> (accessed 17.3.2019).

considered ‘drama’ as ‘dance’ by a Euro-American classification, both labels fitting the forms as well (or as inadequately).

In an ideal world, there would be no need for a collective label at all, with dance forms being referred to by their individual names of kathak, kathakali, kuchipudi, etc. thereby avoiding the connotations and constraints of imperfect labels. The lack of a critical mass of practitioners however means that for many initiatives and institutions (e.g. the CAT training schemes, the ISTD, the *BBC Young Dancer* or even the dance agencies), it is simply not viable to treat each style entirely independently, economically or infrastructurally. In order to attain the visibility, or at times the economic subsidy that attaches to such initiatives therefore, disparate, and often very different dance forms (such as kathak and bharatanatyam) make at times uneasy alliances to make sure that their presence counts. In this respect, the sector shares a dilemma faced by the Association for Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD). Needing a more generic signifier than the individual names of a panoply of dance styles, both South Asian and African dance in Britain have settled for labels they are less than happy with, which nonetheless help to situate them within the broader field of British dance.

Which imperfect ‘collective’ might be preferable has long been a subject of discussion – and the question as to which label is politically and aesthetically most apt has been debated by the sector for over twenty years, without conclusion. In 2004, Akademi organised a symposium to discuss what might be meant by ‘South Asianness’ (*No Man’s Land – Exploring South Asianness*) – and several of those present expressed their dissatisfaction with the label (Meduri 2008b),³⁶ a dissatisfaction still felt today as Khan’s opening question makes clear.

³⁶ <http://www.ballet-dance.com/200407/articles/baks/SouthAsianness20040522b.html.0002.3456.bak> (accessed 28.1.19).

For the moment this study swaps between names, as far as possible, following the lead of the particular artist or organisation discussed, for example when discussing the ‘South Asian dance’ category in the Birmingham young dancer, or Akademi ‘South Asian dance in the UK’. The term I use by default is ‘classical Indian dance’ – for two main reasons. Firstly, this study is concerned primarily with bharatanatyam and kathak – and to a lesser extent odissi and kuchipudi – all forms counted among the now eight recognised ‘classical’ dances of India.³⁷ Secondly, in considering these forms, my focus is on the ‘classical’ technique of these forms, even when this technique is used within a (Euro-American) contemporary dance context. Using the term ‘classical Indian dance forms’ retains this focus. Moreover, as others have observed, the term ‘South Asian dance’ has latterly been increasingly understood to refer particularly to that hybridised form that constitutes ‘South Asian contemporary dance’ (Kedhar 2020; Thobani 2017). When using the term ‘classical Indian dance forms’, I appreciate both the limitations of this term in grouping together different dance forms with different needs and narratives and the provenance of these dance forms from outside the geographical region now named India. Wherever I am referring more specifically to a discrete form - such as bharatanatyam or kathak, I use these specific names. A possible collective noun, avoiding culturally inappropriate and geographically tethering terminology could, I suggest, be ‘Natyam’ (Sanskrit for dance/drama). I touch on this possibility in chapter 5. For the moment however, I adhere to the labels the sector has adopted for itself.

Boundaries and limitations

Before outlining the contents of the thesis, a note about what it is not about. As mentioned above, the focus of this thesis is on classical dance forms. Thus, while bollywood and bhangra, amongst other forms, have an increasingly significant role within Britain, it is beyond the scope of this project to consider these forms. Of the classical forms, while both odissi and kuchipudi have a

³⁷ The others being mohiniattam, kathakali, manipuri and sattriya.

growing presence in Britain, they have not as yet been incorporated into the institutions of for example *Yuva Gati*, ISTD or (contentiously), the *BBC Young Dancer*. This has meant that, although I consider odissi and kuchipudi, my engagement with these forms has been limited, and my research has inevitably engaged more with bharatanatyam and kathak than other forms.

In analysing work as a dancer, while appreciating the importance of work as a teacher, dance movement therapist or dance animateur, my focus has been on performance. This is because an important part of professionalisation is necessarily 'how dances come to be seen' (Lepecki et al 2004), and more importantly, 'what dances come to be seen'. Performance dictates training, so has an inevitable impact on the role of teaching. Thus while not diminishing the critical role of the dance animateur, and the all-important role of the teacher, the particular focus of this work has been on the dancer as professional *performer*.

Finally, it is important to note that the focus of this work on a few select classical dance forms reflects the pattern by which these dance forms have come to stand in for Indian dance heritage at the expense of multiple subaltern/dalit/minoritarian dance knowledges. Where classical Indian dance forms are marginalised by the white-centred structures and aesthetics of contemporary Britain, these dance forms are themselves the instrument of marginalisation in dominating the representation of what it means to be Indian or of Indian heritage - both within India and in the diaspora. This domination, as my thesis touches upon, is intimately related to the transfer within India in the early twentieth century of the practice of 'classical dance forms' to the high caste and the well-heeled. This process, the gender and sexuality scholar Shefali Chandra suggests, was one of 're:colonisation' - by which Brahmanism was 'rendered according to the mandate of whiteness: universal and transparent' (Chandra 2020: 1195). Where this thesis argues for the decolonisation of the British canon through the making of space for the aesthetics and artistic narratives of Indian classical dance forms, the fuller work of decolonisation must look also to confront this pattern of

‘re:colonisation’, both in the context of India and the diaspora (Banerji 2021; Chandra 2020; Prakash 2019.)

The shape of the work

My study starts by ‘setting the scene’ and providing the context for the thesis through a closer consideration of the place of South Asian dance within the *BBC Young Dancer*. I then turn to a detailed examination of what is meant by ‘professionalism’ and ‘professionalisation’. This is succeeded by a chapter broadly centred around each of the three key features of professionalism I have identified: Learning, Livelihood and Legitimacy.

Chapter One (Context) sets the context for the thesis by presenting a snapshot of the place of South Asian dance in Britain by analogy with the place of the South Asian dance category in the competition the *BBC Young Dancer*. Drawing on the critique of televised competitions within dance and cultural studies (Penman 1993; Morris 2008; Redden 2008, 2010; Weisbrod 2010, 2014; Elswit 2012; Dodds and Hooper 2014; Foster 2014), I consider how far the *Young Dancer* competition avoids the susceptibility of other televised competitions to spectacularised conformity. I argue that several of the challenges evinced by the position of the South Asian dance category within the *Young Dancer* competition apply equally to the position of South Asian dance within the broader field of British dance. These include the paradox of high achievement and high profile resting on a fragile infrastructure and the limited awareness of the specific artistic narratives of South Asian dance forms within the wider audience. Efforts at equal representation, I argue, can only go so far while the legacy of colonialism in ideologies that deny coevalness (Fabian 2014) and subscribe to the ‘rhetoric of modernity’ (Mignolo 2007) remains unchallenged in our cultural sphere.

Chapter Two (Professionalism) unpicks the vexed question of ‘professionalism’. A topic acknowledged as contentious at the best of times - hence sociologist Thomas Brante, ‘Perhaps it

is not an overstatement to say that there are almost as many theories of professions as there are scholars of professions' (1988: 126) - it is further complicated in the context of the arts, and yet further complicated in the context of South Asian dance (in Britain). I acknowledge the increasing scrutiny of the concept owing to its disciplinarian force (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2013) and return to the question Bourdieu raised in 1992, which is how far this Anglo-American culturally laden value should be abandoned in favour of a concept less prescriptive. In this light, I propose a reading of 'professionalism' in line with the Tamil concept of 'virutti'³⁸ meaning a 'way of life', 'conduct or behaviour', 'employment, business', 'devoted service' and 'means of livelihood'³⁹, leading me to propose three core features of professionalism: Learning (or excellence), Livelihood and License (or legitimacy).

Chapter Three (Learning/ Training) takes a socio-historical approach, looking at how classical Indian dancers are trained in Britain today and the institutions involved in providing such training. I focus on the Classical Indian Dance Faculty (CIDF) of the Imperial Society for Teachers of Dancing (ISTD), the South Asian focused Centre for Advanced Training (CAT), *Yuva Gati* and the failed attempt to establish a BA in Contemporary dance with a South Asian dance strand at London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS). Starting with a historical reflection on how hereditary dancers were trained and considered to attain proficiency, I then look at some of the early efforts to establish classical Indian dance classes in Britain. I argue that similar to the situation in the United States (Srinivasan 2012), British cultural policy from the 1970s led to a re-positioning of classical dance forms from being dance forms with a universal appeal to being 'minority arts' for a 'minority' people. This framing reinforced the ways in which the dance forms were used by migrant communities as a form of 'cultural long-distance nationalism' (Wong 2010). Such

³⁸ I am indebted to Avanthi Meduri for urging me to look more closely at this Tamil concept and its relationship to 'professionalism'.

³⁹ <https://agarathi.com/word/விருத்தி> (accessed 11.1.21).

positioning, I argue, has had long term repercussions in terms of circumscribing the available pool both of potential performers and potential audiences of classical Indian dance in Britain. This has had a knock-on impact on standards of dance due to the lack of demand for classical work and hence a lack of a critical mass of candidates to make a vocational training school for the dance forms a viable entity.

In Chapter Four (Livelihood, Learning, Embodiment), I address two related questions. The first is how far the technique of a professional dancer is influenced by the context within which they live. What happens when the cultural contexts in which the dancer lives is mismatched or non-aligned with the cultural context in which their dance technique was formed? The second is what the professional demand for the versatile dancer means for the performance of dance technique, particularly of dance techniques that do not form part of the dominant dance discourse – such as classical Indian dance forms in Britain. How far can the versatile dancer embody distinctive dance techniques without being co-opted into that ‘wonderfully unifying and legitimizing aesthetic category of “contemporary dance” (really meaning Euro-American modern/contemporary dance)?’ (Chatterjea 2013: 10). This chapter deals therefore with livelihood insofar as it highlights the constraints placed on dancers (and their techniques) by the need to meet a particular market demand. In considering these questions, I use Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (as extended by Wainwright, Turner and Williams, 2006, 2007). Contrary to dance anthropologist Brenda Farnell (2000) and to Foster (2009), I argue that this concept is too useful for the theorisation of dance technique to be abandoned.

Chapter Five (Legitimacy) looks at the role played in ‘professionalisation’ by ‘consecration’ (Bourdieu 1991) or legitimacy, in particular through absorption into the ‘national cultural canon’. While as I discuss, there are multiple factors that have contributed to the failure to form a professional field for the pursuit of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, this chapter argues that

their position will remain precarious until they are considered more integral to the national cultural capital. Following Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage's argument in his book *White Nation* (2000), I propose that these dance forms need to be perceived more as what Britain *is* than as what it *has* (Hage 2000). To achieve this, I suggest, will first necessitate a decolonisation of the national cultural capital/canon by means of un-suturing (Yancy 2017) or de-linking (Quijano 2007) from a canon and an aesthetics dominated by 'white' (Anglo-European) values. This will then permit a true broadening of the 'horizon of expectations' (Mignolo 2007) and a shift from 'multiculturalism' to 'pluriversality', allowing for the development of a 'British Natyam'.

Chapter One

Context

The *BBC Young Dancer* and the Professionalisation of South Asian Dance in Britain – a snapshot of the sector and its place within British dance.⁴⁰

Introduction

On the 23rd January 2017, in a studio theatre within the glass walled modernist building that forms the international arts centre The Lowry in Manchester, the young bharatanatyam dancer Akshay Prakash performed a short section of an *abhinaya* based dance on the Hindu god Anjaneya – or Hanuman, and his relationship with Lord Rama. Cheeks and chest puffed out, and alternating impressive crouches and leaps with the depiction of a sedate and dignified gait, Prakash swapped between the role of the strong ruler of the monkey army (Hanuman), and, with his left arm raised with his hand in *shikara*, and right hand by his side in *kapitha* to symbolise the bow that only he could string, the Lord Rama.⁴¹ While there can hardly have been more than 100 audience members in the theatre in Manchester, and many of these were friends and family of the performers, Prakash's piece, and those following it, were filmed, edited and (interspersed with footage of the competitors in training and going about their everyday life) broadcast to an audience of approximately 189,000 people on prime-time Friday night T.V.,⁴² with many more watching it on catch-up.⁴³ This was the final for the South Asian dance category of the *BBC Young Dancer* 2017 – only the second round of the competition launched by the BBC in 2015.

⁴⁰ Sections of this chapter appeared as part of the article 'The BBC Young Dancer and the decolonising imagination' (Magdalen Gorringer 2019) published in *South Asian Diaspora* 11:2, (163-178) and subsequently as a chapter in Ramnarine, Tina K. (ed.) (2020) *Dance, Music and Cultures of Decolonisation in the Indian Diaspora* (2020). Oxford, New York: Taylor and Francis.

⁴¹ Yadagudde (2017) *Anjaneya*. Performed by Akshay Prakash, for the *BBC Young Dancer* Category Final, The Lowry Theatre Manchester, 23rd January.

⁴² Figures provided by the BBC to Anita Srivastava, sent to me via personal communication, 3.5.2017

⁴³ I assume. The BBC was unable to provide me a figure – but merely from the circumstantial evidence of talking to friends and colleagues, I believe this to be a safe assumption.

As noted in the introduction, the inclusion of the South Asian dance category in this competition has proved a significant boost for the sector, both in terms of mainstream recognition, and in terms of providing high profile performance opportunities for young dancers. It has been widely welcomed, both by organisations and by individual artists. Thus, as previously cited, Kaushik was pleased by the decision; Prakash Yadagudde, resident bharatanatyam teacher at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the Institute for Indian Culture in West Kensington (and father of Akshay Prakash mentioned above), felt it was ‘an encouragement to the youngsters’ (Yadagudde, Interview, 2017); Piali Ray, Director of Sampad, an organisation committed to promoting South Asian arts and heritage in Birmingham, acknowledged that there had been reservations about the competition, but felt that overall, ‘...it has been good. It has been a huge profile raiser and has created a lot of excitement, and an environment of ambition within students and parents...’ (Ray, Interview 2 2017).

Yet, as I discuss in the introduction, while the inclusion of South Asian dance as a category is significant - an equal fourth amongst three other dance styles, this inclusion has also brought into focus the manifold ways in which South Asian dance is clearly not an ‘equal fourth.’⁴⁴ While the career path of most dancers is marked by precarity (see chapter 2), the training and career opportunities for talented and passionate young classical Indian dancers are yet more limited than for their ballet and contemporary dance trained peers. The *BBC Young Dancer*, therefore, at once emphasises the distance South Asian dance forms have come in this country (in making up one of only four categories) while highlighting the distance they have yet to travel. The specific case study of the place of South Asian dance in this competition can be seen in this way as a microcosm that

⁴⁴ Hip hop, like ‘South Asian Dance’ is also disadvantaged by comparison with ballet and western contemporary dance – in not having a dedicated vocational school for example. There are interesting similarities and contrasts between the case of hiphop and South Asian dance – see Prickett 2013b for an insight into hiphop’s journey to legitimacy in Britain.

reveals, on a smaller scale, many of the wider issues that impact on the place of South Asian dance forms in the world of British dance. These include the need to understand an artform within the parameters of its own narrative and the deep-seated hegemony of a Euro-American aesthetic ideal within the field of British dance. This televised competition, with its specific performance requirements, also highlights some of the tensions that beset any dancer taking dance as a profession – how to balance expertise with accessibility; to balance experimentation with financial viability; to make an impact where the audience may have no understanding of the conventions of one’s artform. I return to these themes throughout this thesis. Most importantly, the hope, commitment and talent showcased in a competition focused on young British based dancers who ‘will hopefully enter the professional world in a year or two’ (Hackett 2015), underlines what is at stake in discussing how South Asian dancers and their dance forms take their place in the world of professional British dance. It therefore seems an appropriate place to begin.

In this chapter, after providing a brief introduction to the *BBC Young Dancer* Competition and explaining its rubric, I go on to contextualise it in within the broader debates associated with dance competitions and televised dance and reflect on how its production team seeks to position it in relation both to these shows and to the wider world of British dance. I then look specifically to the inclusion of a South Asian dance category, highlighting some of the benefits this has brought to the South Asian dance profession in Britain, along with some of the problems that its inclusion has brought into focus. I conclude by reflecting on what this competition tells us about the context within which the South Asian dance profession in Britain is striving to develop.

What is the BBC Young Dancer?

The *BBC Young Dancer* (*Young Dancer*) is a competition launched in 2015, based loosely on the model of the *BBC Young Musician* which was established in 1978. With the *Young Dancer*, as Jane

Hackett,⁴⁵ former Director of Creative Learning at Sadler’s Wells, and the dance consultant on the programme explains, the BBC had been thinking about a dance equivalent to the *Young Musician* for some time and had initially attempted to impose the same framework they had used for music on dance. Deciding that this approach was not working, they asked Sadler’s Wells for advice, and Alistair Spalding, the Artistic Director of Sadler’s, seconded Hackett to work with them on the programme’s development (Hackett, Interview, 2017).

The rubric of the competition is straightforward – and consists of three competitive performance rounds (two of which are broadcast), as well as a preliminary round based not on live performance, but video submissions. It is open to dancers aged between 16 – 21 who ‘must not, nor should ever have been employed on a professional full-time contract as a dancer’ (*Young Dancer*, Entry Brochure 2017).⁴⁶ To enter, dancers in each of the categories from across the country are invited to send in a short video, showing themselves performing two contrasting solos with a total duration of no more than 6 minutes.⁴⁷ These videos are assessed by judges,⁴⁸ who, as with each of the subsequent rounds, are figures with an established experience, expertise and standing in the dance fields represented by the categories. The judges mark all dancers across all categories to the following criteria: ‘technique; artistry and interpretation, including musicality; performance quality; distinctive movement style/individuality, with an additional criterion for partner work being communication and interaction/combined virtuosity’ (*Young Dancer* Entry brochure 2017). These

⁴⁵ Hackett has a long and impressive history of involvement in dance in various capacities. Apart from working herself as a dance artist and choreographer, prior to her post at Sadler’s Wells, she was director of two national Conservatoires, Director of Learning for Birmingham Royal Ballet and schemes for the Royal Opera House and BRB to increase diversity and access to training and careers in Dance, as well as professional development programmes for dance artists, choreographers and teachers. She also holds an MA in Dance Studies from the University of Roehampton. Perhaps it is not surprising in this context that the *BBC Young Dancer* is, as I argue, though not without its problems, qualitatively different from and more nuanced than other televised dance competitions.

⁴⁶ This is UNLESS that contract ended before the competitor’s 16th birthday.

⁴⁷ To ensure that competitors are not put off by the cost of hiring a videographer and editor, the regulations state: ‘The video should be unedited within the performances and its quality should be good enough for us to assess your dancing. It does not have to be of a professional broadcast quality and you will not be penalised for poor quality of video or sound as long as an assessment of your performance is possible’ (*Young Dancer* Entry brochure, 2017).

⁴⁸ These judges for the video entries change each year, as they do for the other stages of the competition. See appendix 2 for a list of judges and mentors engaged for the South Asian dance category finals.

judges put 20 dancers from each category forward to the first live performance round. In this round (the Second Round), which is filmed, but not necessarily broadcast, each of the 20 dancers again perform two solos (each between 1 minute 30 and 4 minutes in duration), on the basis of which a fresh expert panel selects 5 dancers to participate in the category finals. For the category finals, which are broadcast on BBC 4, the dancers must prepare two solos and ‘a pas de deux /duet that demonstrates partnering skills’ (*Young Dancer* entry brochure), ‘repeating at least one solo from the Second Round’. Again, each of the dances must be between 1 minute 30 seconds and 4 minutes in duration. The finalists from each category, together with one ‘wildcard’ compete against each other in the Grand Final which takes place in a renowned theatre with established connection to dance performance⁴⁹ ‘in front of an audience and a panel of internationally renowned dance professionals’ (*Young Dancer* entry brochure) and is filmed for broadcast on BBC Two. They perform one solo and one duet (which can both be the same as in a previous round, but need not be), which together should not last more than 9 minutes. In addition, they each perform a new solo created especially for them for the competition by a professional choreographer. The judging panel for the Grand Final features expert representatives from each of the dance categories.

Before considering what the selection of South Asian dance as one of the four categories, as well as what the way it is framed within the competition, says about the South Asian dance sector in Britain and its positioning within the wider British cultural scene, it is helpful to consider some of the issues raised in broader discussions related to competition dance, and particularly, televised competition dance. These discussions, as I indicate above, though intensified in the context of a televised competition, nonetheless raise some of the broader issues and challenges facing dancers entering the professional world.

⁴⁹ In 2017 this was Sadler’s Wells, London. In 2019, it was the Birmingham Hippodrome main stage.

The televised dance competition – the context to the *Young Dancer*

In recent years, as the professional ballet dancer, now scholar Geraldine Morris points out, there has been a ‘proliferation of ballet competitions’ (Morris 2008: 39). And not only of ballet competitions. Among the features of twenty-first century Britain has been the introduction of a plethora of televised dance competitions (*Strictly Come Dancing* 2004 (*Strictly*);⁵⁰ *Strictly Dance Fever* 2005; *Got to Dance* 2009; *Move Like Michael Jackson* 2009; *So You Think You Can Dance* 2010 (*So You Think*); *BBC Young Dancer* 2015; *Flirty Dancing* 2019).⁵¹ Admittedly, not all of these have lasted very long,⁵² but the very fact of their emergence indicates a growth of interest in this format – and *Strictly Come Dancing* is hugely popular, attracting 13.1 million viewers for its final in 2016.⁵³ This undoubtedly forms part of a wider trend of increasing popularity for other competition based reality T.V shows such as *The Great British Bake-Off* and *Britain’s Got Talent* (Redden 2008).

In terms of the dance community itself, dance competitions can serve as occasions to bring different sections of a dance world together (or even, as I will show in the case of the *Young Dancer*, sections of several dance worlds). They can provide motivation to competitors, and a goal to work towards where other performance opportunities may not be forthcoming. They offer a chance to see and be seen, to network, and to assess the performance of oneself and others (Marion 2008).

For the audience outside the dance community, competitions provide a format that is inherently accessible. In a wider discussion of competitive reality T.V shows, cultural and media theorist Guy

⁵⁰ An updated and revised version of the show *Come Dancing* which ran between 1950 and 1998.

⁵¹ *Strictly Come Dancing* is a British televised Dance competition broadcast on BBC 1 which pairs celebrities and other participants from all walks of life with professional dance artists in a Ballroom and Latin dance competition. *Strictly Dance Fever* was a similar competition solely for amateur dance artists also broadcast on BBC 1. *Got to Dance* was a British televised dance competition for amateur dance artists that was broadcast between 2009 and 2014 on Sky 1. *So You Think You Can Dance* is an American televised dance competition airing on Fox T.V. that premiered in 2005. It is the flagship show for the *So You Think You Can Dance* franchise, which has seen local variants in more than 30 countries. A British version premiered in 2010 on BBC 1.

⁵² *Move Like Michael Jackson* was a one off after the singer’s death in 2009; *Strictly Dance Fever* was axed in 2006 after 2 series and *Got to Dance* ended in 2014.

⁵³ The Guardian, 18.12.2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/dec/18/strictly-come-dancing-most-popular-series-ratings> (accessed 30.8.17).

Redden observes that ‘Entertainment value is easily driven by questions of who will win and who will lose, with what costs and results’ (Redden 2008: 134). The reward for such accessibility, as illustrated above, is phenomenal viewing figures. 636,000 people watched the *Young Dancer* Grand Final in 2017 (by transmission) with a further on 55,000 on iplayer. 189,000 watched the South Asian Dance category final.⁵⁴ As a consequence, as dance scholar Alexis Weisbrod points out, many different dance styles make their way into people’s homes, giving the audience a greater sense of familiarity with dance and ‘empowering audience members to dialogue with and about the practice in greater detail or, possibly for the first time’ (Weisbrod 2014: 320).

In the televised competitions, this accessibility is reinforced by the human detail provided in the shows. The *Young Dancer* follows a standard trope of such programmes, in what performance studies scholar Kate Elswit terms an ‘extended choreography’ (2012: 136), intersecting the dancers’ performances with clips from their everyday life, their rehearsals, and interviews with themselves and their teachers about their feelings and hopes. Dance writer and producer Robert Penman noted that, ‘Documentaries about dance and dancers, are often successful because they take the viewer backstage to meet artists on human terms’ (Penman 1993: 114) – and certainly, 25 years later, viewing figures would seem to bear him out.

Competition dance: aesthetics or artistry?

While competitions can offer positive experiences for both the dance community and the audience, the format of the competition, which gives a competitor a very short period of time in which to make an impact and impress the judges (the 4 minutes maximum for the *Young Dancer* solos is comparatively generous) can tempt a dancer to use that time to display their most spectacular physical feats or to pull out their favourite ‘tricks’. The result can be that the

⁵⁴ This was by transmission – no figure was available for iplayer.

performance is dominated by, as Morris observes of the *Prix de Lausanne*,⁵⁵ ‘high extensions and big, split-jumps...to the detriment of light and shade, articulate footwork and flexible upper bodies’ (Morris 2008: 45). For the judges likewise, a short clip of a performer makes it easier to assess the visually striking qualities of technique rather than the more nuanced and complex qualities of artistry (discussed below). In this way the competition format is almost inevitably weighted in favour of technical virtuosity and the spectacular rather than interpretation and depth – a weighting that can only be addressed by the deliberate choice of the competitor or the deliberate intervention on the part of the competition organisers.

This tendency is only reinforced in the context of a television show. Popular dance scholar Laura Robinson argues that ‘virtuosic displays of athleticism are linked with the tight temporal framework of the T.V. competition, as the performers must engage and impress the judges and audiences in under 2 minutes, requiring an intensity and compression of choreography’ (Robinson 2014: 314). The result can be a slide towards what dance philosopher Anna Pakes describes as the ‘easy consumability or aesthetic surface of dance practice’ (Pakes 2001: 249), or in Weisbrod’s terms, the privileging of ‘entertainment and popular culture over visionary or experimental art practice’ (Weisbrod 2014: 325).

Morris draws on the philosophy of aestheticians Graham McFee (2005) and David Best (1982) to support her reservations about the current ethos of the ballet competitions she studies, and to explain why she agrees with the much-respected teacher of Cechetti ballet, Richard Glasstone that ‘Artistic excellence has little to do with virtuosity and nothing at all to do with gymnastic stunts’ (Glasstone, cited in Morris 2008:49). Both Best and McFee agree that while aesthetics deal with mere appearance – with what you can see, art relates to a deliberate and intelligent act of design. This act is situated within a broader history of such acts of design, or within a specific ‘historical

⁵⁵ A highly prestigious international ballet competition for ballet students aged between 15 – 18.

narrative' (Carroll 2001: 87),⁵⁶ which you cannot see. Thus, while you might consider both a sunset and the photograph of that same sunset to be beautiful, only the photograph would count as art – as only here has a person 'captured' the scene in such a way as to frame (however successfully) elements of contrast and balance. In order then to properly appreciate this photograph, it would need to be understood within the context of the history of landscape photography. Similarly, it is the awareness of this narrative which distinguishes as art an image taken by a photographer rather than a snap you might have taken on holiday. Art, then, as opposed to the aesthetic, is about much more than immediately meets the eye. As an illustration, Best describes watching a performance of bharatanatyam dancer Ram Gopal, observing that 'I was quite captivated by the exhilarating and exquisite quality of his movements' (i.e – the immediate sensual or aesthetic qualities), 'yet I was unable to appreciate his dance artistically since I could not understand it' (Best 1982: 361). Lacking a knowledge of bharatanatyam's narrative – its traditions and history, Best must content himself with a superficial aesthetic satisfaction, rather than with the informed appreciation of an aficionado of the art form (or in the language of Indian aesthetic theory – of a *rasika*). In dance terms, to follow Morris, this means that while a high level of technical competence deriving from 'flexibility, strength, physical control' will make an excellent technician, more than this is demanded for an artistic rendition of choreography. Here, interpretative choices need to be made in relation to (though not necessarily in accord with) the dancer's knowledge of the narrative of her art form. For example, Morris explains that in interpreting the choreography of Frederick Ashton, to be true to Ashton's vision, the dancer would need to appreciate that 'sharpness and motion are of greater significance than balanced shape' (Morris 2008: 49). Without such attention to the interpretation and the artistic narrative, Morris holds, the 'distinction between dancer and gymnast will disappear' (Morris 2008: 49).

⁵⁶ In a discussion of different philosophical approaches taken to determine what should constitute an artwork, Carroll resolves that 'historical narration is a reliable way for identifying art'. 'Whether or not an object is to be regarded as an object or art depends on whether or not it can be placed in an evolving tradition of art in the right way' (Carroll 2001 pp 63-99).

Weisbrod, makes a related point, contrasting the ‘normative’ discipline of technique with the potentially ‘transgressive’ qualities of interpretation and artistry. She draws on cultural theorists Toby Miller and Randy Martin (1999), who examine the centrality of sport in American life. Sport is easily accommodated she writes, because it privileges

...the Foucauldian bodily experience of power wherein the body is disciplined by training, regimented by rules and overseen through visible and non/invisible subjects. Directly opposite sport experience is the less controllable practice of art... Rather than maintaining normative behaviors as if being constantly policed, the artistic body is often transgressive, pushing the standards of customary representations.

Weisbrod 2010: 46

Her contention is that ‘Competition, by structuring dance as sport, diminishes or entirely removes the artistic element, in particular those that often situate it outside normative social practices’ (Weisbrod 2010: 46).

While the argument of Best and McFee about art and its ‘narrative’ is compelling, it is not always easy to separate the aesthetic from the artistic – especially in the case of music and dance. Morris interviewed Mavis Staines, then artistic president for the Prix de Lausanne, who felt that for ballet, artistry cannot be separated from technique, and that ‘separating the two is potentially destructive’ (Staines, quoted in Morris 2008: 43). Morris concedes that ‘she may well have a point, since it is necessary for professional students to have achieved a high level of technical competence’ (Morris 2008: 43). A dancer could be very well informed about the stylistic preferences of different choreographers, and about the history and development of ballet (ballet’s narrative) and yet lack the strength or physical control to execute the choreography as required. A dancer is not an academic. Indeed, in order to flout the rules of good technique to portray a choreographic (or musical) style – the dancer must arguably be in absolute command of her technique (she *could* execute the movements to a prescribed standard, but she *chooses* not to). Morris’ concern rather is that ‘in the profession having a good technique does not always mean having flexibility, strength

and physical control, on the contrary it can mean mastery of the vocabulary of classical dance according to prescribed instructions' (Morris 2008: 43). Her objection is to the disciplinarian quality of technique – or what Weisbrod terms its normative rather than transgressive qualities.⁵⁷ Competition dance then, can be perceived as weighted to privilege spectacle over nuance, technique over interpretation. In this way, for Weisbrod, competition dance is inherently conservative.

Competition Dance: popular art, 'high' art and 'consumer culture'

It is telling that in Weisbrod's discussion of *So You Think* she laments that in the format of the competition, 'the performance and training of these contemporary bodies centralizes *entertainment* and *popular culture* over visionary or experimental artistic practice' (Weisbrod 2014: 325, my emphasis). Here she aligns herself with the orthodoxy of cultural theory which is that the former (entertainment, the popular, 'low' art) is inferior to the latter (visionary artistic practice), and which perceives the two as mutually exclusive.

Dance scholar Sherril Dodds, in her study of popular dance, *Dancing on the Canon*, situates her ethnography with a clear and detailed summary of the debates within cultural theory about 'high' and 'low', 'folk' and 'classical' art. She shows how in these discussions, 'high' art emerges as 'profound and individualized...concerned with transcending body, time and place' while 'low' art is focused on 'entertainment...is serialized and exists for commercial gain' (Dodds 2011: 43). 'High' art is viewed as 'independent of the market and produced for its own sake, unlike mass or popular art which is driven by capitalist production' (Dodds 2011: 90).

⁵⁷ The same concern can be heard within bharatanatyam circles – for example one artist commented of the famous bharatanatyam training school Kalakshetra, 'Kalakshetra teaches you to be a very good robot. No emotion, no understanding, no understanding of how your body works' (Fieldwork notes, *Yuva Gati*, 12th April 2017).

Dodds outlines the argument often raised in critique of ‘popular’ art – which is that the homogenous and formulaic nature of much popular, commercially successful culture lends itself to unquestioning, passive consumption, meaning that the audience is arguably left vulnerable to manipulation by the producers, creators or managers of this product (Dodds 2011). Dodds’ critique of this view, supported by three detailed ethnographic studies, is that it is both patronising and reductive. The effect of dance, she points out, (and I would argue, the effect of all art) cannot be measured in terms of the piece of art alone but must be understood in terms of how its audience engages with it. I might watch Hofesh Schechter’s *Political Mother* (2010) and be totally gripped and disturbed by the visual references to prisoners of the Nazi concentration camps, or I might sit in the theatre more preoccupied by whether I have enough food in the fridge for my sons’ packed lunches and whether I need to stop by Sainsbury’s on my way home. The impact of a piece of art is not predetermined by the artwork itself, but must be forged together with the response of its audience – a response that will vary from person to person (it is impacted, in Srinivasan’s terms (2009: 53), by the ‘unruly [or the ‘ruly’] spectator’). In Dodds’ studies, each of the communities she looks at engage with the ‘popular’ dance forms of burlesque striptease, of pogoing, headbanging and skanking at punk, metal and ska music gigs, and with the dance culture of the British Caribbean dance club ‘Sunday Serenade’, in ways that enable them to subvert and question their day-to-day experience. Engagement in these dance forms provides participants from each group studied, with an ‘imagined community’ (2011: 157), opportunity to ‘play’ (2011: 204-5) and a great deal of ‘pleasure’ (or joy) (2011: 123–4 and *passim*).

Dodds’ study is an important corrective to the frequent denigration of popular culture and her emphasis on the importance of ‘pleasure’ and ‘play’ is well made. The suspicion of ‘entertainment’ and ‘escapism’ shown by some cultural theorists can assume a Puritanical dimension which makes

one fear a Cromwellian cancellation of Christmas.⁵⁸ Writing in the 1970s, sociologist Richard Dyer argued that the ‘larger-than-life spectacle’ of the televised talent contest ‘constituted the aesthetics of escape for alienated workers’ (Redden 2010: 132), offering momentary respite from ‘necessity and scarcity’ (Dyer, cited in Redden 2010: 132). As an occasional bit of escapism, can such programmes as *Strictly* or *So You Think* not help refresh and restore us to better deal with the challenges of life? Or, without the utilitarian justification, can they not simply provide fun (pleasure)?

Equally, Weisbrod is critical of *So You Think*’s propensity to turn ‘dancing bodies’ into ‘commodities for consumption’ by ‘mainstream and popular culture’. Within cultural theory, as Dodds points out, the assessment of art as ‘commercial’ is typically pejorative. It remains the case, however, to follow literary and cultural studies scholar John Frow, that ‘all cultural production is dependent on the market’ (Frow 1995, cited in Dodds 2011: 91). Within a capitalist economy, therefore, all culture high or low, is to a greater or lesser extent a consumed commodity. To make a crass point, where the art is not consumed, the artist is unable to consume (food/drink/other cultural products) - unless they have an income provided them by some other means (independent wealth or state or other patronage – or through working in other capacities to supplement their lack of earnings from their art).⁵⁹ The rhetoric around ‘high’ art and the disdain for the idea of motivation for financial gain leads to a ‘certain anxiety about art developed in a capitalist framework’ (Van den Braembussche 1996, cited in Dodds 2011: 91) which I would argue contributes directly to the embarrassment and reluctance dancers show in talking about money and in asking for financial recognition of their labour – asking for decent pay (see chapter 2).

⁵⁸ Oliver Cromwell was a Puritan military commander of the anti-Royalist Roundheads, who served as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland between 1653 and 1658. In 1647 the Puritan parliament made the celebration of Christmas a punishable offence, and it remained such until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Thus, while it was not Cromwell alone who ‘cancelled’ Christmas, this period is associated with him, together with a particularly austere form of Puritanical religious observance.

⁵⁹ The question of dance as paid labour and of the necessity for many dance artists to work on multiple jobs is discussed more fully in chapter 2.

There is certainly an argument here for increased state patronage for the arts, or for the more radical but increasingly popular suggestion of a Universal Basic Income (as I discuss in the conclusion). Britain is fortunate for the moment to have an Arts Council supported by, yet independent of, the state, that helps support artistic ventures that may not be commercially viable. Without this, it is not clear what the artist is supposed to do apart from market their art (thereby making it a commodity), or, as the poet and journalist Theophile Gautier is supposed to have observed of the author Gustave Flaubert, to have ‘the wit to come into the world with money.’⁶⁰ There is absolutely nothing romantic about living in a garret (or about sofa surfing, which is the contemporary equivalent for many dancers). In this light, dancers in *So You Think* or *Young Dancer* any of the other competitions – all of whom choose to enter these competitions voluntarily – are doing no more than using their talent and hard won skills to try and ensure themselves a better future (and in so doing providing the audience with some enjoyable entertainment).⁶¹ Under this interpretation, some of the objections to *So You Think* and other talent shows (voiced by Weisbrod and Redden among others) could be construed as arising from a misplaced academic snobbery and reluctance to have a good time, together with an unhelpfully idealistic vision of art created without thought of financial gain.

And yet, while Dodds’ work is an important reminder of the variety of as well as the variety of responses to ‘popular dance’, it is interesting that each of the dance forms she chooses to illustrate ‘popular dance’ comes from a community that could hardly be considered ‘mainstream’. Dodds clearly distinguishes the burlesque striptease she studies from the striptease marketed by such

⁶⁰ “Flaubert was smarter than us...He had the wit to come into the world with money, something which is indispensable for anyone who wants to get anywhere in art” (Theophile Gautier to Feydeau, quoted in Bourdieu, 1983: 349).

⁶¹ Though, as several commentators have pointed out the *Young Dancer* does not actually give the competitors much, with the grand prize of £3000 being sufficient to cover the tuition fees for only a third of one year of training, in contrast for example to the *Prix de Lausanne* which offers a prize of a year’s free tuition plus expenses. It does, however, provide competitors with tremendous exposure. The young kathak dance artist Vidya Patel who won the South Asian Dance Category final in 2015 was catapulted to fame as a result, feted both within the South Asian and contemporary dance worlds, and has not had any shortage of work since.

corporate or ‘mainstream’ venues as *Stringfellow’s Cabaret of Angels* or the *Spearmint Rhino Gentleman’s Club* (Dodds 2011: 111). In each of the cases Dodds describes, the opportunity for fantasy and escape is shaped by participants to allow them a creative response to real life exclusions and inequalities. None of the dance forms she describes is commercially driven. Dancing at music gigs is a ‘free activity’ (in that one would pay for the gig whether one danced or not), the *Sunday Serenade* at £5 a ticket (Dodds 2011: 171) is clearly not aiming to do much more than cover costs, and burlesque striptease, while hoping to be marketable, clearly has many more complex interests and ideals as its overriding goal (unlike *Cabaret of Angels*). While, as discussed above, it is naïve to think that art in contemporary Britain can escape some degree of commodification, what is perhaps important is the extent to which being a commodity has been the dominant ideology shaping the work, and the extent to which this has meant abandoning artistic (and often moral) integrity. To use an extreme example, burlesque striptease is an art form. *Cabaret of Angels* (which makes no concessions to the demands of artistry or to avoiding exploitation of dancers) is not. The problem (*pace* Weisbrod) is not with popular art, or with entertainment, or with making money – but is a matter of intention and degree. Which ideology – that of art or commerce – is dominant in shaping the product?

This is not always an easy question to determine, and (given that commodity value for something that disclaims its artistic or cultural status is likely to fall), is unlikely to be answered honestly. Theologian Timothy Gorringer (following cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel) quotes the television pianist Liberace who confessed, ‘My whole trick is to keep the tune well out front. If I play Tchaikovsky, I play his melodies and skip his spiritual struggles. Naturally I condense. I have to know just how many notes my audience will stand for’ (Liberace, cited in Gorringer 2004: 55). What are Liberace’s priorities here? Are they box office returns? In this case his overriding concern could be argued to be commercial, making his primary role that of businessman rather than artist. Is his priority audience engagement and accessibility? Does his desire for accessibility

compromise his artistic integrity? Tchaikovsky's (possibly uncomfortable) struggles, represented in the more complex passages which lend depth to his work, are omitted, while the aesthetically pleasing (if superficial) tune is kept 'out front', for just as 'many notes' as his 'audience will stand'. What Liberace is describing, could, I suggest, be likened to 'fast art' (related to, but distinct from cultural anthropologist Grant McCracken's (2009) definition of fast culture) – being a little like fast food – easy to consume, low on nutrients and roughage, often cheap and addictively tasty, fine as a treat, but liable to lead to obesity if not otherwise part of a balanced diet. This is not so much because the work is 'popular', but because it is comfortable and, to return to Weisbrod's critique, essentially conformist.

Importantly, Liberace's decisions are driven not by a concern for the intrinsic quality or coherence of the piece of music as a work of art, but by its viability as a product (commodity) to be consumed. Thus, the over-riding principle determining the shape of his music is not art, but commerce. This question of what constituted the 'over-riding ideology' was one of philosopher and sociologist Theodore Adorno's key gripes with what he terms 'the culture industry'. He accepts that some degree of cultural commodification is hard to escape. He concedes that 'ever since these cultural forms first began to earn a living for their creators as commodities in the marketplace they had already possessed something of this quality [the quality of commodification]' (1975: 13). The distinction comes when a cultural product's identity as an artwork becomes subsumed by its purpose as a commodity. Thus, he continues, 'But then they sought after profit only indirectly, over and above their autonomous essence. New on the part of the culture industry *is the direct and undisguised primacy of a precisely and thoroughly calculated efficacy in its most typical products*' (Adorno *ibid.*, my emphasis). From this perspective, none of the examples of popular art that Dodds describes could be said to belong properly to the 'culture industry'. Her distance from Adorno is perhaps not as far as it might initially seem.

The entity to be wary of then, is not ‘popular art’, but ‘fast art’, or art as ‘industry’. In his 1975 essay, the *Culture Industry Reconsidered*, Adorno highlights two key dangers with culture as ‘industry’. The first is its ‘scaffolding of rigidly conservative basic categories’ (1975: 13) which means that the industry ‘standardises’ culture: ‘what parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up, remains the disguise for an eternal sameness’ (1975: 14). The second is that in this standardisation of product, it encourages a standardisation, or a conformity, among its audience. Controlled by ‘the most powerful interests..., the consensus which it propagates strengthens blind, opaque authority’ (1975: 17), impeding ‘the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves’ (1975: 19). Thus, the discussion returns to the dangers of passive consumption, and vulnerability to media manipulation.

Televised competitions, standardisation and the contempt for the ordinary

Building on Adorno, media theorist Neil Postman’s seminal study of the influence of television on Euro-American culture, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (2007) [1985], drew on Aldous Huxley’s novel *Brave New World*, where the *soma*-drugged⁶² workers repeat to themselves ‘I’m so glad I’m a Beta [as opposed to a harder working Alpha]...I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because I don’t work so hard.’ (Huxley 1979 [1932]:33). Huxley was critiquing a Fordist model of labour, where people were required to work as efficient units of a machine during working hours, and Postman’s point is that T.V. (the modern-day opium of the people) acts like *soma* to reconcile workers in the Ford machine to their inferior and routine status, creating a feeling of well-being which exchanges an induced feeling of euphoria for rights to civil action.

Foster draws attention to a new model of labour, which scholars are suggesting has replaced the Fordist model in contemporary culture: the Toyotaist model (Foster 2014). While Ford model employees leave work behind at the end of the working day, the Toyotaist model demands a greater

⁶² *Soma* is a drug which produces a feeling of well-being.

level of engagement, such that ‘employees do not leave work and come home, but instead continue to work at some level non-stop’ (Foster 2014: 2). Foster contends that echoing this, on *So You Think*, it is not only dancers’ bodies that are displayed as commodities for the viewing public, but their very selves – their personal lives, their struggles in rehearsal, their hopes and dreams. The labour portrayed on these shows is passionate, all-consuming and intense. It is also precarious. The competitions combine the Toyotaist model of round-the-clock labour with, as Redden argues, the values of a meritocracy which boasts ‘equality of opportunity amid inequality of reward’ (Redden 2008: 139). Evidently in every competition, where one will win, others must lose.

Beneath the veneer of entertainment, such reality T.V talent competitions are, Redden argues, (following a similar line to Adorno), deeply pedagogic, and are exploitative and damaging of both competitors and audience. They are not so much about talent, as about escape. They recognize the talent of ‘ordinary folk’, but only as a vehicle towards a new (more glamorous, less ordinary) life (Redden 2008, 2010). Being ordinary is a condition to be left behind. So great is the allure of this reward (the escape from the ordinary),⁶³ that despite the ‘work of being watched’ (Andrejevic 2004, cited in Redden 2010), despite gruelling mental and physical demands confronted in front of millions of viewers, despite the high chance of failure, there remains a constant supply of competitors seeking to be exploited on the gamble of making it big. The lessons taught are ‘don’t be a nobody’ and ‘keep working to make it’. Thus, the labour of the competitor is exploited while the audience is taught the lesson of discontent – which will in turn ensure that they keep labouring. The economic reality of such a meritocracy, as Redden points out, is entrenched inequality, as the ‘desired few’ are rewarded ever more handsomely (and their individual irreplaceability underlined),

⁶³ This is similar to the pull of the fantasy world of Bollywood dance experienced by film viewers and amateur dance artists (See David 2010a).

while the ‘undesired many’ have their contracts cut, their wages frozen and are treated with the contempt of ‘disposability’.⁶⁴

The Huxleyan workers under the Toyotaist model would not be content with being Betas but would feel the need to strive and labour ceaselessly to be an Alpha, lured by the fairytale appeal of the Alpha world. Soma, the sedative, has been replaced by a stimulant; drug induced contentment replaced by drug induced discontent. In this context ‘escapism’ assumes a whole new significance. The goal of this escapism is not to shut down on the struggles of day-to-day life for a short while, returning to them refreshed and better able to deal with them (with perhaps even a creative approach to tackling them). The goal of this escapism is, Redden argues, one of ‘rupture’ (Redden 2008: 141). The individual crosses over to the elite from the ranks of the ‘meritless majority’ (Redden 2008: 141) In this way, the genius of the talent show, Redden shows, is that it enables those invested in the media to

...render an image of social life that legitimates their material interests, and simultaneously those of any organization that dreams of an endless supply of workers who will work passionately for ever diminishing returns, with security traded for the chance of making it – while loving it.

Redden 2010: 139

It is the capitalist’s wet dream.

Dance Competitions and Manufactured Identity

Weisbrod, in her detailed analysis of *So You Think* points to another insidious harm lying beneath the glitz of competitive entertainment, which is the role the programme plays in shaping and reinforcing stereotypical images (Weisbrod 2010). The format of the dance competition lends itself to simplistic representations, which can be used to shape or manipulate audience perceptions. The

⁶⁴ The pathological underpinnings of such competitions is arguably highlighted by the number of competitors (including ‘winners’) who go on to suffer serious mental health issues, some even committing suicide. See Adegoke 2020. Thanks to Ann R. David for highlighting this point.

same appeal to the spectacular and the superficial aesthetic – what I shall call (following the idea of the ‘soundbite’), the ‘visionbite’ - that makes it so marketable a commodity also lends itself well to the creation and perpetuation of myth and stereotype.

Dance ethnologist Anca Giurescu draws attention to the ‘network of institutions and a system of competitions named *Cantarea Romaniei* (Song to Romania)’ that ‘was given the task to select, construct and disseminate these symbols - symbols that were meant to build an idyllic image that would hide a reality full of deep contradictions’ (Giurchescu 2001: 116). It is not only in the context of a totalitarian state that such selective representation is harnessed to manufacture an idealised and simplistic rallying point for cultural identity. Irish step dance competitions organised by the Gaelic League performed a similar function for Irish culture (Wulff 2007), while in Indian folk-dance competitions held at American universities, ‘Prize-winning teams are those that score high points in both skill and traditionality. Performances posit their existence as authentic representations of Punjabi culture...’ (Chacko and Menon 2013). Similarly, David notes the ‘reifying of tradition’ and the emphasis on a supposed ‘authenticity’ that marks the success of teams competing in *raas* and *garba* (Gujarati folk dance) contests in Britain (2014: 30). Each of these portrayals of culture conveys a caricature, a cartoon image constructed of cherry-picked features that skates over complexity. As with Liberace’s rendition of Tchaikovsky, the Romania, or the Ireland, or the Punjab of these competitions is portrayed with the ‘melody’ (an idealised depiction of an authorised version of identity) out front, without the difficult complications of ‘spiritual struggles.’

In the televised competition, the cartoon impressions provided by such ‘visionbites’ of dance are further reinforced by ‘extended choreography’ of the commentary of the judges and the selection of the rehearsal and ‘backstage’ material. Weisbrod shows how on *So You Think*, the training histories of the dancing bodies presented are simplified in order to project a stereotype of the ‘raw untrained hip hop dancer’ in contrast to the ‘classically technical contemporary dancer’, thereby

sustaining ‘a paradigm of race that has an extensive history in American culture, which ensures that these bodies fit into an established system of discipline and racial discourse’ (Weisbrod 2014: 330). The intensification of the contrast between categories of competitor serves to intensify the spectacle of the show (Weisbrod 2014), while precisely this intensification of spectacle serves to reinforce and underline established racial prejudices rather than disrupt or question them. Yet more perniciously, the judges’ rhetoric around the ‘raw, untrained body’ thereby ‘invisibilizes the labour’ (Weisbrod 2014: 330) of young, black men already struggling to combat a widely held American stereotype of black male laziness and disaffection.

At the same time as minimising the labour that goes into the technical mastery of hip hop, the programme adds insult to injury by presenting hip-hop on mainstream T.V. in a manner calculated to emasculate its transgressive and radicalizing potential, making it safe for placid consumption by viewers at home.⁶⁵ Furthermore, as Dodds and Hooper argue in their illuminating critique of *So You Think*, for all its alleged diversity, ultimately the competitors who succeed must ‘be re-trained in the choreography round according to the judges’ Euro-American dance standards paradigm’ (2014: 105). In order ‘to progress in the competition’, the competitor ‘needs to conform’ (2014: 106). The discussion returns to the point raised at the beginning – the propensity of the dance competition to uniformity, discipline and the normative.

To summarise the preceding discussion, the dance competition is a format that, while offering benefits, is fraught with aesthetic and ethical concerns, concerns intensified when the competition is televised following the tropes of the increasingly pervasive reality T.V. show. A format biased to privilege spectacle over artistry, it is predisposed towards the stifling of the transgressive and

⁶⁵ Such use of the competition format is nothing new. Dodds notes how in the early twentieth century, in response to the ‘sense of social unease’ prompted by the ‘bodily aesthetics of play... casualness, inventiveness’ (Robinson 2009, cited in Dodds 2011: 59) of ragtime dance, forms of ragtime were ‘codified and set as a disciplined technique that could be taught as competition dancing’ in a manner ‘refined to suit North American tastes through exhibition dance’ (Dodds 2011: 59)

the experimental, and facilitates the manipulation of ‘visionbites’ to reinforce stereotypes and impose conformity. Within the context of the reality T.V. show, the inherently ‘meritocratic’ format of the competition is linked to a Toyotaist model of ‘surveilled affective labour’ (Redden 2010) to pedal a social model of elitism whereby the talented and ‘strong actually do what they can and the weak suffer what they must’ (Varoufakis 2017: 19 citing Thucydides). The benefits of bringing together sections of the dance world, and accessibility and entertainment for an audience seem small rewards for so great a price.

The *BBC Young Dancer* – breaking the T.V. competition mould?

In this light, it is small wonder that the response of Judith Mackrell, dance writer for the *Guardian* newspaper, to the announcement of the launch of *Young Dancer* was somewhat muted. Rather wearily she asks, ‘Does the dance world need another competition?’ (Mackrell 2014, np.). Yet, as she concedes, the *Young Dancer* is a competition that has been thought through ‘with unusual care’ (Mackrell 2014, np.). It has also been widely welcomed across the British world of dance, and as I show at the beginning of the chapter, specifically by the world of South Asian dance. The enthusiasm with which it has been greeted by practitioners demands attention and means that it is not a competition that can be easily dismissed. How far does it succeed in avoiding the exploitative and manipulative qualities found in other televised talent contests? How far does it enable the BBC to fulfill its aim to ‘support the arts and...develop new talent?’⁶⁶

From the outset, the *Young Dancer* was modelled on a form of talent competition, the *Young Musician*,⁶⁷ where the emphasis is more on the artform than on the potential life change for the

⁶⁶ *BBC Young Dancer* website, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5Qt0hQdlMx4csFNtZCjvRG/history> (accessed 11.9.2017).

⁶⁷ The *Young Musician* was conceived by BBC producers Humphrey Barton and Walter Todd to encourage more home-grown participation in classical music. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/youngmusician/sites/competition/pages/about.shtml> (accessed 15.7.2021).

competitor. Granted, lives are changed as a result of the exposure provided by the competition, but these changes come over as an acceleration of the consequences of high levels of discipline and talent, where other competitors will also succeed (albeit in the longer term), rather than as the somewhat arbitrary ‘rupture’ whereby gaining the crown in a single T.V series marks the divide between extraordinary success and fame or the return to odd jobs and oblivion. The application pack for the programme is at pains to insist that the competition is ‘not just about winning’ emphasising that it is an enriching experience in itself, where ‘most importantly of all, the competition brings the opportunity to meet and work alongside other young people with a passion for dance’ (*Young Dancer* Entry Brochure). Similarly, Redden observes about the competitive T.V. shows of the 60s and 70s that, ‘The older talent shows focused mostly on the moments of performance and their assessment by judges’ (Redden 2008: 135) and this remains the case, I believe, with the *Young Dancer*. There are clips of the competitors in rehearsal, as well as clips providing some context in terms of their everyday life outside the competition, but the vast majority of the programme focuses on the performance pieces themselves and the judges’ commentary.

The self-conscious commitment to artistry (regardless of how successful the endeavour) both contributes to, and is reinforced by, the show’s deliberate alignment with the wider world of professional dance in Britain. The show considered throughout the process of its construction... ‘what the professional life of a dancer is like’ (Hackett 2015). The *Young Dancer* comes highly supported and endorsed by artistic heavyweights from across the British dance world. So much so that attending the 2017 Grand Final felt like being present at a Who’s Who for British dance, with professionals supporting the performance as judges, commentators or audience members including dancer/choreographers Richard Alston, Shobana Jeyasingh, Matthew Bourne, Jasmin Vardimon and Nahid Siddiqui, Sadler’s Wells’ Director Alistair Spalding, former chief executive of The Place Kenneth Thorp and former prima ballerina Darcey Bussell.

A commitment to training and expertise is highlighted in that the interest of the show is not so much in a talented and charismatic individual, who might win over hearts and minds through charm and untutored pluck (though charisma, charm and pluck inevitably play their part). Rather, the programme's stated interest is in young dancers who have spent 'hours and hours practising and perfecting what they are doing' and are then using their techniques 'to express something new that's relevant to everyone today' (Hackett 2015). Charisma matters, but only on the basis that, as the show's commentators and judges reiterate throughout, 'technique is a given'. Importantly, these dancers are then using their acquired technique to creatively respond to and interpret their environment. Obviously 'given technique' means different things in the context of different dance styles – and the presence of specialist mentors and judges for each category is designed to accommodate this.

To facilitate this commitment to interpretation beyond technique, in contrast to programmes like *So You Think*, in the *Young Dancer*, dancers compete only in the dance style in which they are trained, rather than doing their best in a range of styles they have barely come across before. The familiarity they have with the style they perform permits them more scope for interpretation rooted in established technique. This exploration is supported by time spent with appointed mentors. The presence in the final of pieces choreographed on category contestants by 'some of the best emerging choreographers' (*Young Dancer* programme 2017) (choreographers who, in contrast to *So You Think*, are themselves trained in the competitors' respective dance styles) can be argued to again reinforce the development of interpretation rather than spectacle. Additionally, the *Young Dancer*, (somewhat paradoxically), sets down rules that encourage the transgression of norms as a part of the competition in the sense that for each category, one of the two solos performed in the final is specified in a manner calculated to take participants out of their comfort zone. I use the term 'transgression' here not to suggest the radical subversion of social conventions, but in the

less dramatic yet still important sense as used by Weisbrod, of encouraging the experimental – or of stretching the boundaries of the canon. For ballet, for example, while one solo should be ‘classical technique’, the other should show ‘neo-classical or contemporary ballet’. For the South Asian category, the second solo ‘could show a more contemporary style and/or could show movement vocabulary from another South Asian dance form’. The distinction between this extension of the canon and performance based on learning a new technique is that the core of the performance remains rooted in known vocabulary (though the suggestions for South Asian dance are problematic, as I discuss below).

The restriction of competitors to known technique, the commitment to mentoring, and the emphasis on developing the form by moving it ‘in a different direction’ all serve, I suggest, to counterbalance the pull of competitive dance towards the spectacular, and to encourage competitors to go beyond simply the ‘aesthetic’ or surface appeal. This is reinforced by the criteria for and manner of assessment, which is made by panels of judges with expertise in each of the categories represented, and which takes account of, as mentioned above, ‘artistry and interpretation, including musicality; performance quality; distinctive movement style/individuality’, as well as ‘technique’ (*Young Dancer* entry brochure).

It was in part the desire for (to return to Best and McFee’s understanding of these terms) an artistic rather than merely aesthetic assessment of the competitors by both judges (and, as far as possible, on the basis of information provided within the programme, the audience) that informed the difficult decision to restrict the number of dance categories featured to four, and within the South Asian dance category, the restriction of dance styles represented to two. It also informed the selection of the categories ultimately chosen. Making these decisions was a tough call, and inevitably, the BBC received ‘a lot of letters from musical theatre and other groups contesting the category selection’ (Hackett, Interview 2017). The final decision was based on a combination of

factors, including the popularity of the forms in terms of the numbers of people engaged in them, the fact that ‘each style has a very rigorous and detailed technique’ and the presence of, as discussed above, a ‘highly skilled set of dancers taking the form in a different direction’ (ibid.).

Disappointing as it is for dance forms not chosen, the limit was imposed because Hackett felt that it would allow both the BBC and the viewing public to gain a deeper understanding of each form presented (ibid.), making for a more enriched experience of the show. The limit enables judgement by specialists (established dancers, choreographers and researchers) from each category chosen, each one conversant with the ‘narrative’ framing an individual performance. Hackett explains,

We didn’t want the competition to be a repeat of *Britain’s Got Talent* so we needed forms that would have clear criteria upon which to make a judgement - so that the decision wouldn’t just be a question of personal preference.

Hackett, 2017, Interview

How far ‘clear’ or absolute ‘criteria’ of judgement are ever possible, and how far personal preference can genuinely be avoided are debates beyond the scope of this chapter. However, knowledge of the ‘narrative’ of an art form, allows for an informed assessment and guards against mistaken judgements made about the dance forms ‘because inappropriate assumptions about the art are imported’ [from other narratives] (McFee 2005: 369). The same reasoning led to the restriction of the South Asian dance category to bharatanatyam and kathak, a decision that has caused disappointment that forms such as odissi and kuchipudi have not been included. As Hackett points out, in its present format, the South Asian dance category is able to have on the judging panel a specialist in each form, bharatanatyam and kathak, and to accommodate further forms would simply not have been practical.⁶⁸ This is a straightforward prioritising of depth over breadth.

⁶⁸ The reason we went for bharatanatyam and kathak was to ensure that there would be enough specialists for each style. Challenging as it is to find specialists for bharatanatyam and kathak, it would be even more so with other

In the same vein, the limit allows for the provision of a level of information and education about each form featured that would not be possible with more styles. True to the mission statement of BBC founder John Reith, the *Young Dancer* strives not only to entertain but also to ‘inform’ and ‘educate’. The 2015 South Asian category final included short introductions to the forms from Akram Khan (kathak) and Seeta Patel (bharatanatyam), and the website features links to more information about all the categories featured, including South Asian dance. This information provides a basic sketch of the ‘narrative’ of the different dance styles, allowing the viewing public (at least to some extent) an artistic alongside an aesthetic appreciation of the dance forms. As the editors of the South Asian arts website *Finding Lila* noted, ‘When else would you hear *abhinaya* being discussed on Friday night T.V’ (Somasundaram and Basu, *Finding Lila* 2015: np)?

The balance between accessibility, artistry and expertise is weighted so that in contrast to *So You Think* or *Britain’s Got Talent*, where arguably the professionals step into the domain of the general public,⁶⁹ with the *BBC Young Dancer*, the general public is invited in to witness the expert workings of the privileged sphere of the professional. Endorsing this view, Hanna Weibye, writing for the specialist arts website, artsforum commended the competition as being ‘remarkably gimmick free’ and ‘light years away from the razzmatazz, sparkling scoreboards and celebrity judge in-fighting of the BBC 1 show [*Strictly Come Dancing*]’ (Weibye 2015, np). Kenneth Tharp, then Director of London Contemporary Dance School agrees, writing in a blog on the competition, ‘I remember watching the very first contemporary solo and what struck me immediately from the first 30 seconds was that the quality of the performance and that of the choreography was not the kind of wham-bam razzmatazz showpiece you might expect from a competition piece’ (Tharp 2016, np).

styles. Also, at present we have a bharatanatyam and a kathak specialist on the panel. To allow for a specialist judge for each style, we would have to recruit 5 or 6 judges to sit on the panel...’ (Hackett Interview 2017).

⁶⁹ The final decision as to which dance artist stays or goes rests with the ‘layperson’ audience vote. Hence the suggestion made that the audience is the ‘fifth judge’ for the competition.

The *Young Dancer* then works hard to present what the eighteenth-century champion of ballet professionalism Louis de Cahusac would consider ‘real dance’ as opposed to ‘a means to achieve hollow effects’ (Cahusac, cited in Weickmann 2007: 53). How far does it succeed in avoiding the other dangers of competition dance discussed – those of projecting a ‘visionbite’ of stereotyped identity, and of implicit validation of a meritocratic social model? These are crucial questions, intimately connected to the question of what inclusion in the competition means for South Asian dance. I will therefore return now to the discussion of these questions, before concluding with a more general reflection of the competition’s position in relation to these broader issues.

The competition has, as indicated above, been felt to be a significant inclusion for the sector. In the discussion below, I will highlight three keyways in which the sector has benefitted, which I identify as Building Profile and Networks, Dialogic Representation and Institutional Endorsement. I then go on to consider areas of the programme that are more problematic.

Building Profile and Networks

This is the biggest outreach project that could ever happen

Hackett, Interview 2017

The most obvious benefit of the *Young Dancer* for South Asian dance is the impact it has had on the visibility of the sector for three different groups: the wider public; the dance world, and, perhaps most surprisingly given its comparatively small size, for the South Asian dance sector itself. Appearing on prime-time television, and then available on catch-up, within the context of a framework designed to have a broad appeal, the programme has brought South Asian dance forms to more people in Britain than ever before. Tharp celebrated this achievement when he blogged

(along the same lines of Weisbrod's comments on the more positive aspects of *So You Think* cited above)

I witnessed many comments [by people] on social media...and what their comments had in common was that watching a full hour of classical Indian dance on T.V had clearly been a huge eye opener. Many were thrilled and surprised at the combined beauty of the music, dance, performances and costumes...What the BBC Young Dance did alongside showcasing and inspiring young talent was to allow huge numbers of people to enjoy a whole range of dance they might not otherwise have seen.

Tharp, Place blog, 2016

Hackett agrees

There is actually very little known about South Asian dance forms outside the immediate dance world – and we have had a lot of feedback from people on Facebook for example saying, *'I had no idea that South Asian dance had that much in it.'*

Hackett, Interview 2017, my emphasis

Profile in itself could be unhelpful if the way in which South Asian dance was portrayed fed into stereotype (as I discuss below), or otherwise cultivated an impression of South Asian dance as somehow inferior to, or less nuanced than Euro-American dance forms. It is therefore noteworthy that the FB commentator Hackett refers to above is left with a greater appreciation of the complexity of South Asian dance forms. This is in contrast to *So You Think* where, as Weisbrod (2010) shows, the labour and expertise that goes into hip-hop is diminished in favour of the image of the 'raw' and 'untrained' dancer. Clearly the effort to provide background and information to supply a 'narrative' context to the work that facilitates artistic appreciation has had an effect in this instance.

As well as the broader public, the programme has been instrumental in educating dancers across dance styles about other forms and encouraging 'cross-form' collaboration. For example, South Asian dance category finalist Akshay Prakash described how

...there were two contemporary dancers performing in the duets [at the category final] – and I was very impressed – because I never watch contemporary or ballet, but I was interested with the way they have control of their body and it kind of pushed me...to want to reach that kind of level. It kind of motivated me.

Prakash, Interview, 2017

While watching the South Asian category finals for *Young Dancer* 2017 in Manchester, I found myself sitting among the contemporary dance category finalists, none of whom had seen more than snippets of classical Indian dance forms before. As a result, to quote Hackett again,

...already there have been a number of collaborations that have come out of *Young Dancer* 2015 that would never have happened without it...the collaboration between Connor⁷⁰ and Vidya for example, or between Richard Alston and Vidya.⁷¹ These are all incredibly enriching collaborations.

Hackett, Interview, 2017

Finally, the competition has facilitated connections between the participants across the very different spheres that make up the South Asian dance sector within Britain. As David shows through her ethnographic work among the British Tamil community,

Young people studying Bharatanatyam in one of the weekend Tamil schools were unaware of the names of prominent London professional Bharatanatyam dancers and were not encouraged to see performances; Leicester kathak and Bollywood dance teachers were uninformed of the London Tamil dance scene...

David 2010b: 90

Akshay Prakash spoke of how the *BBC Young Dancer* has opened his world, and gave him a sense of pride and confidence in just how widespread bharatanatyam is in Britain

⁷⁰ Connor Scott, the overall winner of *BBC Young Dancer* 2015. He went on to train at the Rambert School of Contemporary Dance. As a result of the competition Connor and Vidya went on to create a piece together to open *Navadisha* 2016. They were subsequently commissioned by Sampad to create and tour a new show, *About the Elephant* (2018).

⁷¹After seeing Patel perform the well-respected contemporary choreographer Richard Alston invited her to join his company as a guest artist for the creation and tour of his new work *An Italian in Madrid*. In fact, however, it was not at the *BBC Young Dancer* Competitions that Alston first saw Patel dance. This was at the U Dance Festival 2015 where Patel was dancing as a guest performer. (Patel personal communication, 2019).

...what BBC and the production gave me is a life lesson at the same time...I kind of kept myself confined – in a sense I never really explored out... A lot of dancers and teachers came to the competitions and since then I have been keeping in touch with some of them and talking about productions here and there - it's been very interesting...the fact that in the UK when it comes to Indian culture – it's not just confined to Bhavan – it feels really, really good to see and hear that bharatanatyam is expanding in the UK

Prakash, Interview, 2017

The isolation of dance worlds is not one way. At the performance of a dance drama at the Bhavan featuring 24 committed and talented young bharatanatyam dancers (including Prakash), there were no representatives from other South Asian dance or arts organisations present.⁷² Against this background of fragmentation, the *Young Dancer* has brought together members from across these dance worlds – and beyond. An online Tamil journal covered the *Young Dancer* 2017, drawing attention to the participation of Anjelli Wignakumar and Piriyanaga Kesavan - 'Congratulations to the talented young Tamils for representing our art on the world stage' (Thamarai.com, 2017). In *Young Dancer*, the BBC has produced a programme that is invested in by parties as diverse and distinct as London Contemporary Dance School and Harrow Tamil School. This is a clear illustration of Marion's (2008) point (raised earlier) about the value of competitions in bringing together different sectors of the dance world.

Dialogic Representation

Scholars of decolonisation (Fischer-Lichte et al. 2014; Hall 1999; Mbembe 2010; Said 1995 [1978]; Tshimanga 2009) rightly interrogate the representation of art forms, in an attempt to reveal and dismantle western hegemony in the field of humanities and other disciplines (Mbembe 2010). As all representation is mediated, and decisions are inevitably made from the context of an ideological framework, the presentation of art forms originating from a former colony (India) by the

⁷² I observed this at performance of Prakash Yadagudde's (2017) *Kadirgama Kuravanji* performed by students and alumni of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. (Fieldnotes 12.2.2017).

mainstream media of the formerly colonising power (Britain) is bound to be a sensitive area. In addition, as discussed above, competitions are susceptible to the use of the ‘visionbite’, or stereotype - projecting an image of what a culture *should be*, while glossing over its complexity and ‘spiritual struggles’.

In presenting ‘South Asian dance’, on the one hand, lie the dangers of Orientalism (Said 1995 [1978]), now well-rehearsed, whereby artistic forms and cultural forms from outside the western cultural establishment are presented as ‘static, frozen, fixed eternally’ (Said 1995: 208). On the other hand, lie the dangers of assimilation, whereby these art forms are valued most when ‘sufficiently processed to meet the western palate’ (Sporton 2004: 88) – so processed that they can no longer be said to display the distinctive technical and aesthetic vocabularies characteristic of these dance styles. How does one avoid the presentation of Asian classical dance forms in ‘concert halls and festivals in the west’ whereby, as dance scholar Anthony Shay puts it, ‘over a century since the appearance of Asian dance in world exhibitions, [western] audiences search for meaning and truth in ‘ancient’ and ‘timeless’ traditions of dance and music they feel lacking in their own lives’ (Shay 2008: 167)? Counter to this is the question voiced by an audience member at the Academy of Indian dance debate ‘Traditions on the Move’, back in 1993, and echoed repeatedly since then in a variety of contexts, which is that with innovation, is there a line where ‘work stops being Indian dance’ (Tucker 1993: 2)? Where is the line between innovation within a technique, and the creation of a new technique? Clearly this question stands across dance forms, though the reality of dominant economic and cultural power structures makes more likely the assimilation of non-Euro-American art forms in Britain into a dominant cultural framework. The problem is voiced by Akram Khan, who commented in an interview for the *BBC Young Dancer* 2015, that he felt South Asian dance was at a ‘critical time’ in which we need to ensure that ‘on the one hand...South Asian dance [is] still protected in a sense of its form’, while on the other to allow artists to ‘find a way to experiment ...by taking aspects of South Asian dance to a more

contemporary place' (Khan, interviewed for *BBC Young Dancer* 2015, South Asian Final, broadcast 1.5.2015, BBC4).

The cultural anthropologist Dwight Conquergood, in his essay 'Performing as a Moral Act' (Conquergood 2013) poses a related question about the performance of non-Euro-American art forms in a Euro-American context. How do we find our way out of this 'moral morass and ethical minefield of performative plunder, superficial silliness, curiosity seeking and nihilism'? His solution is to suggest a model of 'Dialogical Performance...a kind of performance that resists conclusions...more than a definite position, this dialogical stance is situated in BETWEEN competing ideologies. It is more like a hyphen than a period' (Conquergood 2013: 75).

My contention is that the *BBC Young Dancer* allows for such dialogic performance, allowing space for classical together with more contemporary interpretations of South Asian dance. As an illustration, for the 2017 category finals, bharatanatyam dancer Anaya Bolar started with a conventionally classical rendition of an *abhinaya* based solo depicting a story from the Mahabharata about Draupadi being unrobed by the deceitful Duryodhana but saved from shame by the intervention of Lord Krishna. With her duet, choreographed by dance artist and choreographer Subhash Viman Gorania, she explored the potential of bharatanatyam in relating to another dance style, as she and her ballet trained partner Kaine Ward played with moving along, under, over a rope, positioned now on the floor, now held between them. Dialoguing between the conventional and the experimental, the normative and the (mildly) transgressive, these young dancers displayed their mastery of the 'grammar' and 'architecture' of the dance form (Samson, cited in David 2005a: 7), as well as their ability and imagination in putting that grammar to new uses. Similarly, kathak dancer Jaina Modasia presented first a compelling *nritta* or abstract dance piece *In Akbar's Palace*, highlighting the rapid footwork and dramatic turns of classical kathak. Her duet, with contemporary dancer Peter Camilleri, combined kathak with partner work, including lifts and weight exchange with her partner that took her work well beyond the boundaries of classical

kathak, which is conventionally a solo art form, and where even when performing together, there would not normally be any physical contact between performers. This piece was, I felt, problematic in a number of ways (and I discuss these below), but it nevertheless demonstrated an attempt to push the boundaries of the form. For her final solo, she presented *Krishna*, an engaging kathak rendition of the South Indian Kannada song *Krishna Nee Begane Baro* an established piece within the bharatanatyam repertoire, but which is not commonly rendered in kathak. The *Young Dancer* has facilitated and encouraged such a dialogic representation, steering between, and thereby avoiding, both essentialist and assimilationist ideologies. There is a further discussion to be had about what is defined as normative, and what transgressive, and in what context, and I address this later. For the moment, it is important to acknowledge that the programme avoids oversimplification and embraces complexity by encouraging a breadth representation of the dance forms.

Institutional Endorsement

The most significant benefit to the sector (as well as potential hazard, as I discuss below) is arguably its implicit endorsement, by inclusion as a competition category, by the BBC. Whatever the criticisms of the BBC, and it has received its fair share of these, it remains undoubtedly, an iconic institution. It is, as journalist Charlotte Higgins puts it,

...an institution at the heart Britain. The BBC defines and expresses Britishness – to those who live in the UK and to the rest of the world. The BBC...is the most powerful institution of them all, for as well as informing, educating and entertaining, it permeates and reflects our existences and infiltrates our imaginations...

Higgins 2015: xi

When such an institution presents four categories to represent dance in Britain, and South Asian dance is one of these categories, it is, to agree with Kaushik, 'big and good news' (Kaushik 2017, Interview 1). It is also a tribute to the amount of work put in by artists, individuals and agencies

over the past forty or so years to work to establish the sector and secure its standing in relation to the ‘mainstream’. Defying the challenges that I discuss throughout this thesis, the South Asian dance sector in Britain continues to produce fresh individual dance voices that reimagine both classical and contemporary South Asian work. Thus, when Hackett went looking for forms with a critical mass of participants as well as ‘a highly skilled set of dancers taking the form in a different direction’, South Asian dance was ready as a contender. Despite understandable reservations about representation on mainstream media, its inclusion by the BBC is important because, as Grau points out, institutions are typified by historicity, coercive power and moral authority whereby moral authority she means,

... that institutions have a claim to the right of legitimacy. They are established, recognised as such and in the example of the arts they have helped in the creation of aesthetic canons, the yardsticks by which the arts are evaluated.

Grau 2001: 29

The BBC, founded in 1925, has an indisputable historicity and an acquired moral authority, which in turn lends it a coercive power, defined by Grau as the possession of norms which we must follow ‘whether we agree with them or not’ if we wish to collaborate with these institutions (ibid.). In this context, it is pertinent to note the observation from the British based South Asian Arts blog, *Finding Lila* that ‘Many of those who watched it felt that it was...the *first time that South Asian dance had been presented on an equal footing with ballet, hip hop and contemporary dance on mainstream T.V...*’ (Somasundaram and Basu, *Finding Lila*, 2015, my emphasis).

While it is debateable that this is the first time the BBC has presented South Asian Dance ‘on an equal footing’ (the BBC commission of Jeyasingh’s *Duets with Automobiles* in 1993, for example, as part of a series of commissioned pieces of dance for film is surely another case of ‘equal presentation’), it is certainly significant that this is how the competition has been perceived by parts of the South Asian dance community. Many in the sector (including Jeyasingh herself) do not align Jeyasingh’s or Khan’s work as representative of ‘South Asian’ Dance forms, and it is

difficult to think of another programme that has profiled classical bharatanatyam and kathak alongside other dance styles in this way. This is important because, as policy advisor Bhikhu Parekh wrote in 2000, 'Notions of cultural value, belonging and worth are defined and fixed by decisions we make about what is or is not culture and how we are represented (or not) by cultural institutions' (Parekh 2000: 159); or again, 'It is essential if people are to have a sense of belonging to society as a whole that they should not feel alienated or marginalised by public bodies' (ibid: 49).

The positioning and choices of institutions – particularly of influential and symbolic institutions such as the BBC – are hugely significant in shaping the perceptions of ourselves and others as to our place and value within a wider cultural framework. The extent of this significance can be seen in the fuller commentary on this decision made by members of the sector, extracts of which I used to open this discussion. Kaushik, for example, believes that the competition has lifted South Asian dance out of the realms of 'community dance'.

I think it's the best news for the position of South Asian dance in this country because all this time South Asian dance has been perceived to be a community activity. In this context, where it is put alongside ballet, contemporary dance and other forms, where professionals are working and, in a field, where professionals are aspiring to create professionals, the inclusion of South Asian dance is big and good news.

Kaushik, 2017, Interview 1

For Mira Balchandran-Gokul, the programme reinforces the British presence of South Asian dance as art - 'I think it's brilliant because you are seeing it not just as a cultural form, you are seeing it along all the different dance forms (Balchandran-Gokul, Interview 2017).

Such equal positioning, together with the use of terms such as *abhinaya* from within the Indian aesthetic tradition, is also important because it marks an attempt, as the semiotician and literary theorist Walter Mignolo (Mignolo 2007) articulates, to expand the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectations' of viewers, reminding them of the world's 'pluriversality', and of the existence of multiple aesthetic codes and multiple dance canons.

In addition, then, to being a programme with a level of artistic integrity several notches above that of other televised competitions, the programme works hard to avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping and presents South Asian dance forms with respect and nuance, with an invocation of Indian aesthetic standards that should at least alert the attentive viewer to a plurality of cosmologies.

Tempting as it is to leave this analysis of *BBC Young Dancer* here on a high, it would be both unhelpful and dishonest to stop here. In the following section, I will discuss three problems or gaps both within the sector, and in terms of the sector's wider positioning within the world of British dance, that the *BBC Young Dancer* brings starkly to light. These are: the fragmentation of the world of South Asian dance (already touched upon above); the lack of a broader infrastructure to support the sector and finally, issues with understanding, legibility and cultural translation. Underlying and related to all of these, lies the question of how we understand ourselves as communities, what we value - and how we want to live. Such questions are unavoidable in any discussion of cultural representation – especially when discussing today the bright talent of tomorrow.

South Asian Dance – a divided sector?

Divisions, or factions within the South Asian dance sector in Britain have long been a subject of lament. Abha Adams, the first director of the South Asian dance umbrella organisation ADiTi, which was founded in 1989 and folded in 2001 felt that the organisation's greatest challenge was 'to bring together what was perceived to be a divided dance community' (Adams, cited in Grau 2001: 43). More than 20 years later, at the *Moving On* Conference led by the Centre for Indian Classical Dance in Leicester, Paul Russ, Director of the Nottingham based dance agency Dance 4, spoke of the 'many competing levels of expectations, and largely unspoken issues of personality and agenda of control' which were 'putting the brakes on development' (Menski 2011, n.p.). One respondent for the 2020 Arts Council South Asian dance mapping report echoed this, remarking

damningly, ‘The organisations are so competitive with each other. That’s a real problem. I haven’t seen any solid collaboration in this country that goes outside of their boundaries’ (Courtney Consulting 2020: 96). Given this background it is not surprising that one of the challenges Hackett has faced in helping to draw together the South Asian dance category is that ‘as a sector, it is not as unified as it could be...there are a lot of people working on their own on their own little islands...Perhaps there isn’t the kind of support for each other that would be of overall benefit to the entire sector’ (Hackett, Interview, 2017). There are many possible reasons for these divisions, which I touch on throughout the thesis, relating to definitions of art and culture, as well as to notions of what constitutes ‘professional’ and what ‘community’ dance (Meduri 2020). Fundamentally, as Hackett observes, ‘...to some extent this happens whenever a sector is poorly resourced and supported, so that people are competing for the same small pool of resources’ (Hackett, Interview 2017). This observation brings us to the second set of problems highlighted by the competition:

The South Asian Dance Profession – ‘Mind the Gap!’

In her review of *Young Dancer* 2015, dance critic Ismene Brown points out ‘There’s a muddle here as there is no level playing field for ballet, South Asian, contemporary and street dance’ (Brown 2015, n.p). This is, of course, absolutely right. Looking at the steps of the career ladder, for South Asian dance in Britain, there is no institution providing full-time vocational training; there are no apprentice schemes or ‘post-graduate style’ companies for newly trained dancers and most importantly of all, there are hardly any dance companies to which to apply for a job (Ramphal and Alake 2010; Gorringe et al 2018; Meduri 2020). As I show in the introduction to the thesis, these gaps have not passed unnoticed. I discuss in chapter 3 the many attempts to address these gaps over the years, together with possible reasons for their failure. Suffice it to say for now that the only vocational training available for South Asian dancers in Britain today is through a ‘portfolio’ training arranged through their teacher, or guru. And the best chance of employment is through

forming your own company. As Akram Khan said at Navadisha 2016, ‘there just isn’t enough access to long-term serious classical training, and the many opportunities needed, to make a full-time career as a classical [South Asian] artist today’ (Khan in Gibson 2016: 25-26).

With such gaps in progression routes, it is only to be expected that, in marked contrast to ballet and contemporary contestants, all of whom are engaged in full-time vocational training, this is true of only two of the South Asian dance category finalists. And yet, much as many in the sector would love to dance full-time, it is difficult to make this choice when the options for employment seem so scarce. Hard as life is for contemporary and ballet dancers, with many condemned after years of intensive training to a soul-destroying procession of highly competitive auditions, the critical difference is that there are jobs to aspire to. For one classical Indian arts administrator, the *BBC Young Dancer* may work to change the career path for a single dancer, but this is of little consolation to all the many excellent South Asian dancers who might aspire to work in dance, but for whom there is no obvious way to achieve this (Fieldwork notes, 23.8.2017). In the words of the artistic director and producer of the arts company zeroculture, Hardial Rai, ‘there is still no industry to support those artists ...So we are relying on factors outside our sector for support’ (Rai interview 2021). Within the context of the *Young Dancer*, this means that in the competition finals, dancers in the South Asian category, who must make time for their dance training amidst a range of priorities, are competing against dancers in other categories with sometimes two or even three years of full-time vocational training under their belts – of time spent absorbed in studying, training in and thinking about dance. This clearly presents a risk that South Asian dance forms could end up appearing less technically rigorous than other dance forms – simply due to the lack of time available for study. I put this to Kaushik, whose reply was characteristically feisty:

That’s not the risk – that’s the reality. Ballet is supported by numerous institutes that enable intensive and dedicated training at all levels – we haven’t anything parallel to this. However, it IS worth the risk to take part. Yes, it is not a level playing field, but South Asian dancers have been remarkable in competing on a par with ballet and contemporary dancers despite this. We should not undermine what we have achieved given our circumstances. We are

daring to be on a par with these well nurtured sectors. This comes from the passion and determination of the community.

Kaushik, 2017, Interview 2

In announcing the category winner, choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh, 2017's General Judge, and hence member of all judging panels, spoke of the courage and commitment it takes to decide to be a dancer in a context where there is 'no professional training'. 'You need' she said 'Dedication. You need the support of your family. But above all, these forms require TIME.'⁷³ The winner, despite stiff competition, was a dancer who had made the decision to 'take up full-time training...under the support of his Guru.'⁷⁴

'Contemporary' dance, Category confusion and Cultural Inauthenticity

At the performance in Manchester, one piece presented by the prodigiously talented Jaina Modasia struck, for me, a jarring note. Her duet, as described above, was performed together with a contemporary dancer, and featured several lifts and other partner work completely alien to kathak technique or repertory. While experimentation is to be welcomed, and Fischer-Lichte (2014) reminds us that cultural 'interweavings' are both inevitable, and nothing new, the choice of choreography left me with several questions. Why would a dancer like Modasia, whose proficiency in kathak is stunning, choose choreography likely to be so much more difficult for her to perform? As a collaboration in another context, I could see the appeal – but as part of a competition on national television? When the whole point is to show yourself at your very best – to reveal your artistry in a context where, as choreographer Matthew Bourne put it, 'technique is a given' (Bourne, *Young Dancer* Press Event 2015)? Modasia is a confident and flexible performer and acquitted

⁷³ Jeyasingh made these comments made while announcing the judges' decision for the *BBC Young Dancer* Category Final, The Lowry Theatre Manchester, 23rd January 2017.

⁷⁴ *BBC Young Dancer*, South Asian category finals, programme notes.

herself with impressive competence in a sequence well out of the range of classical kathak – but overall, I was left feeling cheated. I did not want to see Modasia working hard to perform a set of (by contemporary dance standards) indifferent lifts. I wanted to see her fly in a complex battle of rhythms, in a dazzle of *chakars*, in a weaving in and out of floor patterns and changing proximities to her partner. The duet felt forced. Would any of the contemporary or ballet dancers, I wondered, attempt to make a battle of footwork central to their duets? I expressed my frustration to an audience member. ‘Eh’ he sighed ‘It is because they don’t have confidence in their own form’ (Fieldnotes, Lowry, 23 Jan 2017). Was that it? As I discuss later in the thesis, the South Asian dance sector certainly does show occasional signs of being beset by an internalised inferiority complex. As Shay describes, this is not uncommon among formerly colonised communities whereby

...many of the colonized individuals accepted and continue to accept and even exaggerate the denigrating opinions of themselves and their forms of cultural expression held by representatives of colonial powers, long after the presence of the colonial administration.
Shay 2008: 9

A similar point is made by the revolutionary Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire when he writes

Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders...In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes.

Freire 2017: 126

Is Modasia’s duet the result of playful creativity and a transgressive exploration of artistic boundaries? Or is it a (perhaps unconscious) attempt to align the aesthetic of her piece with that of (dominant) Euro-American contemporary dance practice? An instance of what sociologist Anibal Quijano terms the ‘colonisation of the imagination of the dominated’, whereby ‘cultural

Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration’ and ‘European culture became a universal cultural model’ (Quijano 2007: 169)?

Researching this chapter, I re-read the rubric for the competition. In the Repertoire section for South Asian dance, the rules state,

The second solo could show a more contemporary style and/or show movement vocabulary from another South Asian dance form.

Your partner work **should** be a contemporary duet.

BBC Young Dancer Competition Guidelines 2017 (My emphasis).

I asked Hackett about this. ‘Doesn’t it say could?’ she asked – but the guidelines read ‘should’ – not choice, but obligation. The rationale, she explained

...is because the forms are traditionally performed solo – duets do not form part of the tradition. It is a very interesting point. The duet is not part of the traditional form – it wouldn’t be part of an existing catalogue of pieces. So, in this sense any duet choreographed will necessarily be contemporary in that it departs from tradition. We took advice from a lot of people in the sector – Shobana and Piali and others – and the consensus we received was that a duet with a musician would be part of the tradition, while a duet with another dancer probably wouldn’t...

Hackett, Interview, 2017

So far, so good. ‘But’, I asked, ‘What does the word ‘contemporary mean in this context - Isn’t it quite a loaded term?’ Hackett’s response was

I think of the term as ‘contemporary’ with a small ‘c’ – meaning ‘of this time’... As I remember for the 2015 round, we didn’t have any contemporary entries – though Urja choreographed a contemporary piece for Vidya’s final.

Hackett, *ibid.*

While this may have been the intention, I am not convinced that this was the interpretation put on this condition by the participants. As argued above, the openness to a ‘transgressive’ interpretation of the forms lends the competition both depth and integrity, however I find the coercive ‘should’ in this section of the competition’s rubric uncomfortable. If a duet is specified, and granted that this already takes South Asian dance forms out of their conventional format, is there any further need to assert what form that duet should take?

This raises a further question, which is what it is that should count as normative, and what as transgressive, and from whose perspective? Author, scholar and martial artist Janet O’Shea argues that ‘lack of familiarity with choreographic codes often leads non-South Asian viewers to assume that bharatanatyam choreography, no matter how recent its composition, is ‘ancient’ and ‘traditional’ (O’Shea 2007: 57).⁷⁵ This is an example of the kind of misperception identified by McFee I touch on above, whereby the art work is incorrectly understood because it is read with ‘inappropriate assumptions...[which are] imported.’ The responsibility lies here on the panel of specialist judges to pick up on such nuances and convey to the watching public that, for example in Prakash’s first solo, the leaps in the air he performs with knees bent, and soles of the feet pressed together, show inclusion of vocabulary from another dance style, kathakali. It is an indication of the *Young Dancer’s* weight and seriousness that in the broadcast South Asian category final, the bharatanatyam specialist judge, artist and academic Chitra Sundaram explained to viewers what makes Modasia’s interpretation of *Krishna Nee Begane* unusual (Sundaram on the *BBC Young Dancer* 2017, South Asian Final, broadcast 14.4.2017, BBC4).

An additional problem in interpreting the term ‘contemporary’ as a South Asian dancer is that being historically used to an audience that might, for example, see nothing new in, for example,

⁷⁵ Indeed the concept of ‘choreography’ itself raises questions in relation to classical Indian dance forms as I discuss in Chapter 5.

Seeta Patel's interpretation of the classical margam (*Something Then, Something Now*, 2014) – which made use of unconventional spatial arrangement (and included sections of dance performed with her back to the audience, something classical Indian dance traditionalists would regard as taboo), and being used to funding guidelines that have been seen to privilege a specific interpretation of innovation, a lack of confidence in what will be *perceived* or *accepted* as contemporary may result in pushing boundaries in a manner more forced than organic. This is scarcely surprising given the commonly held equation of 'contemporary dance' with Euro-American contemporary dance practice and as such, it is a term that I feel could usefully be dropped from this part of the competition guidelines, or at the very least only used with an explicit guide to its interpretation. Arguably any performance by a contemporary performer is 'contemporary' in that it is rendered by a performer in the present moment, but if the competition means by 'contemporary' something more than this (as it clearly does) – and yet does not mean to refer to 'Contemporary' dance, it is not clear what in fact it does mean. Unambiguous definition is all the more important given the deeply entrenched 'rhetoric of modernity' (Mignolo 2007: 463) which has aligned, since the Enlightenment, the contemporary, the 'modern' the 'new' with the values and cosmology of Western Europe (and later the USA) as opposed to the perceived 'traditionalism' of alternative cosmologies. That this is not mere theoretical nit-picking is borne out by the experience of the competition producers themselves. Independent arts manager Anita Srivastava (founding director of New Dimensions arts management) explains,

In 2014, for the first time, BBC advertised the young dancer competition – and because the brand name BBC was there – and because for the first time they were including ballet, hip hop, contemporary and South Asian, they were expecting quite a few applications. But up to the first deadline, they did not receive a single one [for the South Asian dance category].

Srivastava, Interview, 2017

She was then recruited by the BBC to help with ‘reaching out and getting in touch with the SA dance sector’ (Srivastava, Interview 2017).

Srivastava attributes the lack of applications (which was a continued problem with the second round of the competition in 2017) to a variety of reasons. One of these was the use of the troubled and vague term ‘contemporary’. Srivastava recounts,

...in the application you had to write about... what you were going to present. And the classical work you were going to present as a second piece had to be slightly different from the first piece – it had to be more contemporary. So at this point I picked up the phone to the BBC and checked directly with them – what do you mean? Because none of these dancers are contemporary students and they have not had any contemporary dance training – so what are you expecting? So then they explained that the second piece had to be different from the first piece. So if the first piece was more technique based, the second should be more abhinaya or more fusion based ... the word that they used...that was definitely one of the stumbling blocks for many of the teachers thinking ‘I don’t teach contemporary, so how can I present this?’

Srivastava, Interview, 2017

The suggestion that the second solo might ‘contain elements of vocabulary from another South Asian dance style’, is again, I feel a ‘category confusion’ and a misapplication of what is appropriate for contemporary dance onto South Asian forms. Granted ‘contemporary dance’ covers a multiplicity of techniques – from Graham to Limon, from Cunningham to contact improvisation. The crucial difference is that contemporary dancers expect to train in a variety of these techniques. Whether or not South Asian dancers should train in more than one technique is up for debate. The fact remains however that asking a bharatanatyam dancer to use vocabulary from kathak for example, is more like asking a ballet dancer to use vocabulary from Release technique than like asking a contemporary dancer to play with a combination of Graham and Cunningham. The historical development of the forms means that dancers still struggle to accept or perform different *bani*s or schools of their *own* style, let alone introducing vocabulary from another style altogether. Indeed, the guru-shisya system is based on exclusive training with one guru, such that even taking

class from another teacher within the same *bani* or substyle is seen as potentially confusing and corrupting, and has not, until very recently, been encouraged. And even now, it is rather tolerated than encouraged. Prakash Yadagudde makes this point, highlighting how far he has come from ‘*bani*’ orthodoxy.

...I don’t stick to something rigidly. That is the reason that when we run the Summer School [at the Bhavan centre in London], we call different people...We don’t want to say ‘you have to do only your *bani*’...many people think like that – but that’s not how I think.

Yadagudde, 2017, Interview

In this context, to suggest that dancers use vocabulary from a whole other dance form represents not so much an encouragement to extend the canon as to step outside the canon entirely. It is the mistaken application of the norms of one aesthetic cosmology on another. Having said this, there are pervasive examples of exchange between classical Indian dance forms, where aspects from another classical dance form – or from a folk-dance or a martial arts form are quite naturally incorporated into the performance of a different style – as with Prakash’s use of a kathakali jump in his bharatanatyam piece (referenced above). Such exchange can be typified as what the philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin termed ‘organic hybridisation’ (Bakhtin 1981. See also Meduri 2020). What the *Young Dancer* promotes or even compels by contrast, through the prescription of a hybridisation that goes beyond such organic flows is, I suggest, what Bakhtin describes as a ‘reaccentuation’ (1981: 417) - a hybridisation that can result in a representation of the language hybridised that at best lacks ‘nuance’ (1981: 419) and at worst represents a ‘crude violation’ (1981: 420) of that language.

In both these ways, in the use of the term ‘contemporary’, and in the suggested use of vocabulary from other dance forms, the production of the *Young Dancer* reveals how hard it is, despite the best of intentions, to escape a dominant framework of understanding, and thereby, as Mignolo on puts it, to change ‘the terms in addition to the content of the conversation’ (Mignolo 2007: 459). The

attempt at ‘equal representation’ founders on the lack of a ‘profound understanding of each [dance] language’s socio-ideological meaning and an exact knowledge of the social distribution and ordering of all the other ideological voices of the era’ (Bakhtin 1981: 417). In other words, it founders on a continued ‘gross underestimation’ of ‘the whole significance of Europe’s colonial domination of the world’ (Mbembe 2010: np.), and a continued enactment in this small section of the cultural sphere of that ‘hidden and not so hidden violence at the core of what Western hegemony takes to be its ‘knowledge’ of others, knowledge which most of the time takes the form of ignorance’ (ibid.). It betrays a failure to recognise the full extent to which the Western ideological framework has been and continues to be accepted as universal – a recognition which must be the starting point for any meaningful engagement in decolonisation.

‘All Dances Are Ethnic, but some are more Ethnic than Others’

Developing the point made above, I use the title of dance anthropologist Theresa Buckland’s article (Buckland 1999)⁷⁶ to draw attention to the final issue I want to raise in connection with the *Young Dancer* before considering the wider context. Perhaps the most important, while also the most worrying aspect of the *Young Dancer* is how close it came to being something else entirely. Hackett explains,

When I joined [the *Young Dancer* Advisory Panel], they were going to have to have three categories – ballet, contemporary dance and ‘Other’. They seemed to think that everything else – from Irish dance to musical theatre, to South Asian dance forms, to hip hop would go into one category.

Hackett, 2017, Interview

⁷⁶ This itself riffs on Joann Keali’inohomoku’s (2001) [1969] seminal article, *Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance*.

In one sense such a categorisation would do no more than reflect funding divisions within British dance.⁷⁷ As an illustration, looking at the funding for National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) for the years 2018–2022, the funding for the Birmingham Royal Ballet alone (leaving aside English National Ballet, the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House and other companies) is £31,564,000 for this time period. The funding for the Contemporary Dance Trust in London alone (apart from funding for any other contemporary dance organisation) is £7,175,940. This is in contrast to the funding for all 7 of the South Asian Dance Alliance organisations that are NPOs (Akademi, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Gem Arts, Kala Sangam, Milapfest, Sampad and South Asian Arts UK) put together, which comes to £5,407,252, with the important qualification that 6 of these 7 organisations cater for all South Asian art forms, not only South Asian dance, and that this figure includes the funding for the South Asian Youth Orchestra co-ordinated by Milapfest.⁷⁸ It would also no more than continue to reflect the sub categorisations for dance that continue to be used by the Arts Council – where the dance categorisations include the classifiers of ‘Ballet’, ‘Contemporary’ and ‘World’.⁷⁹

The BBC’s thinking (before they had the good sense to seek advice) is clearly not anomalous. In his reflections on the programme, dance critic Bruce Marriott wrote ‘Ethnic dance came down to South Asian, but what of other ethnic dance?...I hope a wider view can be taken next time and perhaps a catch-all section introduced’ (Marriott, 2015, np.). Similarly, Ismene Brown suggested as a possible improvement, ‘Rethink the categories more broadly to admit jazz, tap and any ethnic dance – rather than only hip-hop and kathak’ (Brown 2015, np.).

⁷⁷ See table on page 238.

⁷⁸ Source: National Portfolio Organisations spreadsheet, 2018 – 2022. Available here <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/national-portfolio-2018-22/more-data-2018-22> (accessed 18.12.2019).

⁷⁹ These archaic internally used categorisations came to light through reference to them in the South Asian dance mapping report (Courtney Consulting 2019). See Agrawal et al. (2021) for the sector response critiquing this usage.

Such commentary, as with the competition prescriptions detailed above, highlights the deep rooted Eurocentricity that persists within the British cultural sector, which assigns to the primarily Euro-American, white dominated forms of ballet and contemporary dance an ahistorical universalism, contrasted with the ‘ethnic’ particularity of other forms. As dance anthropologist Joann Keali’inohomoku pointed out in 1969, almost half a century ago, ‘By definition, every dance form must be an ethnic form. Although claims have been made for universal dance forms...it is doubtful that any such dance form can exist except in theory’ Kealiinohomoku 2001[1969]: 39. It is an illustration within the dance world of the way that ‘a particular ethnicity’ (that of Western Europe) has been ‘taken as universal rationality’, imposing ‘a provincialism as a universalism’ (Quijano 2007: 177).

This perception immediately privileges two white, Euro-American dance styles that do not have, historically a much greater claim to represent ‘British’ dance than South Asian dance or Hip-hop. Thus, while the disappointment and frustration of styles not selected is understandable, the alternative to a narrow selection of forms would be an open competition privileging no style – a kind of ‘Britain’s Got Dancing Talent’. By restricting the number of dance forms presented therefore, the *Young Dancer* safeguards a level of depth, artistic integrity and equality of representation that, as discussed, it mistakenly compromises elsewhere.

Competitions, Meritocracy and South Asian Dance in Britain

The *Young Dancer* is a considered, intelligent competition with a commitment to artistic integrity that avoids the ‘fast culture’ and ‘visionbites’ that characterise so many other televised dance competitions and talent shows. It is a competition that treats with respect all the dance forms with which it engages, and which strives to avoid stereotypes through a model of dialogical performance. The deliberate engagement with and invocation of the artistic narratives of different

cultural forms, through the judgement and commentary of dancers and choreographers from these forms at least in part fulfils Mignolo's plea for the 'pluriversality' that he believes is key to the ongoing project of decolonisation (Mignolo 2007). At the same time, the competition has 'been a huge profile raiser and has created a lot of excitement, and an environment of ambition within students and parents – healthy competition' (Ray, Interview 2, 2017).

However, important as the *Young Dancer* is in these many ways - its goals and purposes remain to an extent thwarted and undone by the sheer weight of the cultural sphere that surrounds it, which is one that continues to hold 'the elite values of European art ... as the pinnacle of human endeavour' (Buckland, 1999:8), with ballet symbolising the 'apogee of the performing arts' (Keali'inohomoku, 2001: 35). This framework is one which, despite its intentions, the *Young Dancer* remains unable to fully recognise and therefore escape. This 'entrapment' is one it shares with the wider British cultural sector where the continuance of 'west' or 'white-centredness' is apparent, from the allocation of state funding to the unexamined and unrecognised aesthetic bias of arts funders, programmers, producers and managers. In 2017, a contemporary dancer won the Young Dancer grand final for the second time, and once again, the space of the Wild Card was awarded to a contemporary dancer.⁸⁰ For the Grand Final, which features judges from each category of dance, the judges must rely on their aesthetic rather than their artistic assessment (following McFee and Best's definition) for each of the performances not from their own discipline. Even if (as one would hope) they made the effort to inform themselves about the other dance styles before the competition, such cursory education cannot be expected to shift a lifetime of acquired aesthetic preferences. In the Grand Final 2017, three out of the six-member jury panel had a contemporary dance background, which, as Dance Tabs commentator Graham Watts observed, seems 'a bit too contemporary-heavy' (Watts, 2017, np). 'It seems that contemporary dancers have the advantage

⁸⁰ In 2015, a further space was awarded a Hip-hop dance artist – and I do feel that the competition could helpfully reserve a further Wild Card space for a Hip-hop or South Asian dance artist.

in this contest', he writes, something he attributes to 'The absence of rigid discipline' while 'the robust reliance on specific disciplined technique [for ballet and kathak] makes even the tiniest blemish more obvious, as well as diminishing the opportunity for self-expression and freedom of movement' (Watts 2017, np.). While acknowledging the symptom, I would contest this diagnosis – in the 2017 competition, for example, I felt that Prakash expressed himself through the character of Hanuman with as much individuality and wit as could be found anywhere else in the series. The bias is, I believe much more deep-seated, and relates to the 'enduring enchantment' (Mignolo 2002) of a culturally specific reading of newness and modernity which privileges 'individualism, the right to criticism, autonomy and action' (Mignolo 2007: 467), and which deliberately defines itself in contradistinction to 'tradition'.

The dominance of the Euro-American contemporary and classical dance traditions within the British dance world is pervasive, painful and frequently not recognized by contemporary dancers who, coming from a context which is non-conformist and eclectic (as well as predominantly liberal and left-wing) are too often inclined to think themselves beyond prejudice. Bisakha Sarker, a creative Indian dancer in the Tagore style who has worked in Britain for over thirty years reflects with some sadness on the contemporary dance world, '...they do not know us. They only know Shobana Jeyasingh...and Akram. But why? We know so many people's names and go to so many things. But why? Because it never came on to their radar. There is no need for it to' (Sarker, Interview, 2017). For a senior arts administrator in the sector, the *Young Dancer* is problematic in the attention it receives, which seems to diminish the importance and value of awards made within the sector itself. For him, it is almost as if the acknowledgement and appreciation of institutions and assessors from outside the sector is required for the sector to appreciate and value itself (Fieldwork notes 23.8.2017).

In this light, Freire's words become all too poignant

For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. Since everything has its opposite, if those who are invaded consider themselves inferior, they must necessarily recognize the superiority of the invaders. The values of the latter thereby become the pattern for the former. The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them – [and we could add, dance like them].

Freire 2017: 126

The argument thus returns inexorably to the question of competition and meritocracy, and the myth both that hard work can get you anywhere and that a social structure that awards ‘special privileges to special talent’ can at the same time pretend to respect the fundamentally equal worth of every person. The failures of the competition are visible not only for South Asian dance. Again, to quote Watts, ‘It seems oddly counter-intuitive that 80% of the finalists in the first two iterations of this event have been young men, which is probably in inverse proportion to the gender balance amongst those seeking entry into the vocational schools’ (Watts 2017, np.). Are we to understand from this that young male dancers are intrinsically more talented? Or should we ask rather what are the structures, ideological and institutional that allow young male dancers to showcase their dance in a manner perceived as ‘finalist material’? Ultimately, the attempt to present a competition of equals cannot overcome the structures and bias that continue to favour the white and the male.

Conclusion

An examination of the competition the *BBC Young Dancer* brings into focus both how far South Asian dance forms have come in this country and how far they have yet to go (in terms of infrastructural support as well as wider appreciation and acknowledgement). The challenges faced by the young classical Indian dancers entering this competition, with its self-conscious and deliberate links to the world of professional British dance, reflect the wider challenges faced by classical Indian dancers aspiring to a career in dance in Britain. Like any artist attempting to make a living from their artforms, they face the same questions as the producers framing this

competition – how to present dance that is accessible without being comfortable, that is legible without surrendering to a ‘visionbite’ stereotype, and that is commercially viable without being driven by a commercial end. How can one be a ‘professional’ in the sense of making one’s living as a dancer or performer while continuing to be ‘professional’ in the sense of honouring a ‘concern for the laws of form demanded by aesthetic autonomy’ (Adorno 1975: 14)?

For classical Indian dancers in Britain, as for the young dancers in the ‘South Asian’ category of this competition, together with these challenges, there are additional demands which can make the engagement with the wider world of British dance a particularly complex and enervating venture. There is the constant negotiation a self-representation that avoids the pitfalls of either essentialism or assimilation (Kedhar 2020). The common conflation of the term ‘contemporary dance’ with ‘Euro-American contemporary dance’, places on other dance forms the burden of proving their contemporaneity (Kwan 2017), a problem exacerbated by the ‘rhetoric of modernity’ (Mignolo 2007), which positions ‘tradition’ as something in the past. There is the persistent labour of insisting on the need for their work and their dance forms to be assessed in the terms of their own artistic narratives. After all, in the words of artist and cultural theorist Brenda Dixon Gottschild, ‘One of the easiest ways to disempower others is to measure them by a standard that ignores their chosen aesthetic frame of reference and its particular demands’ (Gottschild 1997: 171). Yet, as the *Young Dancer* shows, so entrenched is the assumed and unexamined universalism of Euro-American aesthetics and conventions that this is hard to ensure even where the need has been acknowledged. As in the *Young Dancer* Competition, professional classical Indian dancers in Britain must ‘compete’, in this case for funding and for audiences. And as with the *Young Dancer*, this competition takes place in a landscape in which multiple social structures mean that in many ways, the ‘winners’ are always already determined.

The illustration of this competition therefore encapsulates several of the themes and challenges that I discuss further in this thesis. Its focus on passionate and talented dancers at the start of their professional lives is a reminder of what is lost when these dancers turn to medicine, engineering or dentistry and thereby lends a sense of urgency to the question of a developing classical Indian dance profession in Britain and what might obstruct its growth. Before considering structures that are in place, how they succeed and where they fail, I will first rewind a little and take some time to consider the controversial concept of 'professionalism'.

Chapter 2

Professionalism

Of Work, Love and Money: Living to dance – or dancing to live

What it means to be a ‘professional’ classical Indian dancer in Britain.

Understanding and acting on these economic trajectories is what makes the difference between dance as a noble hobby and dance as a professional career.

Shobana Jeyasingh, in Gibson 2016: 38

*‘Professionalism’ is about serving the art and your art form **solely**, as the centre point of your life. That for me is professionalism. It’s not about money. It’s not about how much money you make or how successful you are.*

Akram Khan Interview, 2017 (Khan own emphasis)

‘Guriji has trained many students [in dance] who have gone on to be top professionals and work in top establishments’

Compere, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Fieldnotes Feb 2017

‘...the lack of distinction between amateur and professional is a major problem in our sector’

Dance artist, personal communication, Fieldnotes May 2016

Introduction: Professionalisation, a preoccupation for South Asian dance in Britain.

I am at my old dance school, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan or Institute of Indian Culture, based in West Kensington in London. A former church, it is now a thriving centre for Indian arts and

languages. I have returned to see another performance by Akshay Prakash, the dancer from the *BBC Young Dancer* with whom the last chapter opened, this time in the context of a dance drama, as one performer among an ensemble. I enjoy the familiar feel of the Bhavan, finding my seat in the Mountbatten Hall where images of Lord Louis Mountbatten and Prince Charles gaze down benignly at the assembled audience. Where in India anglicised names such as Madras and Calcutta have been replaced with the non-anglo-inflected Chennai and Kolkata, in this London outpost of Indian culture, Louis and Charles remain comfortably settled. As anticipated, the performance starts somewhat late; equally as anticipated, I enjoy the performance very much when it eventually starts. The cast, all made up of volunteer, or unpaid dancers, are committed and confident with a couple of outstanding performers, including Akshay. Sometime before the performance finale there are speeches. Even as I stifle a sigh, there is a part of me that welcomes this interruption. For as long as I can remember speeches lauding the performers and the creative team have been an integral feature of performances at the Bhavan. Somehow not to have them would seem improper or incomplete. My mind wanders as the compere starts the customary round of thanks and congratulations. My attention is caught however by a proud reference to Guruji's (Prakash Yadagudde's) achievements, as someone who 'has trained many students [in dance] who have gone on to be top *professionals* and work in top establishments' (Fieldnotes Feb 2017, my emphasis).

The term catches my attention in part, inevitably, because of my focus for this study on what it means to 'professionalise' Indian classical dance forms in Britain, but also in part because it is unexpected. I am used at the Bhavan to hearing about the 'legal eaglets' or the well organised medics who combine their careers with weekends and evenings spent at the Bhavan, often resulting in good quality performances, such as this evening's show. The two leads in this piece are both medics, Akshay studying at medical school, and the heroine of the dance drama already working as a medic in London. What does the compere mean, I wonder, by her invocation of 'professionals'? Does she mean top professional dancers, and in this case, which 'top

establishments' is she referring to? I can certainly think of a number of my guru's students who are professional dancers, but they work in the main for their own companies. Or does she mean that they are top professional dancers, but also working as professionals in other fields, in top establishments outside of dance? Is she referring to the unpaid dancers of tonight's performance? Does 'professionalism' not have a monetary association in her understanding of it? Whatever her intention, her investment in the importance of 'professionalism' is clear.

As I discuss in the introduction, 'professionalism' has become an increasing preoccupation for the South Asian dance sector in Britain. For example, as I show in the previous chapter, for Akademi's Kaushik, the recognition of South Asian dance forms as 'professional' rather than 'community' art forms is partly what made the inclusion of a South Asian dance category in the *BBC Young Dancer* so significant. Writing in a magazine belonging to an organisation representing the wider British dance sector (One Dance UK), London based kathak dancer Parbati Chaudhury reflects on a series of meetings that were run over two years by the South Asian Dance Alliance (SADAA). What interested her most in these meetings, she observes, were the discussions that focused on 'the professionalisation of practitioners' (2019: 28). In a very different part of the sector at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan which, unlike Akademi, is an institution less concerned with building links to the wider community of dance in Britain and more interested in 'stick[ing] to what we do best...' - 'concentrat[ing] on promoting our classical dance forms' (M. Nandakumara, Interview 2018), the awareness of the currency of the 'professional' is likewise present, as the compere's speech indicates.

So, why is this Anglo-American derived sociological concept (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Rueschemeyer 1983) of such significance for South Asian dance in Britain? While the status of the 'professional' is evidently desired, it is not clear what being a 'professional' entails. Indeed, as the opening quotations demonstrate, there are multiple and at times opposing understandings of what

it means. Like ‘beauty’, it appears to be a good and desirable quality, but one that means different things to different people. And yet, unlike ‘beauty’ which has a contingency that is generally recognised, being ‘professional’ continues to be upheld as a quality that adheres to some objective standards. Unfortunately, it seems, there is not much agreement as to precisely what these are. For classical Indian dancers in Britain keen to demonstrate ‘professionalism’ therefore, this involves chasing a chimera – where it is anybody’s guess as to when this status has been achieved. Unsurprisingly then, the anonymous dance artist cited in the last quotation above finds that there is no clear distinction between what defines an amateur and a professional practitioner.

This chapter attempts to put a shape to this chimera that has such a hold on the South Asian dance sector in Britain. In doing so, I hope to impose some parameters on the concept’s current somewhat inchoate influence. Starting with an overview of sociological understandings of ‘profession’ and its cognates, I then look at the complications of defining ‘professionalism’ within the arts (particularly dance) and more specifically, South Asian dance. In order to do so I briefly trace the history of classical Indian dance forms, their suppression and revival, showing how this history impacts on current ‘professional’ practice both in India and Britain, particularly by encouraging the pattern of the ‘dual career’ dancer. I conclude by asking, given both its contingency and its ambiguity, is the concept of the ‘professional’ (and hence ‘professionalism’) in fact useful at all, or is it best abandoned? This was the preferred approach of Bourdieu for whom, ‘[p]rofession is a folk concept which has been uncritically smuggled into scientific language and which imports into it a whole social unconscious’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 242), a concept ‘all the more dangerous because...it has all appearance of neutrality in its favour’ (ibid.). His suggestion was that the concept be replaced altogether in favour of that of ‘field’. I evaluate how far his suggestion of ‘field’ serves as a viable substitute for understanding ‘professions’ and ‘professionalism’ and suggest three key ‘features of professionalism’ that I argue hold across occupations and across cultures.

Profession, professional, professionalise – a brief note from sociology

On one level the meaning of ‘professional’ is very straightforward. Sociologist Stephen Ackroyd acknowledges, ‘In everyday speech to be professional requires only that a person is paid for their work and/or adopts a business-like approach to it’ (Ackroyd 2016: 15). Or, in the words of a musician friend, ‘it’s when you get paid, innit?’⁸¹ The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘professionalisation’ as ‘the action or process of giving an occupation, activity, or group professional qualities, typically by increasing training or raising required qualifications’. ‘Professional’, in turn, is defined as ‘relating to or belonging to a profession’, as ‘a person engaged or qualified in a profession’ or as ‘engaged in a specified activity as *one's main paid occupation* rather than as an amateur’ (my emphasis). Sequentially, the definition of ‘profession’ is listed as ‘a *paid* occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification’ (my emphasis). This is echoed in Jeyasingh’s understanding of the term, quoted above: ‘Understanding and acting on these economic trajectories is what makes the difference between dance as a noble hobby and dance as a professional career’ (Jeyasingh, in Gibson 2016: 38).

Using this understanding, ‘professionalisation’ would refer to the process of transitioning from an amateur (or unpaid) to a paid pursuit. This is not the whole story however, as Akram Khan’s perception of the term makes clear. For him, professionalism has nothing to do with ‘economic trajectories’. On the contrary, ‘professionalism’ is about serving the art and your art form *solely*, as the centre point of your life... It’s not about money’ (Khan Interview, 2017, Khan own emphasis). Rather than an economic alignment, Khan’s understanding of ‘professionalism’ invokes commitment, integrity and surrender to one’s work.

Part of the challenge of understanding what it means to be ‘professional’ is that the term has come to signify both an understanding of someone who is ‘paid for their work’ (with the implication

⁸¹ Mark Broadhead, Cellist, Personal Communication, 20.6.2017.

that they merit such pay for their acquired expertise) at the same time as invoking someone who ‘puts their work first’ (with the implication that they will carry out their work to the best of their ability regardless of what they might be paid). In this way, in common parlance, while at one level, as Ackroyd observes, ‘professional’ equates to ‘being paid’, it is at the same time widely touted as signalling desirable qualities such as competence and commitment to work above and beyond ‘being paid’. It suggests a level of engagement with one’s occupation that takes it beyond simply being a ‘job’. The same term is used therefore, both to invoke monetisation and to reject it.

This inherent tension in the understanding of what it means to be ‘a professional’ is reflected in the sociology of professions where theories about ‘professions’ and ‘professionalism’ can be seen to fall into two main camps (Ackroyd 2016), labelled by Brante as the ‘Naïve’ and the ‘Cynical’ (Brante 1988). What Brante terms the ‘Naïve’ understanding stems from ‘functionalism’, a theory which argues that institutions emerge and persist because of the use or the ‘function’ they serve to a society (Ackroyd 2016). This account of professions assumes that they ‘serve the public good and are altruistic’ (Ackroyd 2016: 17) and is presented by Brante as ‘Naïve’ in that it rests on the ideal of a ‘utopian professional focussed on the common good’ (Brante 1988: 121). A more recent restatement of this position can be found in the work of scholars such as Eliot Freidson, who argues that an emphasis on ‘professionalism’ can uphold the ideal of an ‘ideology of service’ and ‘devotion to a transcendent value’ in the face of the growing pressures of the market (consumerism) and organisations (managerialism) (Freidson 2004 [2001]: 116). This view, I suggest, corresponds to Khan’s understanding of professionalism as involving a selfless devotion to one’s craft.

A counter view of professions, presented by Brante as ‘Cynical’ (Brante 1988) arose in part in reaction against the idealist functionalist view, and is possibly best summed up in the aphorism attributed to philosopher and dramatist George Bernard Shaw – ‘All professions are conspiracies

against the laity' (Shaw, cited in Brante 1988: 119). Under this interpretation, professions attempt to impose what the pioneer sociologist, Max Weber, termed 'closure' (Weber 1979 [1922]) on the occupations they regulate, where closure means the 'monopolisation of opportunities by various social groups' (Brante 1988: 127). A key proponent of this position was Terence Johnson, who argued that professions are not types of occupations so much as 'a peculiar means of occupational control' (Johnson 1972: 27). Under this construction, 'professions', far from being altruistic, 'promote professional practitioners' own occupational self-interests in terms of salary, status and power' (Evetts 2014: 38). While it misrepresents Jeyasingh's view to align it too closely with this 'cynical' position, and I discuss below the problems with overly romantic notions of 'art as above money' below, there is nonetheless a correspondence here with the perception of professionalism as connected to an 'understanding and acting on economic trajectories'.

There are elements of truth in each of these understandings of 'professionalism', both the 'Naïve' or 'Cynical'. Part of the complexity pertaining to the concepts of 'profession' and 'professionalism' stems from the fact that they have come to represent both an ideal of commitment to excellence as well as a pragmatic acceptance of the need for income and the means of making a livelihood. Inherent in 'professionalism' is the tension that arises from the necessity to monetise one's craft, or one's practice, in particular within a capitalist economy. The 'Naïve' and 'Cynical' perspectives merely highlight different ends of the same conundrum.

The earliest understandings of 'the professional' sidestepped this conflict by making 'the professional' someone who, though he might make some financial gain from his practice (and at that point in time it was almost exclusively 'his'), did not depend on it for his living. American sociologist, and early thinker on professions Everett Hughes points out that the very 'earliest meaning of the adjective 'professed' was 'one that has taken the vows of a religious order' (Hughes 1963: 656). As the term was secularised, it took with it some of the qualities of involvement in a

religious order, including entry into a closed group with its own specific code of practice, an appeal to a specialised body of knowledge, a set of expected relations between members of the order and finally, a commitment to that which has been professed, entailing a commitment to a more universal entity and a wider good than the service of a particular client (or one's own livelihood). The earliest established 'professions' were those of 'divinity, law and medicine. Also the military profession' (ibid.), practised by those for whom their profession was a supplement to independent means. Consequently, there developed, to follow sociologist of professions Julia Evetts, the early image of the professional, which was one of '... the doctor, lawyer and clergyman, who were independent gentlemen, and could be trusted as a result of their competence and experience to provide altruistic advice within a community of mutually dependent middle- and upper-class clients' (Evetts 2014: 42). These professionals being 'independent gentlemen', their need to make an income was not paramount – and thus they would not be corrupted by it. Their economic independence safeguarded their integrity.

This elite status and impression of trustworthiness and competence is in part what drove twentieth century occupations not previously considered as such to seek the status of a profession, with its concomitant benefits of 'more independence, more recognition, a higher place, a cleaner distinction between those in the profession and those outside, and a larger measure in choosing colleagues and successors' (Hughes 1963: 661). Hence Hughes' conclusion in 1972 that 'The concept of profession is ... one of *value and prestige*' (Hughes 1972: 339 – 340, cited in Joffe 1977: 19, my emphasis). This association with 'value and prestige' drove the anxiety within manifold occupations to lay a stake to the descriptor, leading American sociologist Harold Wilensky, to write an article entitled *The Professionalisation of Everyone?* (1964) critiquing the tendency for everyone, including 'barbers, bellboys, bootblacks and taxi drivers' to claim to be 'professionalised' (1964: 138). Sixty years on, the association of 'professionalism' with status and worth remains as potent as ever - and South Asian dancers (in Britain) are no more inured to its allure than anybody else.

Clearly, a quality open to everyone loses its claims to distinction or privilege, and much early writing on the professions and professionalism focused on attempting to determine what kind of occupation could legitimately be called a ‘profession’ and in what context. Hence the approach sometimes termed ‘trait theory’⁸² developed, espoused by sociologists such as Wilensky (1964), Millerson (1964), Greenwood (1957) and others (see Ackroyd 2016),⁸³ whereby an attempt was made to establish what distinguished a profession in line with a number of identifiable ‘traits’ or characteristics. The problem with this theory was and is that there is ‘only limited agreement as to what the traits of professions are’ (Ackroyd 2016:16). As a result, there is now a widespread recognition ‘that definitional precision [of professionalism] is ... a time-wasting diversion...’ (Evetts 2013: 780) and that ‘it no longer seems important to draw a hard-definitional line between professions and other (expert) occupations’ (Evetts 2014: 33). Nevertheless, there has been some agreement, and it is worth bearing in mind that most lists refer to ‘expertise’, ‘a consistent body of knowledge’ and ‘certification of competency’ (Ackroyd 2016:16).

While the amount of time scholars have spent unravelling the finer points of ‘professionalism’ could, with some justification, provoke accusations of sophistry, it remains the case that the attribution of ‘professional’ and ‘professionalism’ does matter. It matters where the line is drawn between who is ‘amateur’ and who ‘professional’. Just as doctors discuss ‘frauds’ or ‘quacks’ whom they regard as betraying the ideals of their profession (Wahlberg 2007), for dancers there are a range of ‘wannabe’ dancers, ‘housewives’ or ‘amateurs’⁸⁴ who are thought to tarnish the way the field is perceived, and from whom they wish to be clearly distinguished. As sociologists Mark Neal

⁸² This is not related to the ‘trait theory’ found in other areas such as psychology or criminology, other than in referring to specific characteristics.

⁸³ Much of this summary draws on Ackroyd’s (2016) clear and helpful summary on the development of sociological theories of professionalism.

⁸⁴ These are all pejorative terms used by dance artists within the field to describe other dance artists they wish to distinguish themselves from.

and John Morgan observe in their millennial reprise of Wilensky's article, 'The ethnographic approach to the professions...demonstrates that the issues of definition and social closure are not mere academic constructs but are everyday concerns for professionals as part of their work' (2000: 10). Hence the frustration of the dancer cited at the beginning of the chapter with 'the lack of distinction between amateur and professional' in the world of classical Indian dance. While the choice of the label 'profession' or 'expert occupation' for a particular area of work may be an academic exercise, the attempt to achieve 'occupational control of the work', to determine who is 'competent to work', or to establish who merits the legitimacy of the title 'professional' – is not.

In the context of the arts, standards of practice and guidelines for what distinguish a 'professional' are important both in the 'idealist' (Naïve) sense - to ensure excellence in artistic practice for those the practitioners serve (the audience), and in the 'Cynical' sense because, as social geographer Alison Bain points out, 'without a professional guarantee, it can be difficult to ensure that society and the marketplace compensate artists for their works' (Bain 2005: 34). While the 'cynical' view of professionalisation rightly alerts us to the dangers of the exploitation of a relatively disempowered public by a privileged professional class, in the context of work by artists (who have historically struggled to have their labour properly recognised), occupational control can be seen as essential to prevent their own exploitation. Contrary to the 'Cynical' view, in ensuring a certain level of artistic practice, occupational control can also work to safeguard both artist and audience, art (or dance) teacher and art (or dance) student. As Buckland shows in her article *Crompton's Campaign* (2007), the Victorian dance master Robert Crompton's efforts to impose standards on the practice of dance teaching in Britain in the 1900s and to 'exercise collective control over the artistic standards of the profession', were motivated as much by a desire to root out charlatans to prevent a situation whereby 'pupils are spoiled and Art suffers' (Crompton 1892, cited in Buckland 2007: 26) as to 'protect employment rights' [of bona fide teachers] (Buckland 2007: 2).

A hundred years later, the young British South Asian dance sector finds itself facing a similar task. As the quotations at the start of the chapter suggest, at present there is no clear basis for ‘occupational control’ within the sector – rather, it is assessed on very different and sometimes opposing criteria. I explore some of the social and historical reasons behind these disagreements below.

Working to live, or living to work – the ‘professional’ artist

*‘Go to the British funding authorities and say, ‘We are professional dancers with a positive contribution to make to the British cultural scene...we must have **money**’ (Massey 1982: 11, my emphasis).*

What makes a ‘professional’ artist? A ‘professional’ dancer? Debates about what or who might constitute a ‘professional’ are additionally complicated in the field of the arts where the lack of necessity for formal qualification (see below) and yet the importance of training; the lack of a clear career progression, and yet the existence of understood status markers within the field, together with the existence of a ‘reversed economy’ valuing ‘symbolic’ over ‘economic capital’ (Bourdieu 1983; Svensson 2015), all transgress commonly cited traits of ‘professionalism’ including ‘certification of competency’ or ‘vocational qualifications’, ‘salaries’ and a ‘full-time occupation’ (Ackroyd 2016; Weber 1979 [1922], cited in Ritzer 1975),⁸⁵ making ‘occupational control’ particularly challenging. As Bourdieu observes, ‘one of the most significant properties of the field of cultural production is its extreme permeability’ (1993: 43). Thus Bain writes in her discussion of the construction of artistic identity, ‘with no degrees, licenses, prerequisites or credentials, there is an inherent difficulty in separating ...professionals from amateurs’ (Bain 2005: 25). The lack of clear boundaries is far from being a problem unique to South Asian dance in Britain.

⁸⁵ Bourdieu writes: ‘Thus at least in the most perfectly autonomous sector of the field for cultural production, where the only audience aimed at is other producers (e.g. Symbolist poetry), the economy of practices is based, as in a generalized game of “loser wins”, on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies, that of business (it excludes the pursuit of profit and does not guarantee any sort of correspondence between investments and monetary gains), that of power (it condemns honours and temporal greatness), and even that of institutionalized cultural authority (the absence of any academic training or consecration may be considered a virtue)’ (Bourdieu 1983: 320).

Even in areas such as European classical music, contemporary dance or ballet where there are clear vocational programmes and an elaborate framework of certification, ultimately, as psychotherapist Jon Frederickson and sociologist James F. Rooney observe in their study of the ‘music occupation’, ‘the fact remains that an individual can become a musician without attending a school or conservatory...the reason for this is simple: success in music is measured through readily available skill, not through certification of knowledge’ (Frederickson and Rooney 1990: 198). Sociologist Roger Stebbins echoes this - ‘Artists and entertainers are also validated as professionals when they are invited or hired to present their art in places renowned for displaying professional talent’ (Stebbins 1992: 29) without completing any certified training.

Returning to the Oxford Dictionary, or the ‘commonly understood’ definition of a professional, as someone ‘paid for their work’, again, working within the arts makes this complicated. As Stebbins points out, ‘It is well known that only a small minority of artists and entertainers can live solely by the income from their vocation...most professionals in these fields are forced to be part time practitioners to some degree’ (Stebbins 1992: 29). This is all the more so within dance, considered by many to be the ‘Cinderella’ of the arts (Burns and Harrison 2009). An article on an American financial advice website, forbiddingly entitled *Think you can dance for a career? Think again*, starkly reinforces this point. John Munger, then director of research and information for Dance USA is quoted as saying ‘The vast majority of dancers cannot make a living off dancing alone as a performer...I believe less than 3000 actually do in the entire nation’ (McDonald 2006: np). This finding is supported in the report *Dance Mapping*, produced by Susanne Burns and Sue Harrison for Arts Council England in 2009 who note, ‘Many dance workers...operate what have been termed as ‘portfolio careers’, defined as ‘no longer having one job, one employer, but multiple jobs and employers within one or more professions’... This idea of having a portfolio career is symptomatic of the working life of a dancer...’ (2009: 127).

What does the understanding of a 'professional' as one who is 'paid' mean in this context? If one is paid for a single performance, does this make one a professional? Does it matter how much the payment was for? For Kaushik, one is professional, 'from the moment you sign a contract' (Kaushik, Interview 3). So, is one a professional for as long as one is contracted, no more, no less? Or does a single contract entitle one to admission to the 'professional artists 'club''? Does it matter if the contract does not involve any financial exchange?

The difficulties inherent in this equation between 'professional' and 'being paid' are highlighted in a random search on 'professional dancers' on Google. The website dance.net features as responses to the question 'What makes a person a 'professional' dancer?' both 'By most competition rules, it's if 40% of your income is from dance', and 'where I train – it's when you earn the majority of your income from dance...about 80%'.⁸⁶ Even supposing a suitable percentage were agreed on, what should count as 'earning an income from dance'? Does teaching count? Or leading workshops as well as performance? How about dance management? In 2009, Dance UK suggested that 30,000 people were employed in the dance sector, yet only 2,500 Equity members (the British trade union for performers and creative practitioners) described themselves as dancers (Burns and Harrison 2009). Even allowing for performing dancers who may not have belonged to Equity, these figures show a striking discrepancy. In what capacity were the remaining 27,500 employed? What distinguished the 2,500 people who considered themselves to be 'dancers'?

The bar set by Equity does not seem prohibitive, asking for proof of either

- One job on an Equity contract in film, television, radio or theatre as an actor, audio artist, dancer, singer, stage management, theatre director, theatre designer or choreographer. Please note this does not include Equity student production contracts.

Or

⁸⁶ <http://www.dance.net/topic/4351007/1/Jazz-Professionals> (accessed 30.5.2019).

- Evidence of earnings in excess of £500 from the industry in an area of work covered by Equity. If you are aged 16 or under your earnings must be in excess of £250.⁸⁷

Notably, an ‘area of work covered by Equity’ includes not only performance work, but also work as ‘a teacher or voice coach engaged in the teaching of performing arts.’⁸⁸ The key determinant is evidence of (some) pay. Medical anthropologist Caroline Potter, in her discussion of the process of making a professional contemporary dancer, *Learning to Dance*, found that for contemporary dancers, completion of training was insufficient grounds to count oneself as professional, but nor, apparently, was being paid in itself. Professionalism also had to do with the status or the legitimacy of the work undertaken:

Recognition as a professional is largely linked to performance and/or choreographic experience, for instance through acceptance into an *established company*, participation in *recognized* dance festivals (e.g., London’s annual Dance Umbrella), or paid teaching at *recognizable* venues... Recent graduates of dance training programmes, while officially (according to School administrators) part of the professional community, often do not recognize themselves or their peers as successful professionals until they have secured a first performance or choreographic contract.

Potter 2007: 266 (my emphasis)

Dance scholar Judith Alter cites dancer and psychologist Carol Ryser’s study among dancers who likewise felt that ‘professional’ was not determined only by remuneration, but by ‘consecration’ (Bourdieu 1983: 320) or the ‘act of dancing regularly with a *recognised* company’ (Alter 1997: 73, my emphasis).

In the particular case of South Asian dance in Britain, the difficulties with ‘professionalism’ as defined in relation to both ‘consecration’ and remuneration are especially pronounced. As I discuss in chapter 1, while employment for many dancers is precarious, the ‘ready-made’ employment option of work as a company dancer is, for South Asian dancers in Britain, almost

⁸⁷ <https://www.equity.org.uk/about/how-to-join/> (accessed 23.5.2019).

⁸⁸ https://www.equity.org.uk/media/2759/equity_insurance-2019.pdf (accessed 20.6.2020).

non-existent and where opportunities do exist, they are less likely to receive mainstream legitimisation or ‘consecration’. Contemporary dance artist Georgia Redgrave reflects on her experience of working with bharatanatyam dancers, ‘I thought that we had it hard as contemporary dancers, but it sounds like there are really very few opportunities for bharatanatyam dancers, so much so that dancers are just happy to get opportunities to dance, even if it’s really low paid or unpaid’ (cited in Agrawal 2019a: np). As a result, for South Asian dance, the ‘professional’ marker of securing a contract with a ‘recognised company’ is proportionally less likely. This is true to such an extent that former *Yuva Gati* director (2008 – 2018), and bharatanatyam artist and teacher Anusha Subramanyam felt constrained to advise young South Asian dancers wishing to pursue a career in dance to apply to contemporary dance courses:

I *have* actually been telling my dancers that they should apply to do a contemporary course. And I have been asked – why? And my thing is – why not? If you want to be a performer in this country – a full time performer and a choreographer...if anyone of us was to train at one of the contemporary dance schools, there are more opportunities.

Subramanyam Interview 2017

Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that an Akademi report commissioned in 1997 found that South Asian dancers felt that:

...professionalism should be redefined and not solely determined by taking as its criterion that of performing and teaching dance as the principal source of income... *professionalism is to do with excellence of performing standards and should not be taken as commensurate with the earning potential of the performer.* They feel that this is a cultural issue of great consequence, an imposition of values tantamount to cultural imperialism...in a culturally diverse society one should be allowed to retain the freedom of performing without this being linked to earning money from dance, if one so wishes, without a perceived consequent lowering of one’s performance standards.

Iyer 1997a: 57 (my emphasis)

For these dancers, the notion of tying the concept of ‘professionalism’ to the economic reality of money and contracts is dangerously reductive. Dancer, choreographer and coach Mavin Khoo makes this case eloquently,

So just as an example, as a dancer I think one of the limitations of working within a professional setting in the West is of course that then dance becomes your job. And when it becomes your job, the boundary that this places in terms of, I guess things that for me are important, like truly living and surrendering to your craft...the more I work, the more experience I have working in a range of contexts and it’s a very ambiguous line about how many professional dancers are actually invested in becoming artists, and how many are doing their jobs.

Khoo, Interview 2017

For Khoo, the only meaningful and abiding contract for an artist is with their artform – and other contractual agreements must yield to the over-riding demands of this most important commitment.

While Khoo distinguishes the ‘limitations of working within a professional setting in the West’, there is in fact a long-established rhetoric within the arts world in the West, which underlines the importance of ‘the theory of art for art’s sake, which is to the field of cultural production what the axiom ‘business is business’ ...is to the economic field’ (Bourdieu 1983: 343). The arts operate, Bourdieu argues, within a ‘reversed economy’, or within a field that places a value on ‘disinterestedness’. He draws a comparison with the case of prophecy, which ‘demonstrates its authenticity by the fact that it brings in no income’ (Bourdieu 1993: 40). Consequently, Bain remarks, there has been and still lingers ‘A spirit of romanticism embodied in the stereotypical image of the starving artist in a garret’ (Bain 2005: 29; Abbing 2008). The artist, this romantic image suggests, cares nothing for income so long as they can commit themselves to their art. As with understandings of who or what makes a ‘professional’, such mythical ideals within the arts world matter because they impact on how people live. An investigation into the career of the

independent dancer by dance scientist Imogen Aujla and dancer and academic Rachel Farrer revealed that

...some dancers and choreographers were reluctant to talk about money, firstly because it appeared to compromise their artistic integrity: “no one likes talking about money, whether it’s institutions or a funded company. You feel like you’ve got to maintain artistic integrity...I think there’s this notion that it’s about producing your art, so it’s about your artistic identity and the fulfilment of the project. But then it’s hard to earn anything [laughs].

Aujla and Farrer 2015: n.p.

Contrary to Massey’s exhortation cited at the beginning of this section (‘We are professional dancers...we must have money’), the understanding in this case is ‘We are professional dancers...we don’t talk about money (because our commitment goes beyond it).’

Thus, the debate returns to the very first understandings of ‘profess’ and ‘professionals’ where the understanding of ‘professed’, referring to one who ‘has taken the vows of a religious order’ (Hughes 1963: 656), was carried into succeeding understandings of ‘professionals’, in that the ‘professor’ was assumed to have avowed their commitment to a more universal entity and a wider good than the service of a particular client (or their own livelihood).

‘Jobbing professionals’, ‘Noble Hobbyists’⁸⁹ - and a historical interlude

It would be interesting to trace (though beyond the scope of this project) when the widely understood meaning of ‘professional’ switched from having at its heart the idea of a ‘nobler’ or broader goal than payment, to the point where the dictionary defines the concept in terms of ‘being paid’. A significant part of the *kudos* attached to the earlier understanding of ‘professional’, as I argue above, pertained to the professional’s relative indifference (or at least apparent indifference) to monetary reward.

⁸⁹ Jeyasingh used this term to describe the middle-class performers of the reconstructed Indian classical dance forms in her keynote speech at Navadisha, May 2016, mac Birmingham.

Given the sociological evolution of Indian classical dance forms (described below), it is worth observing that in the historical context of British sport, the term ‘professional’ referred to a player requiring of payment (as opposed to the ‘amateur’ who played for love of the game alone). In this context, the ‘amateur’ typically held greater status than the ‘professional’ (Wagg 2000). This was essentially on the same basis that had afforded the professional (in other contexts) part of their original status – that of pursuing the chosen activity free of economic interest. Thus, sports sociologist Stephen Wagg shows how until as recently as the 1960s and 70s, within English cricket, ‘amateurs’ were upper class ‘Gentlemen’ players who played with no fee, while the ‘professionals’ were ‘usually hired by gentlemen to play for their teams’ (Wagg 2000: 32). Accordingly, team captains were almost always ‘amateurs’, with ‘the inherent leadership qualities of the gentleman amateur often fiercely asserted’, thanks to their ‘educated minds’ and ‘logical power of reasoning’ (ibid.).⁹⁰ The thinking behind this is made plain in the framework on amateur status drawn up by the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) in 1948 which states in its first clause, ‘An Amateur is one who practises and competes ONLY for the love of the sport’ (capitals in the original) (cited in Polley 2000: 93). This is by contrast with the (by implication) less noble paid professionals, pejoratively known as ‘mere jobbers’ or ‘instrumentalists’ (Allison 2001:157). These same values found within British sport also applied to the practice of Indian classical dance forms in the early to mid-twentieth century. Given the impact this history has had on understandings of ‘professionalism’ in South Asian dance in Britain today, it is worth a slight digression to consider this in some detail.

⁹⁰ Wagg relates the tale of Jack Hobbs, a professional player for Surrey in 1904, who was superlatively talented and came to be regarded as the best batsman in the world. Due to his talent, he was claimed as an ‘honorary amateur’ by the game’s elite, with Pelham Warner, the Middlesex captain affording him the high praise of being a ‘professional who played just like an amateur’ (Wagg 2000: 33).

As is well documented elsewhere (Srinivasan 1985; Gaston 1996; Allen 1997; O’Shea 1998; Meduri 2001, 2004; Soneji 2010), Indian classical dance forms have a long history of professional performance albeit in the context of temples, courts and private salons rather than in the contemporary [Euro-American] context of ticketed stage performance. From at least the 16th century (and probably earlier), the various dance forms that were later reconstructed as ‘Indian classical dance forms’ were performed by dancers known by different names in different part of India, but now most commonly recognised as *devadasis*.^{91,92}

As Amrit Srinivasan’s now classic ethnographic work identified, at least within the South of India, these hereditary dancers had established an occupational ‘way of life’ or a ‘professional ethic’ (*vrtti, murai*). While ‘the office of *devadasi* was hereditary’, it ‘did not confer the right to work *without adequate qualification*’ (Srinivasan 1985: 1869, my emphasis). Rather, ‘recruitment to the profession was restricted on the basis of criteria such as – sex, inheritance, initiation, training (the public demonstration of skill in one’s art subsequent to a ritual and social apprenticeship...was the necessary preliminary to a professional career)’ (Srinivasan 1985: 1870).⁹³ The early nineteenth century Telegu Brahmin, P. Ragaviah Charry, writing in 1806, gives us a further insight into the rigour involved in being a ‘Dancing Girl’. He records,

The young girls are sent to the dancing school at about 5 or 6 years of age, and at 8, begin learning music; either vocal or instrumental – some attain great proficiency in dancing, or others in singing; but the first art is limited to a certain period of life, for dancing in the

⁹¹ The term ‘devadasi’, however, as Nrithya Pillai highlights is in fact a term ‘that comes out of Sanskrit materials that were the focus of European Orientalist scholarship about India. It is not a term used frequently in the historical record (texts, inscriptions, literature, etc.), and more importantly, within these communities that held exclusive rights to performative traditions that were part of their intangible culture’ (Pillai 2020: 13). Pillai, who is herself from the Isai Vellalur caste that many hereditary dance artists came from argues that ‘the continued use of the term [devadasi] ...inflicts violence and dissuades women from engaging in both their hereditary dance form and its critical history’ (2020:14). Out of respect for her argument and position, I substitute the term ‘hereditary dance artist’ for *devadasi* in my subsequent argument, except in citations.

⁹² See Soneji’s (2010, 2012) rigorous work on this area. He agrees that there are references to professional dancing women before this time period, but notes, ‘...it is only in the Nayaka period ...that the identity of the devadasi as we understand her...with simultaneous links to temple, court and public cultures, complex dance and music practices...emerges’ (2010: xiii).

⁹³ This performance, called the arangetram within bharatanatyam, remains an important social performance today, though ironically rather than announcing the start of a career, it now more often heralds the dance artist’s retreat from regular training in dance in favour of pursuing a more lucrative profession (See Gorringer 2005).

Hindoo style requires great agility of constitution – thus no women after the age of 25 is reckoned competent to the task.

Ragaviah Charry 1808 [1806]: 546

He goes on to explain the manner of professional qualification - ‘when the Girl attains a certain degree of proficiency...the young student is introduced to the assembly and her merit is examined and assayed’ (ibid: 547). What emerges from these accounts is an impression of working dancers who performed their occupation in a manner demonstrating several of the traits Ackroyd (2016) notes as receiving some sociological consensus as attributes of professions, such as specialised training, professional duties, a distinctive way of life and a particular clientele.

Ragaviah Charry also refers to the dancers’ means of income or ‘Revenues’. Here, ‘the first source of emolument’ he states, ‘proceeds from their destination as public women – When the young lady arrives at the age of Puberry, she is consigned to the protection of a man, who generally pays a large premium, besides a suitable monthly allowance...’. As his observation makes clear, and is well attested elsewhere, the ‘dancing girl’ commonly combined her work as a dancer with work as a professional courtesan. This was part of her accepted function and as Pillai (2020) points out, often relied on longstanding relationships between a woman and a particular client. It is this aspect of the lifestyle of hereditary dancers institution, viewed through a lens of British Victorian values that falsely equated it with prostitution, that led to it becoming the subject of much controversy in the early twentieth century, as well as the focus of a number of aligned but differently motivated campaigns for its prohibition.⁹⁴ These campaigns ultimately led to a series of regional bans on the hereditary dancers (including the influential State of Madras ‘Madras Prevention of the Dedication

⁹⁴ These Included campaigns led by both British and Indian reformers concerned about child marriage and prostitution; members of the Hindu reformist Brahmosamaj and Aryasamaj movements concerned with returning to the ‘original’ truths of the Hindu scriptures and of ‘rescuing’ old traditions from a condition of present degeneracy, and one led by men from the community of hereditary dance artists who hoped to challenge the rights for only daughters to inherit property (Sreenivas 2011).

of Devadasis Act' in 1947),⁹⁵ as a result of which, and combined with the diminished status of their customary patrons in the face of colonialism, the hereditary dancers were effectively prevented from continuing their profession, including their traditions of dance and music, by the beginning of the twentieth century.

While condemning the hereditary dancers, abolitionists remained largely positive about the art forms - the music and dance, that these dancers had practised. Keen that the art forms should not disappear with the hereditary dancers, advocates for their preservation, like the lawyer and nationalist E. Krishna Iyer, directed their efforts towards taking dance out of the 'hands of the exponents of the old professional class with all its possible and lurking dangers... and introducing it among cultured *family* women of respectable class' (Krishna Iyer 1949:24, cited in Soneji 2010: xxiv, my emphasis). The reformist Muthulakshmi Reddy, herself from a hereditary dancer family, likewise held that '...the arts must be restored to their original purity and grandeur, so that respectable, good and virtuous women may come forward to learn and practice them' (Reddy in *The Hindu*, Dec 1932: 5. cited in Srinivasan 1983: 82). It took a while to overcome the stigma associated with practising dance, but slowly opinion shifted so that in 1943, the highly influential founder of Kalakshetra, Rukmini Devi Arundale was able to write to a student and teacher in her school, S. Sarada, 'They used to think that, except the usual class of people, no one else would be able to dance. Now there are so many girls from *good* families who are excellent dancers' (in Sarada 1985: 50, cited in Allen 1997: 65, my emphasis).

These 'excellent dancers', coming as they did from 'good families' were, unlike the hereditary dancers, not dependent on dance for their livelihood. Thus, one of the keys to distinguishing this new class of dancers from their forebears was that they did not dance for money. The arts, in Rukmini Devi's vision (a vision that reflected the wider approach of the period), were to be

⁹⁵As Marglin comments, 'Even though the new law applies only to the province of Madras, it influenced enormously the consciousness of most English educated Indians regarding the devadasis' (Marglin 1985: 8).

followed with dedication, but without commercialism. For Devi, the success of the India nation, as well as the Indian arts depended on restoring woman from her degraded position to that of ‘a divine influence, rising above the material aspect of things’ (Devi nd, cited in Weidman 2003: 208; see also Meduri 2005). The obvious candidate to acquire such non-monetarily oriented expertise was the financially supported housewife. To quote a 1930s advertisement for violin lessons, in a programme for the Madras Music Academy, ‘A modern wife has tons of unemployed leisure and a wise husband must provide hobbies for her leisure being usefully employed’ (cited in Weidman 2003: 210). In providing such a ‘useful occupation’, following the rhetoric of the times, the ‘wise husband’ would be upholding not only Indian culture but also the Indian nation and Indian moral integrity. Thus developed the ideal of practising dance as, in the words of Jeyasingh, a ‘noble hobbyist’, whereby, ‘My mother’s generation had an ideal of dance as a noble pursuit untainted by the economics of earning a living’ (Jeyasingh in Gibson 2016: 37). Where for the hereditary dancer her ‘freedom from household responsibilities (*grhasthya*)’ (Coorlawala 2004: 50) meant that she could dedicate herself to her artistry, in the twentieth century reconstitution of the dance forms, being a womanly representative of ‘*grhasthya*’ values was almost a precondition of being permitted to perform them.

Not quite everyone was convinced of the practicality of this. The great Sanskrit scholar and patron of the arts V. Raghavan voiced his reservations, arguing that ‘family women are not capable of devoting the time and attention to develop to perfection this art of Bharata Natyam. Domestic circumstances of work and care are not promotive of the spirit of it’ (V. Raghavan Bhava Raga Tala 1933, cited in Soneji 2010: 188). He was in the minority however, and Srinivasan suggests that by the time the 1947 Madras Act banning the dedication of hereditary dancers came into effect, it marked ‘the birth of a new, elite class of ‘amateur’ dancers’ as much as it sealed ‘the death of the old professional class of temple dancers’ (Srinivasan 1983: 82). Accordingly, mohiniattam and kathakali dancer and founder of Akademi Tara Rajkumar, recalls, ‘on my father’s side there was

this feeling that yes I should perform and get a name, but never take a fee because it was beneath you to get money out of your artistic performance’ (Rajkumar, Interview 2017).

This ideology of the ‘noble hobbyist’ was institutionalised in one of India’s most significant training schools, Kalakshetra, in part due to Devi’s idealism and wish to avoid commercialism. As a result, while standards of training were similarly rigorous, the question of making money from one’s work and expertise was ignored almost on principle. Kalakshetra alumna Mira Balchandran-Gokul reflects:

I never really planned my career – and nobody was there to help me plan it. Everyone who was there was very idealistic. My parents were idealistic, and even in Kalakshetra, there was no focus on how do you develop dance into a career. I don’t think that played a part *at all*.
Balchandran-Gokul Interview 2017 (Gokul own emphasis)

As another illustrative example of the institutionalisation of this ideology, dance writer Ashish Khokar suggests that in the late 1980s,

Kalakshetra was so staunchly unprofessional where money matters were concerned that it returned unutilized a grant of Rs. 25 lakhs from the Ford Foundation on the grounds that ‘never having been a wealthy institution, it was at a loss as to how to use these funds’.
Khokar 2012-2013: 193

The message was that ‘Kalakshetra’s creed was to do with art, not the business of art’ (ibid.).

The reconstructed classical Indian dance forms have thus developed with an in-built aversion to performing art for money, going beyond that found within Euro-American artistic practice due to the desire to maintain distance from a supposedly disreputable past. While as dance scholar Judith Lynne Hanna shows, again due to associations with prostitution, ‘the ballet girl had a pejorative connotation in the U.S until the mid-twentieth century and in some places still does’ (1988: 124), yet I suggest, there did not develop a divide between legitimated (unpaid) and proscribed (paid) practice of ballet. Rather ballet’s ‘rehabilitation’ took place on the understanding of the dance artist being paid, while for classical Indian dance forms this ‘rehabilitation’ was on the basis of the artist

being unpaid. To understand some of the complexities of the development and professionalisation of South Asian Dance forms in Britain, it is essential to recognise this context.

Dance, art and pay – the Indian context

Of course, the problem with the practice of the arts as described above, as indeed of the economically buffered ‘professions’, is that it almost necessarily restricts the field concerned to those privileged or wealthy enough to be able to work without pay, in these cases, the upper middleclass housewife, or the gentleman of independent means. Bourdieu makes this case in his essay on *The Field of Production* (1983). Reflecting on the ‘reversed economy’ he makes the fairly obvious point that

The propensity to move towards the economically most risky positions, and above all the capacity to persist in them...even when they secure no short-term economic profit, seem to depend to a large extent on possession of substantial economic and social capital. This is firstly because economic capital provides the conditions for freedom from economic necessity, a private income (*la rente*) being one of the best substitutes for sales (*la vente*).

Bourdieu 1983: 349

The ideology of arts as best practised shielded from financial imperative is one that only stacks up in the context of not having to earn one’s living as an artist – it better suits the ‘noble’ (unpaid) ‘amateur’ rather than the (paid) professional artist. Certainly, though there are signs that this is now changing, it has been the case within India the serious practice of *bharatanatyam* and other classical dance and music forms have largely relied on having a significant disposable income. Dancer and scholar Avanthi Meduri makes this point forcefully, observing that for student dancers,

If they have the economic means, they buy the best instruction available. If they do not, but have the talent, then they struggle. The path to fame is not easy. The students with economic power shop around for the best teachers and test them out. It used to be the other way around...*At all times*

money is needed.

Meduri 2001: 110 (my emphasis)

The personal reality of this was brought home to me during a visit to Chennai in 1998. I spoke to a young girl in the audience of a dance show who was clearly keenly absorbed and interested in the programme. I asked if she was a dancer. ‘No’ she sighed. ‘I was taking lessons – but then I couldn’t afford the *arangetram*’. The situation is exacerbated by the interaction with NRIs (non-resident Indians) who come to India to train and pick up dance materials. Dance anthropologist Ann R. David explains: ‘NRIs from the UK, USA and elsewhere bringing in foreign money to pay teachers, promoters and musicians are ‘in part responsible for creating inflated expectations’ and inflated prices’ (David 2005b: 41-42).

In addition, unlike careers like medicine or engineering where one can expect a salary start to reimburse training costs, as a classical performer in India, one’s costs do not end with training.

With the exception of a select few, to perform in India frequently involves not only paying for one’s own training, but also to a greater or lesser extent, subsidising one’s own performances.

Thus, theatre practitioner and anthropologist Shanti Pillai:

In Chennai, almost all dance concerts are free. Patronage of the performing arts has all but disappeared and government support is minimal. This means that the individual dancer not only receives nothing for the performance, but also that she or he must frequently meet all of the production costs.

Pillai 2002: 17-18

Award winning Chennai based bharatanatyam dancer Chris Gurusamy, whose calibre is well attested (among other achievements, he was chosen by New York Times dance critic Alistair Macauley as one of his ‘best dancers of 2017’ and was also selected as Junior Fellowship Awardee 2017–18 by the Indian dance organization Kalavaahini), describes his experience of working as a dancer. He notes that while ‘there is a possibility’ of being paid for work in ‘group choreography’,

If you want to be a soloist like I do, then you kind of have to learn to live meagrely...a dancer might get paid the same amount as a singer might get paid. Which is to say 5000 Rupees...But then we have to pay the 5 orchestra members, and each one of them might demand Rs 4000 EACH – so it's very rare to have a *kachheri* (concert) situation where you end up breaking even. Breaking even is like...when I break even in a *kachheri* – like I've had a couple where I've been able to break even because the sponsors have given a bit of money – those are like the **best** *kachheris* because you just feel like you know you are actually EARNING something – but most of the time you end up shelling out I'd say at least Rs. 6000 on top of what they've given you IF they give you anything. Some people still believe that it's ok to NOT pay artists which happens quite regularly, and we have to fork out the entire payment for the orchestra.⁹⁶

Gurusamy Interview 2017

As a result, as O'Shea comments, 'Dancers who strive to maintain professional lives in Chennai perform internationally in order to attain a level of financial reimbursement that offsets the generally low honoraria offered by Chennai venues' (O'Shea 2003: 178).

Furthermore, unlike Britain, there is not significant state funding available in India for individual artists. Post-independence, the Indian government had founded a set of Indian Akademis for the arts based, as dance historian Joan Erdman explains,

...on the Western concept of government patronage through academies, the most explicit model being the French Academy⁹⁷. The new Government of India defined its responsibility for the arts as 'the rebuilding of [India's] cultural structure' and the continuation of support for arts previously patronised by the princes.

Erdman 1983: 253

The three Akademis were the Sangeet Natak Akademi (for music and dance) established in 1953, the Sahitya Akademi (for literature) and the Lalit Kala Akademi (for visual and the plastic arts). Similar to the Arts Council in England, these three institutions, along with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), which aims to 'revive, establish and strengthen cultural relations between India and other countries' (Erdman: *ibid*), are supported by government grants, yet are

⁹⁶ Clearly here it is not all artists' pay that is overlooked. The dance artists are still required to pay the musicians.

⁹⁷ The French name was deliberately misspelt for the Indian context, possibly with the transliteration of Nagri (sic) script in mind. (Erdman *ibid*).

supposed to be autonomous in terms of their broad programmes and decisions. However, as Erdman points out

Involvement of the government of India in the cultural sphere was not intended to pre-empt other support for the arts...At the time of their founding, the Akademis had as their objective the revival and promotion of India's artistic traditions. *They did not include programs to support individual artists.*

Erdman, 1983: 253, (my emphasis)

Moreover, such funding as there was available was relatively sparse. The dance scholar and Indian cultural policy adviser Kapila Vatsyayan wrote in 1972,

... culture, in spite of the basic approach, was now to receive comparatively low priority when pitted against the needs of a developing economy, backward industry, badly requiring colossal funds and state administration, not to mention the targets of free and compulsory education, adult literacy drives...

Vatsyayan 1972: 17

Funding for the arts came from the Ministry of Education – and cultivating a literate population was a funding priority. As a result, ‘...cultural activity, both of a participative nature and of a professional nature, was sustained in pre-independent India mainly through private effort...This is still true...’ (ibid, 23), and remains true nearly fifty years later.

The lack of state funding, the lack of clear progression routes, combined with the complicated relationship to money, or to ‘material concerns’ that was woven around the classical art forms makes the issue of ‘making a living through dance’ particularly difficult. Thus, ethnomusicologist Anna Morcom observes, in comparison with the commercial world of Bollywood dance,

In classical performing arts, there has not been such an easy or open relationship to earning raw money. Indeed, in South India, fees given to teachers by students or for performances are still not seen or termed as a salary or wage, but as *gurudaksinas*, fees similar to a priest receiving gifts from the patrons of the temple for assisting them with experiencing the divine, rather than as an assertion of their ownership of the performance through monetary compensation.

Morcom 2015: 293

Dutch anthropologist Stine Puri (writing specifically about bharatanatyam, though the situations with other Indian classical dance forms is similar) makes a blunt assessment.

Bharatanatyam is mostly respected as a kind of cultural education for young females, but not as a career path...For most bharatanatyam dance students today, the dance is therefore an expense rather than a source of income...Bharatanatyam dancers of today, as opposed to *devadasis*, thus have the luxury of not having to dance for an income. *Dancing shows that one has the money to dance rather than the need to dance for money.*

Puri 2014: 221 (my emphasis)

If one does not have the good fortune to be independently wealthy, and cannot be adequately compensated for one's artistry, the only available option is to work at two jobs, something that continues to be taken for granted as a means of sustaining one's practice within India today. On a panel at 'World Dance Day' organized by Khokar in 2015, one of the panellists, Ananda Shankar Jayant advised the young dancers in the audience,

You will all be facing this journey of having a successful career and a successful dance career. They are two different things. The trick is to find something that will subsidise your dance...I have been very successful that I am a rail manager...so don't let anyone tell you that you can't do two things

Shankar at World Dance Day Conference (Kanakarathnam 2015).

Dance, art and pay – from India to Britain

This model of dance practice in India cannot be ignored in Britain because, as Kaushik puts it, '...the dance sector relies on what is happening back home' (Kaushik cited in Gorringer et al., 2018: 61). Several of the prominent figures in the South Asian dance world in Britain today (including all the directors of the influential organisations Sampad and Kadam, as well as until recently, of Akademi) only came to Britain as adults, meaning that their formative understandings of dance

and its practice (or their primary *habitus*⁹⁸ and *doxa* – or axioms⁹⁹) were developed in India. In addition, researchers Gorringe et al. observe, ‘There is a constant exchange between India and the UK, and artists and teachers from India are regularly brought to the UK to perform and to run summer schools, intensive training sessions and masterclasses’ (Gorringe et al. 2018: 59).¹⁰⁰

Given the significance of India and the constant exchange between India and Britain, the transfer of ways at looking at the arts, and in particular dance, is almost inevitable. This has meant a deep-seated perception among some practitioners, teachers and (importantly) parents of young dance students that dance either should or could not be performed for money and that therefore the pursuit of dance must be undertaken alongside another career – or by the independently wealthy. Nina Rajarani recalls her mother’s initial reaction to her decision to pursue a career in dance:

...she said that all these dancers in India come from very rich backgrounds – they have inherited wealth – they don’t need to earn a living and we are a typical middle-class family and have to work really hard – and unless you think you are going to marry someone rich who will support you when you are dancing, I really don’t see how this will work...

Rajarani interview, 2018

This perception is exacerbated by a situation whereby, as I discuss elsewhere, while employment for many dancers is precarious, the employment option of work as a company dancer is, for South Asian dancers in Britain, yet more limited.

In this way, a combination of factors – the historic suspicion of dance as a means of livelihood;

⁹⁸ This can be understood as an embodied lens. See chapter 4 for a fuller exploration of this concept.

⁹⁹ By *doxa* Bourdieu means unquestioned beliefs of axioms – ‘the world of tradition experienced as a ‘natural world’ and taken for granted’ (1977: 164).

¹⁰⁰ The importance of India in the hearts and minds of dance artists training and working in Britain comes across clearly in their study, where 74% of respondents felt that incorporating a link with India in a suggested training programme was either important or extremely important (Gorringe et al. 2018: 79).

the precarity of migrant communities, which in the absence of securely recognised cultural or social capital, seek occupations which offer secure economic capital;¹⁰¹ the lack of available jobs for classical Indian dancers – has meant that the ‘dual career dancer’ continues to feature prominently in the world of classical Indian dance practice in Britain. Thus, it remains common place for a serious classical Indian dancer practising in Britain to also be working as a doctor, or a dentist or a lawyer, something reflected in the aspirations of young dancers. Gorringer et al. found in their study among young South Asian dancers that 51% of their respondents aimed for a ‘dual career’ (compared to 7% aiming to commit to dance full-time), with almost 40% of these hoping to combine dance with medicine (Gorringer et al. 2018: 17). Grau’s 2001 report draws attention to ‘a copy of the law society gazette...which featured a picture of a ‘professional Bharata Natyam dancer’ while announcing her new full-time job as a solicitor for Landau Zeffert Dresden (Grau 2001: 64). Almost twenty years later, a performance at the New Art Exchange in Nottingham in 2018 featured a professional bharatanatyam dancer who was also a ‘practising dentist.’¹⁰²

The Dual Career Dancer

This pattern of the ‘dual career dancer’ and the perception that it is not only possible but desirable to maintain professional practice in a career such as medicine or law without compromising the professionalism of one’s artistic practice is a contentious subject among classical Indian dance practitioners in Britain. Its acceptance or rejection as a model has significant implications for the shape of the developing field of professional classical Indian dance and for the understanding of

¹⁰¹ As the stand-up comic Nish Kumar remarked to Akram Khan during a conversation as part of Dance Umbrella 2020’s ‘Continental Breakfast’, in the context of understanding their parents’ reservations about careers in the arts, ‘if you immigrate somewhere, you have to try to push your children to do something that the society you are living in deems necessary, so that they don’t just kick you out.’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SHMq6QwiiM> (accessed 14.12.2020).

¹⁰² <http://www.nae.org.uk/event/subash-viman-and-jyoti-parwana-double/641> (accessed 24.5.2019).

‘professionalism’. It is therefore important to unpick and examine some of the key issues in this debate.

In some ways, the ‘dual career’ route can be seen merely as an extension of the pattern adopted by many artists of working at a secondary occupation in order to fund a primary artistic occupation (Sommerlade 2018, Abbing 2008). The very limited availability of jobs with long term contracts means that the reality for most dance practitioners in the UK is one of a ‘portfolio career’ defined as ‘multiple jobs and employers within one or more professions’ (Burns and Harrison 2009: 127). Indeed, the very condition of portfolio working, and of working at a variety of often menial, non-career-oriented jobs during gaps between employment, to make ends meet and to allow flexibility to continue in one’s vocation as a dancer, can be a further source of occupational identity for those independent dance artists who constitute the majority of the sector. Dancers exchange stories of the times they have worked waitressing or stuffing envelopes to make ends meet – like bharatanatyam and contemporary dancer Archana Ballal who had ‘a whole host of part-time jobs – non-dance jobs – doing like promotions or as a telephone fundraiser... because there’s always the gaps in between’ (Ballal interview 2017).

Combining work as a dancer, however, with a dance related activity (such as yoga teaching or physiotherapy), or with work requiring minimal expertise or long-term commitment (such as working as a waiter/waitress or a temporary administrative assistant) is qualitatively different from combining such work with another profession requiring intense levels of training (6 years in the case of medicine), expertise, focus and time commitment. Dance sociologist Kristine Sommerlade’s research among contemporary dance theatre artists highlights both the precarity of dance work and the scarce availability of long-term contracts and the fact that ‘dance artists undertake secondary jobs mainly to fund working in their primary artistic occupations as performers, performer/creators or choreographers’ (Sommerlade 2018: 174). Nevertheless, many

of her interviewees ‘rank their artistic practice as more important than paid employment, leisure time and consumption’ and for one respondent ‘as soon as one of her employers refused to accommodate her intermittent absences due to her artistic commitments, she resigned from the post...’ (ibid.) In the case of dance, which like sport, depends upon a level of physical fitness and a level of consistent training (see chapter 4), it is especially hard to move in and out of artistic practice – arguably more so than other creative arts such as writing or painting. Thus, while a ‘portfolio career’ may be standard among dance artists, the pursuit of professional work as a dancer alongside work as a doctor, dentist, accountant or solicitor is a pattern peculiar to the South Asian dance sector in Britain. Obviously, many doctors, dentists and accountants pursue other forms of dance in their spare time – but in this case, it is uncommon for their professionalism as dancers to be in question – dance is a leisure pursuit. While working with a contemporary dance choreographer on a dance project in 2016, his reaction to hearing that classical Indian dancers commonly work as dancers alongside other careers or occupations, not as yoga teachers or bartenders but as doctors and accountants was one of disbelief (Fieldnotes November 2016). I encountered a similar reaction among the contemporary dance category finalists at a *BBC Young Dancer* event in 2017 when I explained that two of the competitors they were watching were medics: ‘You would never get a professional contemporary dancer who was also a doctor’ (Fieldnotes January 2017).

In part, this pattern merely represents a pragmatic response in finding a viable way to pursue one’s chosen art form in the face of the severely restricted employment opportunities. Akram Khan suggested at Navadisha 2016 that this is not a problem confined to Britain:

I am often in dialogue with classical artists, like Malavika Sarukkai, Priyadarshini Govind, and Kumudini Lakhia... [about] the concerns they have about the lack of support, and the lack of opportunity. They feel that the younger artists slowly become disheartened to pursue a career in that field. And then some of those younger artists reluctantly move into the contemporary dance world. Simply because there isn’t enough opportunity to develop or sustain themselves as a classical artist...

Khan in Gibson 2016: 26

Kathak dancer, choreographer and teacher Sonia Sabri agrees,

...we train dancers to study bharatanatyam, kathak whatever the classical form is - we make them study *so* hard – but actually they then divorce themselves from that and they end up doing contemporary dance... getting work in classical technique — it's a real struggle.

Sabri Interview, 2018

Though there are signs that this is now changing, this feeling was reinforced until recently by the perception that the Arts Council would not fund classical work.¹⁰³ A dual career route therefore seems a logical way forward to finding a way to doing the work to which one is truly committed, rather than being forced into doing the (more contemporary) work that is more readily available. Yadagudde explains his reasoning for encouraging his students to take this approach, 'One is a psychologist, everyone is working. I told them 'Earn money. Keep some money, do a performance every two years – it will fund you' (Yadagudde, Interview 2017). The reliability of the income of their day job ironically improves their consistency as performers of work they believe in. The remarkable energy, passion and determination shown by dancers who follow this dual path can, in many ways, only be applauded, especially as it is arguable that this has been an important way in which the Indian classical dance forms have been kept alive in Britain thus far.

The pattern of a dual career, however, also raises problems. It requires that those practitioners who follow this route are compelled to work double-time, meaning that the practitioner albeit no longer economically stressed, continues to be stretched physically, emotionally and intellectually. While there has not hitherto been research conducted specifically on the 'dual career dancer', the case of nineteenth century British sport is once again instructive, where Wagg clearly describes how the commitment to amateurism started to unravel. Relying exclusively on a practitioner's love and respect for their art form to maintain standards of performance did not ultimately work out too well for the field, putting the Amateur Athletics Association (AAA) in the bizarre position of

¹⁰³ I discuss this further in chapter 5.

legislating against excellence. Thus, rules were put in place that no individual might ‘gain advantage’ through a job which might allow them to train at more than an amateur level (Wagg 2000). After all – to practise would be cheating! Asked about the subsequent professionalisation of the sport, the rugby player Stuart Lancaster, reflected:

I suppose improved fitness is the main thing...a sense of having fulfilled one’s potential. You don’t have to train in the evening when you are already tired, but you can concentrate on it. So I’m glad to have played rugby as well as I could have done. I think it’s probably only a 5 percent difference to being a serious amateur, but it is different.

Lancaster in Allison 2001: 116

Stebbins’ research into amateurs and professionals raises a similar point. He observes, ‘The fact that many amateur activities are scheduled during late weekday afternoons or early evenings presents another problem – fatigue...a large majority of amateurs talked about fatigue as an obstacle to doing one’s best’ (Stebbins 1992: 51). Yaddagudde describes how he feels inspired to continue teaching because

In the Bhavan, everyone is very dedicated. They come with seriousness – they don’t come to play around. Some are doctors, some are accountants, some are financial experts – they work – every one of them – in a profession, and yet they still come. Some work ‘til 2 a.m. Some girls work as nurses – they work all night and come at 8 o’clock in the morning for a class - and then go home and sleep. What I mean is the passion – the interest they show – that makes me feel that...I am doing nothing.

Yaddagudde Interview 2017

While on the one hand, such commitment is both admirable and, as Yaddagudde finds it, inspiring, how far is this level of training after a full day’s (or night’s work) sustainable, or even desirable? One immediate risk factor is clearly that of injury due to fatigue, or (potentially) insufficient time spent on warmups and cool downs. One South Asian and contemporary dancer spoke both of her admiration and yet her scepticism for the dual career route:

I think it’s really difficult. When do you get the time to train, to keep in shape?... To be honest I’m amazed that all these South Asian dancers have these careers – and that is what makes me question the commitment – I don’t know ...I automatically question the commitment to the dance aspect of both careers – to how well you are keeping your practice – to how much time and thought you manage to give to your practice, to someone else’s work...to your own work...

Anon., Interview 2017

Essentially, the problem with having another job for money is that one ends up with less time.

This is a problem because as Jeyasingh put it ‘...above all, these forms require *time*’.¹⁰⁴

Time is required not only to maintain one’s fitness and develop one’s craft, but also so as to contribute to the development of the sector more generally. Returning to Chaudhury (quoted at the beginning of the chapter), her reflection on professionalism within classical Indian dance in Britain continues,

...it is essential to formalise professionalisation further, which would hopefully result in more considered programming. Practitioners who want to be programmed by arts venues and theatres of any scale should be dedicating the majority of their time to dance or dance-related work, with an open approach so that they are not only developing their practice, but also taking time to understand the sector better...

Chaudhury 2019: 28

The restriction on the time of dual professionals, in Chaudhury’s view, means that they are unable to really inhabit their sector.

Additionally, the experience of artistic practice is qualitatively different for dual professionals as compared to dance artists who ‘dedicate the majority of their time to dance’ because they are not subject to the same economic pressures. Auljia and Farrer rightly emphasise the hardships of the life of a dancer – the demands of intense physical training, the ever-present risk of injury, ‘hardships...exacerbated by working in the independent dance sector, with its undefined roles, constantly changing working schedules, and lack of financial security’ (Auljia and Farrer 2015 n.p.). This is a precarity from which dual career dancers are cushioned. It is understandable in this light that dancers dependent on dance work for their income might feel a sense of proprietorship over the scarce paid work that is available.

¹⁰⁴ She made this point in a speech while serving as General Judge for the BBC Young Dancer 2017 (Fieldnotes Jan 2017).

A further concern is that dance practitioners who are not dependent on their art practice for an income can afford to undercut other practitioners who are. Rajarani makes this point clearly

If you have a full-time job doing something else as your main sources of income...you can afford to do things at a lower rate – so you can afford to undercut or do things entirely for free. Or you can afford to do things on a more casual basis. For example, if someone is running a school, and they are combining this with a full time career – they are not going to be too worried about whether they receive fees or not, if the student pays on time etc – whereas if this is your only job, you need to put systems in place to make sure that you are not losing money, or paying to run the classes. So someone running classes on a casual basis makes it harder for someone who is running classes as their only source of income.

Rajarani Interview 2018

Ultimately, both in terms of economic necessity and in terms of personal identity, dual career dancers are not subject to the same imperative to seek work within the field. For Stebbins this imperative marks a key difference between professionals and amateurs: ‘Professionals know they must stick to their pursuit when the going gets tough...Amateurs can be choosy, professionals cannot’ (Stebbins 1992: 51). Gurusamy makes a similar point, adding that this imperative is not necessarily always a negative:

...having a career to back yourself up with is always a good thing – but if you really want to make it, I don’t know how good it is. Because a fall-back plan is always great – but how far are you going to push yourself if you have something to fall back on? I feel like I work as hard as I do because I don’t have that luxury of a fall-back plan... you know – I HAVE to make it...*I have no other option*

Gurusamy Interview 2017 (my emphasis)

For Hardial Rai, this imperative is critical as it impacts upon the very nature of the work produced. For him the ‘struggle’ of being an artist summons a calibre of work that comes from a place of necessity. Where this is not the case, ‘The artist is not challenged’. In this light he has made a decision not to programme artists for whom their artistic practice is not their primary career: ‘I say

– I am not going to programme you just because you are very good at it. We know what struggle is in terms of being involved in the arts. The struggle is what makes the work’ (Rai, Interview 2021).

This view is echoed by a further dancer who spoke at the World Dance Day mentioned above. For her it is precisely the preparedness to embrace precarity because of an overriding commitment to one’s art form that marks the boundary between (she implicitly suggests) ‘real’ dancers and others. Questioning Jayant’s assumption of a dual career cited above, she observes,

A lot of us spoke about the problems we have pursuing dance as a career, as something you want to do full time and not with a parallel job. But then I tend to think isn’t this what filters us to want to be dancers? There is no fixed salary, there is no proper status...so you know to some extent I believe that being a dancer comes from having to make this very difficult choice.

Kumudu C. at World Dance Day Conference (Kanakarathnam 2015)

In this way the dual career route, while allowing dance artists to perform on their own terms rather than those of others, and while attesting to the remarkable commitment of many to continuing their dance practice, can also be seen to present a challenge to the professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, from both the idealist perspective, where time constraints can compromise standards of practice, as well as from a cynical perspective, where the lack of an economic imperative on the part of the dual career practitioner can undermine the demand among the wider sector for proper pay.

Unpaid work = Amateur (Professional = Paid?)

The tensions engendered between those for whom their artwork is their primary source of livelihood and those for whom it is not, as well as by the inherent ambivalences in the understanding of ‘professionalism’, are not confined to the South Asian dance sector. The following example, drawn from a set of heated email exchanges posted on the Standing

Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) mailing list in March 2017, is useful in positioning this debate in a wider context.

The thread was prompted by an email from actor and theatre producer Justine Malone posting a ‘Call out to musicians of Oxford’ for a theatre production, offering them the opportunity to ‘ply their trade in a professional setting’ in return for ‘beer/wine, free nights out, fun, new friends, a credit in the programme and exposure of your talent’, but no fee.¹⁰⁵ Responding to this call out, Caroline Radcliffe, a lecturer in theatre, asked that the SCUDD list ‘veto giving advertising space to companies not prepared to pay musicians and actors... [an] appalling practice [which] just perpetuates the idea that musicians and actors should be prepared to tolerate unprofessional conditions ‘because they love it’. In the course of a series of responses, Malone defended her use of the term ‘professional’ because ‘The company I’m working with have professional practices and create incredible work... the only thing that makes us am-dram is that everyone involved has a ‘day job’, but those who choose to be involved are too talented and dedicated to not create new work’. In a subsequent email she adds, ‘Cash and quality do not always go hand in hand’. The response from another member of the list is unequivocal: ‘Unpaid work (of a polished and professional standard) = AMATEUR’ (emphasis in the original). Radcliffe is likewise unimpressed, echoing Bourdieu, ‘some people are very privileged and happy to be able to commit time to projects without being paid, but as with the dreadful system of internships, it is only people who have another source of income who can do this.’

As an indication of how widespread this problem is, Equity states, as part of its 2019 ‘Professionally Made, Professionally Paid’ campaign,

¹⁰⁵ Justine Malone, email to SCUDD@JISCMAIL.AC.UK, Wed, 29 March 2017, with the subject, *Calling Musicians for Twelfth Night/The Tempest - RSC Dell & Oxford Castle*. Thread available at: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A1=ind1703&L=SCUDD#32> (accessed 20.6.2020).

Low and no pay is a major issue for many Equity members. Too often performers and creatives are expected to give their time and energy for free, exchanging hard work for ‘exposure’ or ‘CV points’.

This particularly affects members at the start of their careers, and those without savings or economic support also find themselves priced out of the industry.¹⁰⁶

The dual career route can be seen to contribute to this problem. While it can offer artists financial flexibility and protection, this very flexibility and protection can undercut the demands of the wider sector, and a more fundamental pursuit of a proper valuation of and respect for the arts. After all, in the words of a further panellist at Khokar’s World Dance Day ‘If we could give dancers better salaries, why would they need to do 10 other jobs?’ (Mayuri Upadhyia at World Dance Day Conference, Kanakarathnam 2015).

Profession, Field and *Virutti*

To summarise my argument so far, while ‘professionalism’ is a coveted attribute (not least among classical Indian dancers in Britain), what it actually means to be ‘professional’ remains subject to dispute. The inherent tension within the concept between holding an overriding commitment to the occupation professed (or working for the ‘love’ of one’s work)¹⁰⁷ and safeguarding the right to be properly remunerated for one’s laboriously acquired skill (working for money) is exacerbated within the ‘reverse economy’ of the arts which places a value on ‘disinterestedness’. It is further exacerbated within the field of classical Indian dance (in Britain and beyond) which remains influenced by the historic stigma attached to dancing for an income and (in part as a consequence) a dual career pathway is a popular choice. Attempts to enumerate the required characteristics of a professional are futile because, returning to Bourdieu’s contention highlighted at the very beginning of this chapter, despite the term’s ‘appearance of neutrality’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.equity.org.uk/getting-involved/campaigns/professionally-made-professionally-paid/> (accessed 6.1.2021).

¹⁰⁷ Somewhat ironically, this understanding of the professional carries substantial overlaps with definition of the amateur – or one who pursues a practice or study with no view to financial gain, but only for the love of it (amateur deriving from the past participle *amatus* of the Latin *amare*, to love).

1992: 242), understandings of ‘professional’ and ‘professionalism’ are contingent and subjective. There is apparent agreement, returning to the Oxford dictionary definition, that a professional is one who is paid for their work, but even this seemingly unexceptional condition is questioned in the light of whether one is being paid for ‘recognised’ work with a ‘recognised’ organisation. The layers of interpretation attached to the term mean that there are some practitioners, as shown above, who feel that ‘professionalism should be redefined’ to make not income, but more ambivalent attributes such as ‘excellence’ and ‘commitment’ its primary determinant.

A further complication arises in the form of what sociologists have dubbed ‘organisational professionalism’ (Evetts 2013: 787). The appeal to ‘professionalism’ here becomes a disciplinary mechanism, both a ‘technology of the self’ and a ‘technology of power/domination’ (Foucault 1980) to ‘convince, cajole and persuade employees, practitioners and other workers to perform and behave in ways in which the organisation or institution deem appropriate, effective and efficient’ (Evetts 2013: 790). These ‘appropriate’ and ‘efficient’ ways of behaving are inevitably assessed by a particular criterion, one that has largely been determined from an Anglo-American or ‘white’ perspective. Scholars and activists have therefore increasingly critiqued the concept of ‘professionalism’ for ushering in a set of culturally subjective values (normalising and institutionalising ‘whiteness’) under the guise of an ‘objective’ good (Gray 2019; Urgo 2019; Balarajan 2020). Thus, when invoked in the context of dance, Khoo asks pointedly,

...when we talk about professionalism, what are we really talking about? We are talking about the West and how the West has defined what professionalism is and unfortunately even in India they are looking to the West to define what that model is.

Khoo, Interview 2017

As an example, the performance at the Bhavan described at the beginning of this chapter started late, something that constitutes a serious breach of established (Anglo-American) notions of 'professionalism'. However, as Jeyasingh explains, with characteristic clarity,

...the definition of 'professionalism' will depend on me and the kind of people I want to perform to. If they don't mind if I arrive a little bit late or that there is no signed contract – that might be okay if the contract between the audience and the performer is very clear. On the other hand, if I want to perform at Sadler's Wells, then I would have to understand that that's a different contract between audience and performer – and this would mean that I have to have an administrator, that I make sure I am on time, I would have to make sure my copy is good, my marketing is done and I that pack up and leave when I say I will. So, it has to do with the contract between the performer and the audience. One kind of 'professionalism' is different from another kind - depending on what the expectations are.
Jeyasingh, Interview 2018

How has 'professionalism = good timekeeping' come to be an axiom?

For Bourdieu, a way of side stepping the definitional morass and the value laden entanglements of the concept of 'profession' in order to focus more clearly on the underlying concerns that make it important, is to dispense with the concept entirely, replacing it 'with the concept of field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 242). For him, the most important struggles are those around defining the 'boundary of the field' (ibid.) – who is legitimately classed as belonging to a 'field' and who is not - or in other words, the question of occupational control.

Bourdieu's concept of 'field' is, as discussed in the introduction, like many of his concepts, (deliberately) hard to pin down. It is a 'network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions' (1992: 97). It can be compared (with caution) to a game (jeu)', following 'rules, or better regularities that are not explicit and codified' (1992: 98), but that are nonetheless recognised and followed by all the 'players' in the game, or agents in the field. In other words, it is a social space populated by agents who recognise the same values, the same weighting as regards different forms of capital and the same 'logic, transcending individual agents' (*doxa*) (1990: 58) as to how the 'game'

(or the ‘field’) functions. Or, as Bourdieusian scholars Mathieu Hilgers and Eric Mangez summarise, it is ‘a relatively autonomous domain of activity that responds to rules of functioning and institutions that are specific to it and which define the relations among the agents’ (2014: 5).

Following Bourdieu and adopting the concept of ‘field’ rather than ‘profession’ as the tool of analysis (relegating ‘profession’ and its cognates to their ‘proper’ position as ‘objects’),¹⁰⁸ an investigation into the ‘professionalisation’ of classical Indian dance is a study of the sector’s pursuit of its own ‘autonomy’, or self-definition. It is its attempt to determine what constitutes its own ‘rules’ and ‘logic’ (*doxa*); what it acknowledges as valued knowledge or skill and thereby of who is recognised as a legitimate or ‘bona fide’ member of the field – of determining, in other words, what constitutes ‘professionalism’ for the specific field of classical Indian dance in Britain.

In this light, a significant source of the tensions and frustrations for classical Indian dance practitioners in Britain can be understood as arising from a situation in which they are uneasily caught between two existing fields, or between two sets of rules and expectations (the field of classical Indian dance in the Indian sub-continent, and the field of (Euro-American) professional dance in Britain), trying to construct a field of British classical Indian dance, not yet sure or secure in its own identity. Caught between two worlds, it is hardly surprising that Khoo’s perception of the world of classical Indian dance in Britain is as one that is ‘very confused’ (Khoo Interview 2018). To move forward, he suggests,

People have to be clear about what they want. Do they want dancers to come out like Kalakshetra dancers? Or do they want dancers who will have the physicality and versatility to be adequate to serve some of the South Asian choreographers in terms of form, but are able to have the versatility of some of the contemporary dancers etc. What do you want out of it?

Khoo, Interview 2018

¹⁰⁸ I follow the lead of, for example, Sahin-Dikmen (2013) and Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011).

In part, however, the excitement and the frustration endemic in the world of South Asian dance in Britain arises because it does not want to choose. The task of professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, I suggest, is the task of finding a sustainable and legitimised way of being both, within the same field.

At present, as I discuss throughout the thesis, and as highlighted by other scholars (Thobani 2017; Kedhar 2020; Meduri 2020), the pursuit of classical dance in the manner Khoo characterises as producing ‘Kalakshetra’ dancers is largely carried out within the South Asian diasporic community, often in the context of long distance cultural nationalism (see next chapter), largely unpaid and with little reference to the broader British dance context which dictates the dominant view of what is valued knowledge and what is legitimate (constituting what Bourdieu calls ‘the field of power’). Arriving from the newly constructed field of (amateur, but expert) classical dance in India as discussed above, dancers made an uneasy space for themselves within the field of British professional dance by aligning themselves with the (also newly emerging) independent dance field, a field governed primarily by the standards, values and aesthetics of Euro-American contemporary dance. This positioning is easily understood given both the privilege and relative exclusivity of the world of ballet (another field classical Indian dance could have attached to), and the catholic ability of contemporary dance to absorb many forms into itself.¹⁰⁹ Through this adoption, classical Indian dance forms have arguably undergone ‘a form of symbolic violence that leads them to recognize the legitimacy of a symbolic order that is unfavourable to them’ (Hilgers and Mangez 2014: 11). South Asian dance in Britain then, in its process of professionalisation, remains in the process of

¹⁰⁹ For Chitra Sundaram the more obvious field for classical Indian dance forms to align with was indeed that of classical ballet. Its inclusion instead within the less evidently compatible field of contemporary dance has left the forms with further challenges, not least the emphasis within the world of contemporary dance on innovation and the new (Kedhar 2020). Thus, Sundaram asks, ‘How do we work *within* [the contemporary sector in which we have been positioned] and not lose the classical?’ (SADA meeting, Fieldnotes 27.6.2017). While in some ways more aligned, particularly in the valuing of an established canon, an adoption the field of classical ballet would not have protected classical Indian dance forms from a similar acceptance and espousal of the norms and aesthetic values of Western dance.

determining the specific *doxa* that define it, as well as establishing a ‘legitimate recognition’ (Hilgers and Mangez 2014: 6) of such *doxa*.

Thus in the case of the professionalisation of classical Indian dance in Britain, layered on to the question of how an occupation monitors itself, attains status and ensures standards, is the more specific question of how an immigrant art form from a former colony negotiates its place and identity within the mainstream framework of a formerly colonising power. Returning to my seat in the Bhavan’s auditorium, with the house lights up, the smiles on the faces of the portraits on the wall seem less benign. Certainly, the dancers are performing bharatanatyam, but let us not forget that they are doing so within the Mountbatten Hall.

Bourdieu provides a necessary caution against the unthinking embrace of the notion of profession without a recognition of the cultural baggage that it imports. The concept of field highlights how occupations develop an internal set of rules, standards and thereby conditions for legitimacy specific to themselves. Considering fields in the light of their relative proximity to the ‘field of power’ helps explain the relative levels of influence of different fields, and why classical Indian dancers might be keen to be part of the field of contemporary dance, despite the confusions and contradictions this entails.

The notion of field however, useful as it is, does not ultimately equate to the concept of ‘profession’. One could have a ‘field’ of amateur philatelists – but not a ‘profession’ of amateur philatelists or indeed of amateurs of any sort. The term ‘profession’ serves a specific purpose in its invocation of both working for ‘love’ and working for ‘livelihood’ – it thereby has an association with economics that ‘field’ lacks. This is a condition also signified, I believe (from a very different cultural context) by the Tamil word *Virutti* (விருத்தி). *Virutti* is a word used to describe a way of life (including the way of life of the hereditary dancers). It also means ‘conduct or behaviour’, ‘nature’ (as in one’s nature), ‘employment, business’, ‘devoted service’, ‘means of livelihood’ and

even 'slavery'.¹¹⁰ The overlap of meaning with the English word 'profession' is notable, particularly in terms of its dual focus on devoted service at the same time as a focus on a means of livelihood. The means of livelihood does not necessarily equate to pay, but it does equate to a means to sustain oneself granted in return for the performance of one's occupation. Returning to the original sense of the word in English, a professional is determined by what they profess - and their life is primarily shaped and patterned by their commitment to the professed occupation. In part, the expertise and legitimacy associated with the professional stems from the expertise the professional acquires precisely through such focused commitment and allocation of time. As discussed above, unless one is independently wealthy, such focus and commitment necessarily means that one's profession, as well as shaping one's lifestyle, must also be a primary or significant source of one's livelihood. I suggest that one way to retain the particular meaning of 'profession', while discarding the disciplinarian force (rooted in Euro-American values) that it has acquired might be to employ instead the term 'virutti'.¹¹¹

Of Love, Money and Merit

In this light, counter to the views of several of the dance artists cited in this chapter, I argue, following the lead of Equity, that it is essential that any understanding of profession, professional or professionalisation must be understood to be as much about livelihood (which in today's world usually equates to money) as it is about service, commitment and selflessly developed skill (time and love). This is not so as to call into question the expertise of someone who is not properly paid for their skill, but to underline our obligation as a society to pay for and value such expertise. Such a recognition would restore the practice of Indian classical dance forms to their performance outside the realm of the *grhastha*, or outside the exclusive realm of the wealthy (and typically, high

¹¹⁰ <https://agarathi.com/word/விருத்தி> (accessed 11.1.21).

¹¹¹ This would have the added advantage of leaving scope for an emphasis on the aspect of devotion, or surrender contained both within 'virutti' and within 'profession' but eclipsed by a latter-day association of professionalism with 'mastery'. To the contrary, I argue virutti/professionalism is premised on the *impossibility* of mastery.

caste). In this way, while accepting the justice of Bourdieu's critique of the term, resulting in his conclusion that each field (or profession) must set its own terms of legitimacy, I suggest that nonetheless certain attributes that can be seen as common across and distinctive to professions. These, I suggest, are expertise, livelihood and legitimacy.

Professionalisation therefore, is about both acquiring expertise and achieving a means of livelihood through that expertise. Where Bourdieu's concept of separate fields is helpful is in understanding that each separate profession will have certain types of skills that it denotes as indicating 'expertise'. Each profession will also determine how this expertise should be assessed (what is deserving of merit), and thereby at which point to ascribe legitimacy to the 'professional'. The ability to achieve a livelihood will, of course, then depend to some extent on the level of value the wider society (in particular the 'field of power') places on one's expertise – or to what extent one's expertise is then more widely 'consecrated' or legitimised.

Conclusion

In this chapter I take a detailed look at the contested subject of 'professionalism'. A moot topic in any context I show how it is a status that is especially difficult to determine within the arts, and even more so in relation to Indian classical dance forms, where historic stigma associated with earning money through dance leads to a common perception of 'professionalism' as separate from economics. This has led, both in India and the diaspora to the pattern of the 'dual career' dancer, distinguished from other dancers and artists with portfolio careers by the demands, both in terms of training and on-going commitment that these 'non-dance careers' require. I recognise the importance of Bourdieu's critique of the concept in importing a specific (Anglo-European) set of cultural conceptions under the guise of neutrality. In response to this, I examine the concept of 'profession' together with the Tamil concept of *virutti* and argue that despite the justice of Bourdieu's reservations, there nevertheless remains a space for the concept of 'profession' as one

that connotes an occupation marked by 'expertise', means of 'livelihood' and 'legitimacy'. Where I agree with Bourdieu is that 'the rules of the game', or the principles governing the field - such as what constitutes both the nature and the measure of the expertise that is valued must be determined by individual professions. One possible way to invoke this concept without its historic Euro-American baggage (though with some wariness as to its possible Indo-Tamil associations) might be to replace the term 'profession' with that of 'virutti'.

In studying the professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms in Britain I will examine the ways in which the field identifies and ensures expertise, its struggles to secure the practice of these dance forms as a means to livelihood and its battle for legitimacy. Although these areas inevitably overlap, each of the next three chapters will focus on one these three areas in turn: Learning (training and expertise); the demand for a specific kind of dancer (and thereby access to markets and the means of livelihood) and the pursuit of legitimacy.

Chapter 3

Learning

Migration, Identity and making Professional Dancers

Introduction

In a warm, brightly lit studio in what looks like a converted house in the suburbs of North-West London, a group of children aged between 7 and 10 are learning the first elements of bharatanatyam. They wear a kurta (or shirt) with trousers, a scarf wrapped around their waists. They recite a nursery rhyme in Tamil and perform movements along with the rhyme. They leap, knees pushed out to the side in a sort of mid-air *mulamandi*¹¹² heels touching their bottoms, arms sketching a circle in the air, with both hands held in *shikara* (or a thumbs-up position). They practise the 7th *nattadavu*, one of the extensive series of *adavus* or units of movement that every bharatanatyam dancer must learn in order to perform the art form. ‘Make sure your back knee isn’t bent’, the teacher urges. They finish with some *abhinaya*. The teacher asks them to make up stories, and to illustrate their stories with facial expressions, and with the *mudras* or hand gestures they have learned. One girl catches a fish and ‘puts it in the oven’ for her tea. There are no mirrors. The children’s mothers sit at one end of the room and quietly observe. Later on, many of these mothers themselves swap places with their children and participate in their own class, their children watching or getting on with their homework. The older women wear ‘dance saris’ – saris tied to come to just below the knee, to allow ease of movement.

In a leafy part of Birmingham better known for its chocolate factory, two teenagers attend a bharatanatyam class. They are in the teacher’s house. Both they and the teacher are dressed in t-shirts and leggings. They perform the *tattikumbattu* or prayer danced at the beginning and end of

¹¹²A position where the knees are bent out the side with the heels together, the bottom almost resting on the heels.

classes, and after a short warm up start with *tattadavu*.¹¹³ The dining table has been pushed back to create space, but it remains cramped. As the dance sequences become more complex and cover more space, the dancers cannot entirely stretch out their arms to perform some of the movements, and their jumps are necessarily constrained to avoid banging into the ceiling light.

In a large, converted church in West London, smells of the Indian snacks served by the canteen, and sounds of the vocal and instrumental Indian music taught in other parts of the building provide the backdrop to classes in a range of classical Indian dance styles. The hall is colourfully painted with images of Hindu gods and goddesses. Here, a group of primarily young girls, clad in uniform white dance saris with a red border, are put through their *adavus*. In another room, dancers dressed in *salwar kameez*, and wearing kathak *ghunghrus*, recite the *bols* (or spoken rhythm patterns) for their next movement sequence, their hands keeping time with the sophisticated combinations of finger and palm claps that form the basis for keeping *tal* or *talam* - rhythm - within Indian classical dance and music styles.

In central Birmingham sharing space with the Birmingham Hippodrome, which houses the main theatre space and the rehearsal studios for the Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB), are the studios of the Birmingham dance agency Dance Xchange. From one studio issues the slightly unexpected music of the *Natesha Kbautvom*.¹¹⁴ The studios are beautiful, spacious and warm, with sprung floors and mirrors, and built-in sound systems. In one, about 20 young people dressed in tracksuit bottoms and T-shirts, learn to embody the different iconography of Lord Shiva. Next door, another group similarly attired is engaged in a contemporary dance class. In yet another, a group of kathak dancers are at work.

¹¹³ The first set of *adavus* that a bharatanatyam dance artist learns.

¹¹⁴ A short bharatanatyam dance about Lord Shiva in his form as Nataraja, Lord of Dance.

Back in London, in a University P.E. Hall, a group of young adult ballet and contemporary dancers are given a short experience of bharatanatyam dance – some basic *adavus*, and a modified version of a dance piece dedicated to Lord Ganesha. ‘This movement’, says the teacher, showing her arms crossed in front of her body, the fingers of each hand-held in a *kartarimukab* or ‘scissor’ gesture, as if to clasp each ear, ‘is an adapted version of a movement performed by non-dancers when worshipping Lord Ganesha. It is an adaptation of a movement from everyday life’.

The settings and demographic of these 5 ‘snapshot’ classes reflect a broader reality. Taking a closer look at the pupil make-up of the classes, of all students observed, only two are boys. As with many other styles of dance in Britain, this gender ratio is representative of the broader practice of classical Indian dance. Unlike other dance styles, however, in the first four classes described, all the children and young people in attendance are without exception of South Asian heritage, or mixed race (predominantly mixed South Asian and white). Again, this reflects the broader reality of Indian dance training. Despite differences in practice space and attire, four of the five classes are uniform in catering predominantly to children of school age. This also is representative, in part because there is as yet no school offering vocational training for classical Indian dance forms in Britain, as I discuss below.

Looking more widely at the spaces holding the classes, two of the five classes described are taught under the auspices of cultural centres, which serve as gathering points for the South Asian diaspora – a Tamil school and a centre for Indian culture. As I consider later, this is typical of the context of classical Indian dance tuition in Britain, as is the fact that only one of the five classes described is being taught in a purpose-built studio with a sprung floor and mirrors. The fifth class, in a university setting, forms part of a broader dance degree (focused primarily on Euro-American contemporary dance techniques), aiming to give contemporary dancers a brief taste of, and introduction to, bharatanatyam (as one of several dance techniques from the global majority to be

‘sampled’). Like the other classes, the students are predominantly female. In this case, however, while from a range of ethnicities, the participants are largely white. Again, this single snapshot reflects a wider pattern – where classical Indian dance forms are taught at universities and further education colleges in Britain, they are normally taught as part of a broader dance course aiming to extend the knowledge and range of contemporary dancers, and the majority of these dancers are female and, while from a range of backgrounds, predominantly white. This chapter unravels what some of the different demographics and contexts seen in these snapshots mean for professional training in classical Indian dance forms in Britain.

The performance of almost any dance style requires some degree of training – whether this be a brief rehearsal at a country dance where the ‘caller’ walks participants through the moves in the following dance; a single dance class, as salsa dancer and scholar Sydney Hutchinson describes her formal salsa training,¹¹⁵ or the prolonged and intensive training of a ballet dancer in a conservatoire. The nature and duration of the training depends on the demands of the dance form and the context in which it will be performed – the training provided needs to be fit for purpose. In this way training overlaps with livelihood, as where there is employment for dancers trained in a particular style, there is clearly more of an incentive to train intensively in that form. Conversely, where there is limited employment available for dancers trained in specific dance forms there is clearly not the same imperative for training that is considered to meet a ‘professional’ standard.

The next two chapters look at how a classical Indian dancer is trained in Britain today. More specifically, it looks at how training and livelihood is intertwined in asking how is a *professional* classical Indian dancer trained in Britain today? What marks the distinction between amateur and professional training? What measures are in place to ensure high quality training – and how is a

¹¹⁵ ‘My formal training consisted of a single dance lesson in a nightclub, which was soon shut down’ (Hutchinson 2015: 1).

dancer's competence to practice determined? How does the role that classical dance forms play in nurturing a sense of Indian subcontinental identity within diaspora impact on the training, development (and recruitment) of professional dancers? What is the impact on a dancer of training in a form outside the context where that form originated? In a context where there is a demand for the ever more versatile dancer, what does this mean for training in classical Indian dance forms?

Though interrelated, the range of these questions means that addressing them in a single chapter is unwieldy. I have therefore divided my examination of the training that is so critical to the creation of a professional dancer into two. While both chapters necessarily deal with both topics, this chapter focuses more on 'training/ learning' and the following chapter more on 'livelihood'.

In this chapter I look at the 'how' of training in terms of the broader infrastructure that supports it. What are the institutions available for teaching classical Indian dance forms in Britain, and how do they monitor standards of practice? What are the pressures that these institutions have to navigate? I consider how training in classical Indian dance forms in Britain is pursued for its broader role in providing an education in cultural heritage and the implications of this for the development of a professional dance practice. I also reflect on the increasing professional demand for the versatile dancer, the dancer able to slip seamlessly across dance forms, with a competence in multiple physical vocabularies. Against this reality, how should institutions tasked with creating professional dancers combine the provision of a thorough grounding in classical Indian dance forms with the moulding of a 'sector ready' dancer? Finally, the chapter looks at the 'who' in this equation. Who trains in classical Indian dance forms in Britain, and who trains in them professionally? Who are the teachers and who regulates them? This chapter combines a sociological with a historical approach, providing a context to training both in India and Britain which will serve as a background to both chapters, before turning to current provision.

The Context: Training routes in India, past and present

To understand the current provision of training in Britain, it is necessary first to situate contemporary practice in its historical context. In the professional practice of the precursors of kathak, bharatanatyam and other dance styles now considered ‘Indian classical dance forms’, the trajectory of training and the consequent transition from training or apprenticeship to ‘professional practice’ was relatively straightforward. Looking for example at the model of *dasi attam* (a precursor to bharatanatyam),¹¹⁶ Raghaviah Charry, the commentator encountered in the previous chapter, writes that a girl who intended to become a dancer would take her place within the teacher’s household at an early age (between 5 and 6) (1808: 546) and train under the *guru-shisya parampara*¹¹⁷ model of teaching - or a system of teaching whereby skills and knowledge are passed down through a lineage of teachers.

The *guru-shisya* teaching mode was and remains employed in India across a range of disciplines, from martial arts, dance and music to philosophy and theology, and is in many ways similar to the European model of an apprentice living with the master craftsman to learn their trade. In common with other systems of apprenticeship, this manner of training was immersive, and relied both on ‘imitation and intuition’ (Chatterjea 1996: 75) – a combination of unquestioning repetition and an understanding of professional practice acquired through osmosis. The *guru*, or teacher, modelled the route to correct practice not only on a professional but also on a personal level (Vatsyayan 1982; Chatterjea 1996; Prickett 2007).

¹¹⁶ *Dasi attam*, *china melam* or *sadir* was the professional dance form practised by the hereditary dance artists of Southern India, one of the key dance traditions used as the basis upon which the bharatanatyam of the present day was constructed. However, as scholars have argued (notably Soneji 2012), in the process, the dance form was so modified as to end up presenting a very different aesthetic to that of *sadir*. Bharatanatyam’s relationship to *dasi attam* therefore is not that of straightforward successor. Thus while, it is undeniable that *sadir/dasi attam/china melam* is where bharatanatyam starts, the reclamation of the dance form represented less of a revival than a reconstitution.

¹¹⁷ The phrase in Sanskrit means literally ‘teacher – student, from one to another’.

In the case of *dasi attam*, when the correct level of proficiency had been obtained in the eyes of the *nattuvanar* or teacher, the dancer was ceremonially presented to ‘an assembly’ made up of a knowledgeable audience, including potential patrons. Ragaviah Charry explains: ‘when the Girl attains a certain degree of proficiency, the friends and relatives of the Old Mother are invited...and the young student’s merit examined and assayed’ (1808: 546-7).¹¹⁸ This performance was called the *arangetram* (meaning ‘the ascent of the stage’ from the Tamil ‘arangam’ – stage and ‘erru’ – to climb). An equivalent ceremony, the *rangmanchpravesh*, was used for kathak, and it appears that with regional variations, training in other dance forms such as modern day odissi followed a similar pattern. Ragaviah Charry continues, ‘After this ceremony, and not until then, the set gain admittance to the favours of the public and are asked to attend marriages and other feasts’ (1808: 547). In this way the ‘debut performance’ can be seen to have functioned similarly to a large public audition and led presumably to a flourishing or a mediocre career depending on standard of performance.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the erosion of ‘*dasi attam*’ or ‘*sadir*’ as a professional way of life led to a shift in the rationale underlying why the dance forms were performed. Instead of being practised as a form of livelihood, they were instead pursued primarily as a ‘serious hobby’ or ‘recreation’ which served at the same time to reinforce a particular understanding of Indian nationhood. Classical Indian dance forms, particularly bharatanatyam were used in the service of ‘cultural nationalism’ (Meduri 2001, 2005, 2008b; Weidman 2003; Soneji 2010; Putcha 2013; Purkayastha 2017b), whereby art forms are used to ‘regenerate the distinctive... character of the nation, mainly through literature and art’ (Hutchinson 1987: 16). In a nationalist ‘sacralising [of] the past’ (Guha, cited in Purkayastha 2017b: 125), triggered by ‘the appropriation of a past by conquest’ (ibid.), bharatanatyam in particular was given a pan-Indian status, used symbolically to

¹¹⁸ P. Ragaviah Charry ‘A Short account of the Dancing Girls, treating concisely on the general principles of Dancing and Singing with the translations of two Hindoo Songs’ in Taylor 1808 (545–554). There is evidence to suggest that the tradition of the *arangetram* as a marker of entrance to professional practice goes back as far as the 9th century. The ‘Old Mother’ referred is the matriarch heading the hereditary dance artist household with whom the dance artist lived and trained. See Goringe 2005 for a fuller discussion of the *arangetram*, its history and its contemporary manifestations.

gloss over local distinctions and differences in an endeavour which ‘disassociated the dance from its social roots in highly localized non-Brahmin communities’, and enabled a ‘nationalised ‘pan-Indian’ reading’ of its ‘aesthetic history’ (Soneji 2010: xxv). Or, as dance studies scholar Prarthana Purkayastha words it, ‘Indian dances became major symbols of an embodied national heritage that was consciously constructed to counteract the violence of colonialism in the early twentieth century’ (2017b: 127). Applying the lens provided by Bourdieu’s identification of different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986), this meant that while the reconstruction of the dance forms resulted to a large extent in a loss of their role in providing ‘economic capital’,¹¹⁹ this loss was made up for by the enhanced status accorded them in terms of ‘cultural’ and ‘symbolic’ capital, in serving as the ‘poster art forms’ for the newly formed Indian nation. Far from the separation from dance as a means to earning a living leading to a relaxation in standards therefore, it was almost a point of honour for the new dancers of the new ‘bharatanatyam’ that practice of the dance forms maintained the same levels of expertise. Thus, while the significance of dance practice shifted substantially from being a means of earning a living (at the same time as representing ‘cultural capital’) to being a means to demonstrate individual and collective commitment and investment in the rich art forms of the new nation India (predominantly representing ‘cultural capital’), the value of dance practice remained the same.¹²⁰ The emphasis on rigorous training, therefore, remained.

While several prominent dancers from the early period of bharatanatyam’s history (the 1930s and 40s), including Ram Gopal, U.S. Krishna Rao, Chandrabhaga Devi, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Rukmini Devi, received their tuition within a version of the *guru-shishya* tradition, the ban on the hereditary dancers who had supported and been supported by this method of teaching for dance and music meant that this was necessarily in a different form from the teaching tradition as it had

¹¹⁹ It should be noted however that there were several dance artists who had successful paid performance careers despite the widely held mistrust of the ‘professional’ dance artist, for example Uday Shankar, Ram Gopal, U.S. Krishna Rao and his wife Chandrabhaga Devi, Kumudini Lakhia and Kamala Laxman (‘Baby’ Kamala).

¹²⁰ Albeit for a very different socio-economic class of people.

existed for the hereditary dancers themselves. Thus, as with the dancers named above, the change in the provenance of students from being dancers of the same caste and possibly even the same family as the teacher, to being wealthy individuals from a higher caste (not dependent on the arts for a living), together with the change in the intention behind learning the dance forms, inevitably altered the nature of the *guru-shishya* relationship. It gave it (and its succeeding form when the middle-class dancers themselves became gurus in their turn) a necessarily different quality and emphasis to that which had characterised the training ground for the hereditary dancers. While the student was still the guru's apprentice in terms of continuing the lineage of the guru's particular style of dance, their chances of employment and livelihood were no longer so closely tied to their relationship with that guru.

During the same pre-Independence period, again fuelled by a nationalist commitment to preserving and propagating the Indian arts, a number of institutions were established, offering another model of instruction that incorporated elements from, and yet fundamentally altered the *guru-shishya* mode of instruction. One of the earliest of these was the Kerala Kalamandalam, established in 1930 by a remarkable man, Vallathol Narayana Menon, who (long before the use of the National Lottery by Arts Council England) conducted an all-India lottery to establish the school (Daugherty 2000).¹²¹ The Kalamandalam specialised (and continues to specialise) in the art forms of Kerala, kathakali and kudiattam and mohiniattam. Shortly afterwards, Rukmini Devi, with the initial support of the Theosophical Society,¹²² established Kalakshetra in 1936, focusing

¹²¹ The great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore had established Shantiniketan in 1901 a school which 'attempted to replicate to a large degree the ashram or forest school of ancient India where gurus and their pupils lived in a residential hermitage or gurukulum' (Lal 1984: 34), and where students were educated in arts and crafts in parallel with academic instruction. At its inception it was primarily a school for younger children. In 1921, Tagore added what he called a 'world university' to this school, Viswa Bharati (Gupta 2002) where dance became 'an integral part of university education' (Purkayastha 2017a: 70). The dance taught at Shantiniketan drew on many different classical and folk-dance forms, developing its own 'modern dance aesthetic' (ibid.). It therefore offered a different approach to the schools aiming to instil proficiency in specific inherited techniques.

¹²² They later withdrew their support forcing Devi to move the school to its current location in Thiruvannamipur, Chennai in 1948.

in particular on training in bharatanatyam and associated arts such as Carnatic music and *nattuvangam*.¹²³¹²⁴

Post-independence, under the auspices of the government founded Sangeet Natak Akademi (see previous chapter), two training schools were established, one for kathak (Kathak Kendra in 1964) and one for manipuri (the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipuri Dance Academy in 1954). As the first four officially recognized Indian classical dance forms in 1958 were bharatanatyam, kathakali, manipuri and kathak, with Kalakshetra and Kalamandalam already in existence, this meant that there was now a training school for each of these recognised styles. Since that time a plethora of dance training schools and courses has emerged, offering training at varying levels of intensity. Universities offer degree courses in different Indian dance styles across India, and further dance schools offering training of an intensity similar to that of Kalakshetra or Kathak Kendra have been established – most notably the dance village Nrityagram, established by Protima Gauri Bedi in 1990 which offers training in odissi.

As a result, the current training routes in India include, as dancer, choreographer and scholar Ananya Chatterjea delineates in her dated yet still relevant article: training under the modern-day variant of the '*guru-shishya*' model; studying at a college or university for 'a BA, MA or even a PhD in Dance' (Chatterjea 1996: 81); training at independently run 'dance schools', and finally, training at one of the dance institutions mentioned above. Of these, the dance institutions clearly offer the greatest intensity of training. Training with the 'neo-guru'¹²⁵ where rather than living with the guru full-time, the student 'lives periodically with him/her...– or a teacher might hold 2-week or 2-month intensives' (Chatterjea 1996: 80) offers 'intensity in bursts', while with independent dance

¹²³ The art of reciting the correct rhythmic syllables and keeping time for the dance.

¹²⁴ In 1938, the dance artist and choreographer Uday Shankar established the 'Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre' near Almora in Northern India, which offered tuition in bharatanatyam and manipuri among other subjects. However, the school struggled for funds and closed not many years after.

¹²⁵ Dance scholar Stacey Prickett, inspired by O'Shea, uses this term to describe the contemporary variant of the guru (Prickett 2007: 30).

schools students ‘attend class 2/3 times a week and are expected to practice at home’ (Chatterjea 1996: 84). Of this method of training, Chatterjea observes:

... training in dance schools can be discounted as a serious system of training for those who wish to become professionals. It is more of a response to the growing middle-class demand for easily accessible visibility, even glamour.

Chatterjea 1996: 87

Training models in Britain – first steps.

Given Chatterjea’s sceptical assessment of independent dance schools, it is interesting to note how much of the training within Britain is achieved through this model. There is now an array of dance schools teaching predominantly bharatanatyam and kathak, but also odissi, kuchipudi and mohiniattam, located across Britain. Classes in these schools are offered mainly during the evenings or at weekends, with students usually attending once or twice a week. There are students who train more frequently and there are also instances where students experience a more intensive *guru-shishya* style relationship in the ‘neo-guru’ model, staying with the teacher for days and weeks at a time during school holidays. Such intensive one-to-one training is generally arranged privately between student and teacher without institutional support – and the training customarily takes place out of ‘standard’ working hours – at evenings, weekends, during holidays, and (frequently) during a student’s ‘gap year’. The usual pattern is that the student will receive the bulk of their training with their chosen guru, though it is increasingly accepted for students to attend master classes or workshops with other teachers, with the knowledge and consent of their primary guru.¹²⁶ In line with this, the regular Summer schools run by organisations such as Milapfest, or by the Bhavan, provide important periods of intensity which supplement students’ regular training, and

¹²⁶ It is now fairly common practice for gurus to send their students to other teachers in India for a month or two of intense training prior to their arangetram.

many students make a point to keep the dates for these intensives clear to ensure that they can attend (Dutta Interview 2017; Agrawal Interview 2019).

Yet, it remains the case that there are no vocational dance schools such as Kalakshetra offering immersive and intensive training, and there are no degree courses available for classical Indian dance. There are several universities (see appendix 3) that offer some training in classical Indian dance as part of an overall degree in dance – most notably the University of Surrey in Guildford which for many years (until its closure in 2019) offered a Dance BA that provided students with training in four types of dance – ballet, contemporary, African people’s and ‘Asian’ (most recently bharatanatyam, though for several years prior to this the style offered was kathak).¹²⁷ As with the example at the beginning of the chapter, however, the training provided in these instances is aimed not at producing professional classical Indian dancers but more at extending the physical and mental versatility and understanding of contemporary dancers for work within the world of Euro-American contemporary dance.¹²⁸

Some of the earliest classes for classical Indian dance training established in Britain, by contrast, were based on a model different to any of those described above and had a very specific professional agenda – the training of dancers for a company. Ram Gopal first set up classes in Kensington, London in the early 1960s, and attempted to attract recruits through a series of advertisements (including in the *Times* and the *Dancing Times*) in 1962 and 1963 (David 2001). He offered daily classes in four different classical dance styles – Kathak, Kathakali, Kandyam and ‘Tanjore’ (sic) taught by Gopal himself, together with ‘other qualified instructors from India’. To

¹²⁷ The course was set up in 1995 with kathak classes taught by Nahid Siddiqui. See appendix 3.

¹²⁸ Despite not providing professional training, this course nonetheless provided a vital experiential knowledge of a classical Indian dance style for hundreds of students over the years. The kathak and contemporary dance artist Jane Chan started her kathak training at this course in Surrey before opting to train in it more seriously under her guru Amina Khayyam. The closure of this course therefore represents a great loss to South Asian dance in Britain in particular as well as to dance in Britain more widely.

attend the classes, one had to apply (by letter only), and attend an audition and an interview.¹²⁹ A young Naseem Khan responded to an advertisement in the Times and started training at the school, where dancers were expected to train in all four styles. However, only a 'handful of students' (Khan, interview 2017) ever attended and in the end the school 'sort of disintegrated...I turned up one day and they said I'm sorry the school is finished and Ram's gone...' (Khan Interview, 2017).

A few years later, the Asian Music Circle set up the first 'organised and lasting series of Indian dance classes in Britain' (Khan 1997:26), employing first Gopal and then the dancer couple U.S Krishna Rao and Chandrabhaga Devi for a period of two years. In the absence of Gopal, Khan joined these classes. She recalls

We had classes in the staff canteen of the Indian consulate on South Audley Street. We did them after hours...so the whole place smelt slightly of curry. And that was 4 times a week – it was very intensive actually. It was Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday...Many more people came than had come for Ram's classes...

Khan, Interview 2017

In terms of the class participants,

They were a great mixture – a terrific, really good mixture of people who had come through yoga, people who were of Indian origin, some were Indian students who were studying here and then there were English people who were fascinated by it...

Khan, Interview 2017

The students learnt repertoire and attained a sufficient level of competence to perform in dance dramas choreographed by their teachers which toured the UK, Ireland and Belgium. They did not get paid for these performances, but from Khan's perspective, 'we were learning, you know - we didn't expect to get paid anyway – it was part of the training' (Khan, Interview 2017).

¹²⁹ Advertisement in the *Dancing Times*, available at <https://vads.ac.uk/x-large.php?uid=47346&sos=0> (accessed 5.12.17).

At the same time as the Raos were teaching, other teachers were establishing independent classes, amongst them Sunita Golvala, whose school, Navakala, founded in 1968 is the longest standing Indian dance school in Britain, the Indian filmstar Suryakumari who started teaching in London in 1965 and later founded the (now defunct) centre for India Performing Arts,¹³⁰ and Balasundari, a Kalakshetra graduate.¹³¹ For these teachers, while unlike for Gopal there was not a clear agenda to create professional dancers, the emphasis remained on the study of distinctive movement styles. Any knowledge of culture that came with these styles was secondary. Students were often adults, and with these early classes, tended to be more of non-Indian than Indian origin.¹³²

Training in contemporary Britain: Dance as the tuition of heritage

Most of the new recruits [students] are from families keen for their children to remain connected with their culture. Bharatanatyam is not just a dance, but a whole package of Indian culture and identity.

Bolar, Panel Discussion Navadisha 2016 (in Gibson 2016: 38)

As this quotation from Birmingham based dancer and teacher Chitralekha Bolar suggests, the context of Indian classical dance training today has changed significantly from these early models, with their explicit performance and professional focus, and their even mix of Asian and non-Asian participants. Anita Srivastava¹³³ believes that there are in all approximately 350 teachers of classical Indian dance forms working across the country, either independently, or attached to an institution, with student numbers ranging from a handful to over a hundred (see Gorringer et al. 2018).¹³⁴ The largest number of schools is in London, where the Director of the Bhavan, M.N Nandakumara

¹³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/may/18/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries> (accessed 29.2.21).

¹³¹ Golvala's services to South Asian dance were acknowledged in the Queen's Honours in 2016 when she was awarded an OBE.

¹³² Information on Balasundari's classes comes from Shakuntala (Sheila Cove) who trained with her in London in the late 60s and early 70s. In Sheila's class with Balasundari in 1970, of 14 students, only two were Asian.

¹³³ Srivastava has worked variously with Kadam, Milapfest, *Yuva Gati*, the *BBC Young Dance artist*, the South Asian Dance Alliance (SADAA) as well as as producer for several independent South Asian dance artists. Her perception of the field is thus well grounded.

¹³⁴ Akademi market research in 2010 reckoned that there were '120 teachers of bharatanatyam and kathak teachers in the UK' (cited in Ramphal and Alake 2010: 14). There are many more teachers offering classes in Indian cinematic or Bollywood dance.

estimates there to be between 60 and 80 schools teaching Indian classical music and dance (Nandakumara, interview 2018). True to the samples cited at the beginning of the chapter, the students at these schools are most commonly British Asians with parents or grandparents from the Indian subcontinent. As an illustration, of the students taking the exams in classical Indian dance forms offered by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance (ISTD) for example, kathak artist, teacher and choreographer Sujata Banerjee who is Chair of the Classical Indian Dance Faculty (CIDF)¹³⁵ reports that they are ‘predominantly Asian – with a very small scattering of non-Asian students’ (Banerjee interview 2017). They are also predominantly of school age (between 5 and 17), though there is a significant minority of young adults in their 20s, and a few older students.¹³⁶ Students are largely female – the 2017/18 *Yuva Gati*¹³⁷ intake had 50 students (45 bharatanatyam and 5 kathak) of which 2 were boys. This ratio is fairly typical and reflects the pattern of gender distribution found within most dance classes in India as much as it does that of ballet and other dance styles practised within Britain. As mentioned above, students usually attend classes with their teachers at evenings and weekends once or twice a week.

Some of these schools are run by South Asian arts agencies and institutions: the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Bhavan) in London, Milapfest in Liverpool, South Asian Arts (SAA-UK) in Leeds and Kala Sangam in Bradford¹³⁸ all host weekly classes in bharatanatyam, kathak, or both, with the Bhavan also offering classes in kuchipudi and odissi. However, most dance classes are organised privately by independent dance artists and teachers, and their schools are primarily run as businesses with the school fees covering the costs of the overheads for teaching, space hire and administration. Over fifty years after classical Indian dance took root with classes as well as

¹³⁵ The CIDF was originally launched in 1999 as the South Asian Dance Faculty.

¹³⁶ The first ‘snapshot’ for example, describes Stella Uppal Subbiah’s classes taught under the auspices of London Tamil school, where she has made a deliberate effort to teach the mothers of the children attending class. I discuss this example at greater length below.

¹³⁷ *Yuva Gati* (Sanskrit for the ‘youth path’, or ‘youth movement’) is the South Asian strand of the government funded ‘Centres for Advanced Training’ or CATs, administered by Sampad in partnership with the Birmingham based NDA Dance Xchange.

¹³⁸ See appendix 4 for further information about each of these organisations.

performances in Britain, class teachers remain predominantly first-generation immigrants from the Indian sub-continent. *Yuva Gati*, for example, employs as ‘home tutors’ 23 bharatanatyam and kathak tutors across Britain, the majority of whom are first generation immigrants from India (Subramanyam interview, 2017). This reflects the wider pattern of classical Indian dance training in Britain. There is, however, a growing number of teachers who were born and trained in Britain, some of whom, including bharatanatyam artist, teacher and choreographers Nina Rajarani of Srishti dance company in Harrow and Kiran Ratna of India Dance Wales, run very well attended dance schools.

In common with many other dance forms in Britain, including ballet, jazz and contemporary dance, the first classes in Indian classical dance forms are often given to very young children as an enrichment activity (physically, culturally or socially), with the majority of these classes introducing children to dance with no expectation that they will necessarily go on to take dance as a career. A key difference however between the emphasis of the tuition of contemporary dance or ballet and classical Indian dance forms, as the opening quote highlights, is that classes in the latter are for both children and adults, often seen primarily as a way of ‘keeping in touch with cultural heritage’ or roots. Though dancers may go on to start exploring the dance form for its own sake, the original impulse to learn frequently stems from a parental desire that the child is enabled to cultivate links to a cultural heritage outside that of the cultural mainstream (David 2012). Bharatanatyam dancer Saijal Patel reflects for example, ‘[It was] mainly culture [that] made me start dancing, because I knew it was related to my religion’.¹³⁹ Or as another young second-generation Asian dancer put it, ‘In my generation there are many people who don’t know anything about their culture. Dance is the only way of getting to know about it.’¹⁴⁰ Similarly, during a discussion group at a training day for *Yuva Gati* tutors, teachers cited ‘preserving heritage and cultural education and awareness’ as

¹³⁹ CAT marketing DVD.

¹⁴⁰ Participant at *Yuva Gati* Teachers’ CPD day, Dance Xchange, Birmingham (Fieldwork notes, 29.3.2018).

being a significant role for dance.¹⁴¹ In their research on the feasibility of instituting a vocational training course for classical Indian dance forms in Britain, Gorringe et al. found that for 40% of pre-university respondents, ‘keeping in touch with my cultural heritage’ was the most important reason for studying dance (2018: 47). Writing about the practice of Indian classical dance forms in Britain for the Indian newspaper *The Hindu*, bharatanatyam artist, teacher and choreographer Divya Kasturi sums up this attitude:

With Indians sprinkled all over this island, the first intent that has come to stay in the minds of every aspiring Indian parent is – ‘I want my children to learn classical dance, just so they are in connect (sic) with our culture.

Divya Kasturi 2019: np

In this way, much of the training in classical Indian dance forms in Britain is delivered in the context of providing a ‘tool for cultural retention for a diaspora community’ (Nova Bhattacharya, Navadisha 2016, in Gibson 2016: 43). This approach is encapsulated on the website for West London Tamil School which presents the reasoning behind the introduction of examinations for the (curiously named) Oriental Fine Arts Academy of London (OFAAL) that operates under its auspices, explaining: ‘The trustees also realised, the value of providing the examination to the children who are living outside the homeland....OFAAL examination promotes the cultures and values to the younger generation’.¹⁴² Clearly, as Srinivasan puts it, ‘maintaining links to Indian [or Tamil] culture has become a vital pedagogical tool in immigrant communities’ (Srinivasan 2012: 40). Hence, as the subtitle raises, dance as the ‘tuition of heritage’.

¹⁴¹ *Yuva Gati* Teachers’ CPD day, Dance Xchange, Birmingham (Fieldwork notes, 29.3.2018).

¹⁴² <http://www.wlts.org.uk/ofaal.html> (accessed 23.3.2018).

‘Cultural long-distance nationalism’, cultural policy and the professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms

One catalyst for the marked change in demographic and intention between the classes discussed above and the earliest British classes was, of course, an increase in immigration. Immigration rose initially in response to the call out from the British government to Commonwealth citizens to fill the gaps in the British Labour market after the second world war. This was followed in the 1960s and 70s by the arrival of the East African Asians expelled from Kenya and Uganda due to aggressive ‘Africanisation’ programmes, and from the late 1950s on, as highlighted above, by the arrival of Tamils, initially primarily for university education, and increasingly through the 1980s, fleeing the ‘troubles’ (see David 2005b). Khan records of the arrival of the East African Asians,

Here – almost overnight – was the support for the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, leapfrogging between 1972 and 1977 from a small office to a vast West London cultural centre. Here were the participants for...Navakala...the Gujarati theatre scene... [the dancers] for Navaratri...

Khan 1997: 26

Unsurprisingly, the new migrants gravitated to cultural centres where they could combat some of the isolation and threat of a frequently racist new home. In 1968 parliamentarian Enoch Powell had made his now infamous ‘rivers of blood’ speech in which he set the ‘ordinary, decent Englishman’ against the ‘immigrant and immigrant descended population.’¹⁴³ Powell was stripped of his position in the shadow cabinet as a result, but his view was far from anomalous, as evidenced by the many letters in his support and demonstrations in his favour that his sacking elicited. The racial climate of the nation was probably better gauged by these responses (of 10,000 letters and 700 telegraphs Powell received, only 800 took issue with his views)¹⁴⁴ than by his demotion.

¹⁴³ The full text of this speech can be found here: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html> (accessed 28.8.2019).

¹⁴⁴ See Brooke 2007 for an illuminating discussion of Powell’s speech and the public response.

Against the background of such animosity, cultural associations provided important focal points through which to provide support networks, reinforce a sense of identity and combat isolation.

There is clearly both a need and a place for the role art can play as a means for migrants to assert identity in an often hostile and bewildering environment. Artist and activist Rasheed Araeen makes the case eloquently,

...when people are confronted with a hostile or an un-inviting host population, their own cultures can provide comfort. Culture in this instance can provide shelter against what is unpleasant and also compensate for what one is not able to achieve in the new country. It is the right of all people to maintain themselves within their own cultures, wherever they are, and it is also their right to protect their cultures, their creative forms and values.

Araeen 2011: 50

From the perspective of the professionalisation of these dance forms however, the commitment to dance as primarily a means to a specific regional cultural connection or identity or, to use the phrase coined by diaspora studies scholar Sau-Ling Wong, of ‘cultural long distance nationalism’ (Wong 2010)¹⁴⁵ - means that for many of those attending classes, their sense of identity as a class member is framed first as a keeping in touch with Indian or Tamil roots, and only then as a kathak or a bharatanatyam dancer. In other words, ancestral, geographic or familial connections are privileged above artistic allegiance.

The impact of this prioritisation of learning on the development of a professional classical Indian dance sector is such that it is worth considering in greater detail. To do so I draw on Wong’s concept of ‘cultural long-distance nationalism’, which she derives from Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘long-distance nationalism’ (Anderson 1992), a term that ‘succinctly conveys...suggestions of genocentric orientation, the subject’s physical removal from the

¹⁴⁵ Thanks to Alexandra Kolb for drawing my attention to this article and highlighting the concept of ‘cultural long-distance nationalism’.

homeland, and his/her lack of embeddedness in the nation-state of origin' (Wong 2010: 10). Where 'long-distance nationalism' is primarily concerned with political intervention in the former homeland (Glick Schiller 2005), Wong's focus is the 'cultural dimension' of this relationship (Wong 2010: 9), whereby

...practices of culture in the diaspora..., as much as possible given altered circumstances, derive their sense of legitimacy, their standard of authenticity, and often their content from the perceived source of culture - the nation-state from which the practitioners are now physically removed.

Wong 2010: 10

This role for dance is by no means unique to Indian classical dance forms. To cite just a few examples, Wong coins the term in relation to the practice of Chinese dance forms in America (Wong 2010); ethnographer Barbara O'Connor makes a similar point related to the diasporic role of Irish dancing (O'Connor 2013) and dance scholar Alexandra Kolb draws attention to the intriguing role the Bavarian folk dance *Schubplattler* played in this regard amongst anti- Nazi German exiles during the second world war, as well as to its present-day role in the US (Kolb 2013). In these contexts, as well as a form of 'cultural long-distance nationalism', dance serves also as a mode of what cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) terms 'cultural reproduction', which O'Shea helpfully summarises as 'the means the way 'immigrants seek out emblems of cultural identity because their diasporic position requires the transmission of culture to be explicit rather than tacit' (O'Shea 2007: 52). Periods of significant socio-political upheaval or change (such as India's coming to terms with the legacies of colonialism) provoke a similar pattern of explicit cultural transmission, as the precarity of the social context means that cultural reproduction cannot be taken for granted. Thus, as anthropologist Kalpana Ram puts it,

Predicaments of breakdown, loss and corresponding anxieties about one's culture do not begin with migration for people who have experienced colonisation. Indeed for Indians, the immigrant situation recreates and gives life to the predicament of colonisation faced by earlier generations of Indians.

Ram 2000: 263

In this way the function of the classical Indian dance forms in the diaspora continues and builds on the role they had already assumed within the newly developing Indian nation meaning that they are ‘...readily turned to [as a means to allay migrant cultural anxieties] because [they are] already understood – and that by a particular class of Indians – as a transmitter of what is most representative and prestigious about Indian civilisation’ (Ram 2000: 264). Thus, just as classical Indian dance forms (particularly bharatanatyam) became a rallying point for a pan-Indian sense of national identity both pre- and post- Indian independence, in the diaspora, they serve to provide a single focal point of common inheritance for ‘immigrants [who] left home with [a variety of] local or regional identities’ (Glick Schiller 2005: 571).¹⁴⁶

This role for immigrant art forms was bolstered by British government policy initiatives in the 1970s and 80s, which promoted a strong sense of identity among ‘ethnic minority communities’ as a way to mitigate social problems. The rationale for this followed that of the 1975 Helsinki declaration (to which Britain was a signatory), which recognised the importance of ‘migrant workers’ and sought to ensure the well-being of these workers, by encouraging both ‘free instruction in the language of the host country’, as well as ‘supplementary education in their own language, national culture, history and geography’.¹⁴⁷ The belief was that a ‘minority’ community,

¹⁴⁶ I refer particularly to ‘India’ because while classical Indian dance forms are commonly referred to in the UK as ‘South Asian’ dance forms, recognising their provenance and practice in a range of other countries outside of modern-day India (e.g., Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka – see Introduction), in effect the majority of classical Indian dance practitioners in the UK have familial links with India and Sri Lanka. This is in part due to the ambivalence of Islam (the dominant religion of Pakistan and Bangladesh) towards the practice of dance, and in part due to differences in class (migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh have tended to be from poorer, working class backgrounds, whereas those from India have been predominantly middle class). There are prominent classical Indian dance practitioners with roots elsewhere, most notably kathak dance artist and choreographer Nahid Siddiqui who was born and trained in Pakistan, and Akram Khan and Amina Khayyam who both have Bangladeshi heritage. However, they are in the minority. The context of migration from Sri Lanka is quite different from that of India, driven as it has been in large part by the painful conflict between the minority Tamils and majority Sinhalese. This conflict has led to waves of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to Europe, the United States and Canada since 1956 (David 2012, Jones 2014) and has meant that the practice of dance (bharatanatyam) by these immigrant Sri Lankan Tamils has had more overtly political overtones and a closer affinity with straightforward ‘long distance nationalism’ than the less explicitly political long- distance *cultural* nationalism of the Indian diaspora (David 2007, 2012; Satkunaratnam 2013).

¹⁴⁷ Helsinki Final Act – Economic and social aspects of migrant labour. Available at <http://www.hri.org/docs/Helsinki75.html#H3.23> (accessed 5.12.17).

secure in its own identity would be less likely to cause social unrest – an argument reiterated by Lord Scarman in 1981 in a report commissioned in response to the Brixton riots that had taken place earlier that year when he recommended special funding for the promotion of ‘ethnic minority communities’ as a solution for socio-economic problems (Araeen 2011). As a result, as cultural theorist Chris Weedon articulates, ‘money was channelled by the central and local state into ethnic minority community centres and arts in an attempt to combat widespread alienation that had its roots in racism and material discrimination’ (Weedon 2004: 65). At the time, Jeyasingh recalls, ‘there was a huge political agenda around multicultural arts, and it was interpreted as respecting separate identities and allowing space for those separate identities to develop’ (Jeyasingh Interview 2018).

While much of this funding stream may have been well intentioned, its effect was double edged. The result for arts, such as Indian classical dance forms, was that much of the opportunity for engagement with these arts was offered in the context of serving as a vehicle to keep in touch with the ‘home culture’. Subsidy for ‘ethnic Arts’ within ‘ethnic’ community centres immediately distinguished these art forms from art forms such as ballet, or European classical music, with their presumed universal appeal. Such framing underscored the idea of these art forms being needed ‘to fulfill a specific need of a specific people’, rather than taking their place within society as a ‘common asset’ (Araeen 1987: 19). In this way the ‘entertainment and endorsement of cultural diversity’ came with a ‘corresponding containment’ (Bhabha 1990: 208). This move in Britain, though purportedly instigated by the Brixton riots, was paralleled in America. Srinivasan notes

Beginning in the 1980s, the U.S supported a multicultural policy aimed at a celebration of cultural diversity. In this scenario Asian Americans are valued and encouraged for the exotic, traditional and ancient practices they bring to American culture, but are relegated to the margins and are thought of as aliens, not American citizens.

Srinivasan 2012: 39

Srinivasan relates this to theatre studies scholar Karen Shimakawa's theorisation of such positioning as creating Asian American bodies that are 'object bodies' – 'always at the margins, repudiated by the centre' (Srinivasan 2012: 39).

In this way, it was not only the role of dance within the newly formed India that, as Ram shows, was replicated in diaspora, but also the more invidious hierarchies of colonialism itself: the differences, depicted lucidly by historian Ranajit Guha

...politically...between rulers and the ruled; ethnically, between a white Herrenvolk and blacks; materially, between a prosperous Western power and its poor Asian subjects; culturally, between higher and lower levels of civilization...

Guha, cited in Purkayastha 2017b: 127

The critique of these early efforts at multiculturalism and their effective (if unintended) replication of the dynamics of colonialism is now well rehearsed (Appiah 1994; Bhabha 1994; Taylor 1994; Rattansi 2011; Cattle 2014). While the term 'cultural diversity' was meant to be a fresh concept that addressed some of these issues, for many, it has failed. Its failure is clearly articulated by writer and editor Richard Appignanesi who states bluntly, 'cultural diversity is a meaningless tautological expression' (Appignanesi 2011: 5). His point is that all cultures are inherently diverse. As literary theorist Edward Said puts it, 'Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic' (1994: xxix). Or, in the words of historian and philosopher Tzvetan Todorov, 'There are no 'pure' or 'mixed' cultures, but only cultures that acknowledge and value the fact that they are mixed, and others that deny or repress this knowledge' (Todorov 2010: 420). Used to replace the tautologous 'ethnic arts', 'cultural diversity' merely substitutes a different tautology. Playing on Buckland's article cited in chapter 1, 'All Dances are Ethnic, but some are more Ethnic than others' (Buckland 1999), the implication of 'cultural diversity' is effectively 'All Cultures are Diverse, but some are more Diverse than others'. The problem with this is that while there have been concerted (and to

an extent successful) efforts to improve representation of ‘diverse’ cultures, the very label conjures something apart. Diversity connotes variety and distinctiveness, but it also connotes difference, unlikeness, Otherness. The effect of this is to immediately question for whom these ‘diverse’ art forms are relevant or pertinent. Said notes that ‘CLR James used to say that Beethoven belongs as much to West Indians as he does to Germans since his music is part of the human heritage’ (Said 1994: xxviii). The early funding of art forms such as classical Indian dance as a means of consolidating ‘Indian’ identity acted to call into question the universality of a *Tarana* or a *Varnam*. Weedon and Jordan argue that in this way the concept of ‘Ethnic art’ conflated ‘phenotype... and culture and... ghettoizes’ and hence served as a ‘form of policing as much as ...a space for enjoyment’ (Weedon and Jordan 1995: 487). Lest ‘policing’ seem too harsh a word in this context, they remind us that in Britain it was often the case that ‘funds granted by central government to ‘Ethnic Arts’ and ‘Multiculturalism’ came ‘not from budgets for arts and culture, but from the Home Office’ (ibid.). ‘Cultural Diversity’ was an attempt to shift and improve on this model, but as Appignanesi shows, the words may have changed, but the underlying import really did not.

In her insightful article *Decolonising Dance History*, Purkayastha (2017b) highlights two forms of ‘invisible violence’ that she sees as ‘constructing Indian dance heritage’ which she identifies as Orientalism and Indian cultural nationalism. This latter ‘invisible violence’, in itself a reaction to the violence of colonialism, has resulted, she argues, in the ‘erasure’ from the national memory of ‘certain dancers and their work’ (2017b: 127), replicating the colonial ‘tendency to grant cultural legitimacy to certain bodies, while denying it to others’ (2017b: 129). These invisible violences have continued to transmit and mutate (a little like the Covid virus) to include, I suggest, an invisible violence enacted on the practice of Indian classical dance forms themselves. These have worked to contain them to the status of (to draw on a distinction made by dance and theatre studies scholar Royona Mitra) ‘danced’ heritage, as opposed to ‘dancing’ heritage (Mitra 2017: 41). They emphasise dance forms as ‘cultural artefacts’ (Agrawal 2019b) as opposed to ‘knowledge that is inhabited,

relived and transformed' (Khan in Mitra 2017: 34). They have worked to evoke, in the words of bharatanatyam practitioner Navtej Singh Johar a 'cultural chauvinism [that] is fed into dance pedagogy' representing 'the antithesis of where I want to go with my dance' (Johar on the *Yuva Gati*/BIDF panel discussion *The Transient Source*, 11.6.21). They have worked to mean that, as Jeyasingh expresses it for the case of bharatanatyam, '[B]haratanatyam came to be valued chiefly as an example of culture and religion and Bharatanatyam dancers to be valued as race relation officers, cultural ambassadors, experts in multiculturalism, anthropological exhibits – everything save as dance technicians' (Jeyasingh 2010: 182).

Lest violence seems too strong a label to use with reference to the development of classical Indian dance forms in Britain as a professional pursuit, I suggest three ways in which it has had a substantive and material impact. These are of course, interlinked, but I have attempted analyse them by reference to 'framing', 'standards' and 'constituents'.

Framing

First, 'framing'. As I discuss above, the combination of the natural instinct of new migrants to congregate with others who will relate to their experience of dislocation and anxiety (Ram 2000), combined with Home Office policies aimed at supporting community centres and an immediate Art's Council response to place the burgeoning new art forms 'within the remit of the new community arts panels rather than the artform departments' (Khan 2006: 21), reinforced a perception that 'ethnic minority arts' were 'the province of the communities from which they had sprung and not of any wider relevance' (Khan 2006: 21). These factors conspired to mean that most classes in Indian classical dance have been and continue to be taught within a context in which the focus is less on the art forms in themselves (with a resulting incidental knowledge of cultural mores) and more on cultural heritage studied through the means of dance classes. This emphasis has simultaneously picked up the reconstructionist casting of dance as a 'noble hobby' – and the two framings combined have served to divert attention away the possibility of dance as a

career, building on and reinforcing the reconstructionist emphasis on dance as a means of cultural rather than economic capital: as a serious ‘hobby’, rather than a *virtuti* (or way of life). Thus, kathak artist Kajal Sharma, in an interview for the ISTD magazine, *DANCE*, laments ‘...the status that dance still holds as a hobby for South Asians.’¹⁴⁸ Another dance teacher explained to me, ‘Parents think of the dance as a cultural thing. They do not consider it a profession’ (Fieldnotes, YG residential, Dance Xchange, 12.4.17).

Standards

Second, ‘standards’. While for the reconstructionists, keen to prove themselves worthy performers of their adopted dance forms, standards of performance were critical, it is not clear that the same emphasis on standards of performance has entered diaspora practice – certainly not uniformly. Where the overriding aim of training in the arts is about ‘keeping in touch with one’s roots’, it stands to reason that the success of this training should be assessed on how far it has achieved this goal, not necessarily on the quality of the training provided. Once this primary aim is achieved, any extra provision in terms of a high standard of training is a bonus. Bharatanatyam artist, teacher and choreographer Stella Subbiah observes of her own classes held under the auspices of London Tamil School,

... when the mothers come with their children, they come with the idea that they are Tamil. ‘You have to learn bharamatanatyam’. *Iyal, Isai, Natakam*.¹⁴⁹ So they come with the idea – to learn that. Whereas...I still think you need to offer the rigour. Because if you offer something without that rigour, it doesn’t stay – there is no residue of it...

Subbiah Interview 2018

In a bid to open parents’ eyes to the possibilities and the impact of standards within dance, Subbiah started a class for mothers.

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.istd.org/news/news-archive/classical-indian-dance-shines-at-bbc-young-dancer-2017/> (accessed 18.7.2019).

¹⁴⁹ *Iyal* (Literature), *Isai* (Music) *Natakam* (Drama) are considered to be the three ‘pillars’ of Tamil culture (Mutamizh). Bharatanatyam combines all three.

...as parents I feel, give them the experience and exposure of coming to a dance school...with my ladies I give them to chance to perform in the universities. They used the studios at Roehampton to rehearse. They are going to perform in [the University of] Surrey. So imagine the impact of this – of rehearsing in studios like that. And this is the first time they have done this. So in my mind, these are the mothers, these are the parents...I'm not saying that they will say no to their kids becoming doctors or engineers, but side by side maybe some doors have opened for them – I don't know. At least some of their assumptions have been challenged.

Subbiah Interview 2018

In this way, Subbiah hopes to take parents beyond a 'modality of anxiety' about keeping 'the culture alive' (Ram 2000: 262), to take a level of interest in the standards at which the culture is being 'kept alive'.

Lest I be misunderstood, there is a great deal of excellent training taking place in Britain, in some cases as good as or better than training available in parts of India. It is equally the case that people have every right to practice these dance forms as a leisure pursuit for a variety of reasons, the same as with contemporary dance or ballet, with no particular regard for standards. The way classical Indian dance forms have developed in Britain, however, in large part because of the ambivalent approach to dance as a career, means that as opposed to other dance forms, even where high standards are desired, there is no clear reference point to set a bar for standards of practice. Standards are often compared (frequently unfavourably) to standards of practice in India, though as Agrawal argues compellingly (Agrawal 2019c) the very different contexts of performance mean that this is not really a comparison of like with like. In the meantime, much training, without the benefit of a clear professional benchmark or motivation is conducted, in the view of Kaushik, 'like a cottage industry with individual teachers running their own schools'. In her view, 'a lot of the

teachers in Britain did not train professionally in India ¹⁵⁰ – they trained as a hobby – but they come here and set up schools’ (Kaushik in Gibson 2017a: 2). Lacking professional training, she feels that South Asian dance artists entering the professional dance world are like ‘school leavers’ competing with the ‘Oxbridge graduates’ who have received professional contemporary or ballet training (Gibson 2017a). Continuing with this analogy, the problem for classical Indian dance forms in Britain is not so much that training might start out in a community centre or a draughty town hall, but rather that there is no ‘Oxbridge’ equivalent of training to either set a standard or aspire to. Monique Deletante Bell, the former chief executive of Dance Hub Birmingham (and administrative director of Akademi, 2009 – 2015), observes, ‘...a lot of what you are saying about South Asian dance is paralleled by ballet – I remember going to a church hall ...but I think the difference is that [with ballet] there are ways, routes ...to push you up through ... South Asian dance doesn’t have those routes. So if you are a teacher who recognises that your student had talent, what do you do with them?’ (Deletante Bell Interview 2019).

The reality and impact of ‘dance as heritage’ on standards of dance training and on creating an environment likely to nurture a ‘dance profession’ was recognised by Jeyasingh as far back as 1993. Speaking at a conference co-ordinated by Dance UK (now One Dance UK) entitled *Tomorrow’s Dancers*, she observed,

... the culture of Indian dance training here does not encourage people to look at dance as a full-time profession...not to belittle the very good work that exists...but a dance form that relies on weekend, evening and Summer school provision is just not going to produce large numbers of professional Indian dancers.

Jeyasingh 1993: 56

¹⁵⁰ By professional training she means the kind of intensive training given by a full-time degree, or a course such as at Kalakshetra rather than weekly ‘hobby’ classes.

Constituents

Third, constituents. This is, I believe, the most insidious and far-reaching result of the positioning of art forms like classical Indian dance within ‘the province of the communities from which they had sprung’, in that this framing has worked to restrict a broader engagement with the dance forms, by presenting them as particularly representative of a specific ‘diverse’ culture. This has had an impact on who practices and performs the forms, on who is perceived and targeted as a suitable audience and thereby, inevitably, on how successful the dance forms have been in the professional arena. In other words, it has had an impact on the ‘constituency’ of these dance forms. While it is true that there remain practitioners from a heartening range of backgrounds who work in Britain as professional dancers (in Akademi’s 2007 kathak ensemble production *Bells* for example, 3 out of the 10 dancers involved were non-South Asian heritage), for a country that has had consistent training in Indian classical dance available for over 50 years, and is purportedly committed to the project of cultural diversity, as discussed above, the number of non-South Asian heritage students of classical Indian dance forms is shockingly small.

An interesting case study pointing to how different policies and initiative could have led to a very different present is that of odissi dancer Katherine (Katie) Ryan. Ryan, whose family had previously had no connection to India or Indian art forms, started taking odissi classes at her primary school in Bedford, where the odissi dancer (now director of Kadam dance and editor of Pulse) Sanjeevini Dutta was employed as a dance animateur. Importantly Dutta was employed not (primarily) to increase cultural understanding through a one-off workshop (as is usually the case with classical Indian dance work in schools), nor to explore another aspect of the curriculum through classical Indian dance, but actually to teach odissi as an after-school activity every week. Ryan ‘just got interested...and as I progressed through primary and into secondary school, with some of my classmates, we started to learn classical repertoire... it was an extra-curricular activity

and quite a social activity for myself and my friends' (Ryan Interview 2017). Ryan subsequently chose to commit to dance more seriously and is now a professional odissi dancer. What is telling about Ryan's case is that it is exceptional. Where she was offered odissi classes as a natural part of her cultural inheritance, the more common experience of classical Indian dance forms for non-South Asian heritage children in Britain is of a one-off educational workshop, most often provided as part of a study topic related to 'India' or 'Hinduism'. Where a regular class emphasises a world 'cultural tradition...alive in our countries, ...available to each one of us' (Weedon and Jordan 1995: 482), the more common 'sample' workshop may point to the existence of these dance forms in Britain, but in a context that underlines their Otherness. Hardly surprisingly, the participation of non-South Asian heritage students in classical Indian dance classes in Britain today is something of an aberration, sufficiently unusual to occasion comment.¹⁵¹ Compared to the fairly even numbers of white and South Asian heritage students reported in the earlier dance classes, it seems hard to dispute Jordan and Weedon's claim that while art forms such as classical Indian dance have been supported, they have simultaneously been 'ghettoised'.

Beyond the recruitment of dancers, the 'different but equal', or 'separate identities' approach that characterises the discourse underlying the policy both of 'Ethnic Arts' and 'Cultural Diversity' has had a significant impact on developing audiences. Obviously classical Indian dance forms have been immediately deprived of all those school children such as Ryan whose more 'normalised' exposure to the dance styles could have led to a wider audience. At the same time, the approach has led to, in the words of theatre producer Tony Graves, the view that more 'traditional' work 'will be of interest to people of South Asian origin, ... whilst also assuming that it appeals to them alone' (2006: 154). Thus Rajarani speaks of her frustration at attempting to perform classical work

¹⁵¹ When the ISTD in South Asian dance course first started, Prickett's respondents felt that 'the ISTD's inclusion of the forms enhances their accessibility for those without a South Asian heritage' (Prickett 2004: 17), a belief which would, on face value appear well founded as ISTD provides classical Indian dance forms with a platform in the 'mainstream'. However, more than a decade on, those without a South Asian heritage taking the exams are conspicuous by their absence, forming less than 1% of those who take the exams (Banerjee, Interview, 2017).

‘because the minute you speak to a programmer about it they will insist that it won’t sell.’ As a consequence, ‘you can’t offer a product that no programmer wants to buy so you have to create something else’ (Rajarani Interview 2018). This ‘something’ has usually meant a contemporised version of South Asian dance judged to hold a wider audience appeal. As a result, as dancer and scholar Sitara Thobani notes, there has developed a situation whereby the division between classical and contemporary performances parallels the division between community and professional, with the ‘...professional designation... most often reserved for performances of *contemporary* South Asian dance - more likely to take place in venues in the affluent city centre and draw more mixed or predominantly white audiences...’ (Thobani 2017: 108, my emphasis). The diminished audience for professional classical work restricts the need for such work, which restricts the need for classically trained dancers at a professional level. The lack of employment opportunities then leads inevitably to questions about how worthwhile it is to invest time and finances in training to this level, leading to kathak artist, teacher and choreographer Sonia Sabri’s sense of futility about the long years of training in classical Indian dance forms, as seen in the last chapter: ‘...we train dancers to study bharatanatyam, kathak whatever the classical form is...but actually they then divorce themselves from that and they end up doing contemporary dance...’ (Sabri Interview, 2018). A critical issue relating to the professional training of classical Indian dance forms in Britain in other words, is the question voiced in the 2010 report into progression routes for classical Indian dancers ‘what are we training for?’ (Ramphal and Alake 2010: 9), and one could add ‘who will we be performing to?’ In this way while the practice and pursuit of these classical Indian dance forms has been encouraged, their legitimacy has been confined to a very particular sphere – they are practised not as ‘British dance’, but as the dance of South Asian communities within Britain.

Each of these factors - framing, standards and constituents - can be seen to have a specific impact on three different institutions (or attempts at institutions) involved in training classical Indian

dance forms in Britain. While each factor applies to a greater or lesser extent to each institution, it is helpful to look at each case from the perspective of one key factor. The chapter turns now therefore to Framing and the failure of the attempt to establish vocational courses; Standards and the Significance of the ISTD and Constituents and questions for *Yuva Gati*.

Framing – and the Failure of the Vocational courses

The interest in a school, able to offer intensive, vocational training for classical Indian dance forms has long been present, as I highlight in the introduction, ‘for years’ before Naseem Khan wrote her landmark report in 1976.¹⁵² Almost twenty years after Khan’s report, at the *Traditions on the Move conference* (1993) mentioned in an earlier chapter, observations from the plenary discussion record: ‘There was an acceptance that there is no full-time training here, dancers from the subcontinent are better trained; there is a great need for full-time training courses for dancers with accreditation and that the dance training here must prepare students for the performance structure of Britain’ (Tucker 1993: 4). A further twenty years after this conference, at a meeting of the South Asian Dance Alliance in 2017, the question of a conservatoire was still moot, and it was noted that Akademi ‘has done a lot of ground-work talking to key partners about progressing a conservatoire’ as ‘currently there is no level playing field in training between South Asian Dance and contemporary dance and ballet’ (Gibson 2017b: 6). Asked what one thing she would change if she had a magic wand to improve her position as a young person aspiring to be a professional classical

¹⁵² In many ways the London branch of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (an Indian cultural institute offering classes in music and dance, amongst other subjects) established in 1972 (though classes started some years later), could be argued to fulfill this role. Certainly, the Bhavan has provided a focal point for Indian music and dance, a place where visiting artists are able to perform and conduct workshops. The centre has endorsement in the form of frequent visits to perform and teach from a range of established professionals, mainly from India, including for music, the world renowned sitarist Ravi Shankar, and for dance, bharatanatyam icons such as Padma Subrahmanyam and Chitra Visweswaran and the kathak maestro Birju Maharaj. Since 1984, the Bhavan has followed a prepared syllabus and conducted its own examinations to assure standards, with the examiner usually being a visiting artist from India, and many of its graduates have gone on to set up their own schools in Britain. For all the Bhavan provides, however, it does not provide a full-time vocational course.

Indian dancer in Britain, kathak dancer Tulani Kayani-Skeeff answered: ‘a vocational school for kathak in the UK’ (Kayani- Skeef quoted in Gorringe et al. 2018: 14). Firmly established in his career, kathak artist and choreographer Akram Khan voiced the same desire – ‘my dream is that there is this high-level conservatoire for Indian classical dance, like the stories I heard of Kalakshetra – I wish there was something equivalent to that here’ (Khan, Interview 2018).

Reflecting this level of consistent interest, there have been a number of attempts to provide such training. In 1992, De Montfort University attempted to set up ‘the first degree in Britain to offer South Asian dance as a major subject of study in its own right’ (David 2003: 6). However, ‘due to difficulties experienced in recruiting and retaining staff’ (David 2003: 6), and low student demand, the course was disbanded within a year. A little over a decade later, Akademi worked together with London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS) to offer a B.A in Contemporary Dance with a South Asian dance strand (either bharatanatyam or kathak). The course opened in September 2004 and closed, after only three cohorts, in 2009. Again, according to Veronica Lewis, then Director of LCDS,

The course didn’t work because we didn’t have the groundswell of people who wanted to do it...We couldn’t sustain it. A conservatoire model is a very costly model. We had to have different tutors for bharatanatyam and kathak, as well as for ballet – and we couldn’t continue to pay for it...The course would never have closed had we been able to attract more students to make it viable.

Lewis, Interview 2018

An attempt by Trinity Laban to set up a B.A. in Indian music in partnership followed the same seemingly inevitable trajectory. Bhavan’s Director, M.N. Nandakumara explains,

The first year we had 5 students. 5 was the lowest number that we were allowed to have. So we were able to run... But to get even those 5 we really struggled. Maybe there are about 60 to 80 schools in the whole of London teaching Indian music and dance. Imagine if each one of those sent one of their students, or even if each 10 sent a student, we would have been able to fill a cohort. But when it comes to taking it as a full-time course there remains doubt in the minds of people. For them, taking a medicine degree or an IT degree or an

engineering degree is the one that helps them to run their families – and this is a side activity. Very few want to take this as their profession.

M.N Nandakumara, Interview, 2018

For this reason, the idea of establishing full-time dance training forms no part of the Bhavan's present ambitions – 'We don't have that kind of facility here – and you have only to look at what happened to our music degree course!' (Nandakumara, Interview, 2018).¹⁵³

As indicated above, this lack of participants for vocational courses is very far from reflecting a wider lack of engagement in classical Indian dance and music, as the number of dance teachers running schools across the country highlights – and some of these schools have students attending in their hundreds. In 2016, for example, bharatanatyam artist and teacher Chitrlekha Bolar's school had more than 250 pupils enrolled (Gibson 2016: 38). In 2017 the Bhavan Centre had 140 dance students enrolled, 90 for bharatanatyam and 40 for kathak (M. Nandakumara Interview 2017). Nina Rajarani's school had about '100' students enrolled in 2017 – and she could have more if she wished – she deliberately restricts the numbers she teaches and has a waiting list (Rajarani Interview, 2018). In 2016, the CIDF of the ISTD conducted 1643 exams for classical Indian dance students in Britain, 911 for bharatanatyam, 497 for kathak and 235 'primary' exams (G. Brown Interview 2018). This number accounts only for those teachers who choose to admit their students for ISTD exams (according to the CIDF chair Sujata Banerjee, this was about 70 at that time, Interview 2017) and does not include students from, for example, the Bhavan and the many Tamil schools which conduct their own examinations. If Srivastava's estimate cited above of 350 dance

¹⁵³ Other, not specifically vocational courses have also been pioneered – and followed the same seemingly inexorable trajectory. University College, Bretton Hall launched a Certificate for South Asian Dance Artists working within schools in 1995, working in partnership with the South Asian dance umbrella organisation, ADiTi and Middlesex University. This course closed in 2000 with the folding of ADiTi (Ramphal and Alake 2010). It was replaced by module in South Asian dance as part of a B.A.; this subsequently became a wider Diversity in Dance module. The University of Roehampton established an MA in South Asian Dance in 2005, which closed in 2016. Courses boldly envisioned and brought into being with energy and drive, for one reason or another proved to lack staying power, most commonly due to a straightforward lack of demand. See appendix 3.

teachers is correct, there are about another 280 teachers across the country who have chosen not to send their students for ISTD exams.

With such a groundswell of uptake at the level of pre-vocational training, what accounts for the lack of uptake for vocational training? The framing of the pursuit of classical Indian music and dance as primarily a means to maintain links with cultural heritage - as ‘noble hobbies’, or as Nandakumara puts it, ‘side activities’ diminishes the attention paid to these art forms as potential careers. Equally, the restricted constituents, or the perception of restricted audiences for classical Indian dance forms means that there are then limited employment opportunities for classical Indian dance artists who might opt to be vocationally trained. In this way, the ‘framing’ and the ‘constituents’ of pre-vocational training, together with the wider ‘framing’ and therefore ‘constitutive audience’ for classical Indian dance in Britain, combine to impact upon ‘standards’ by effectively restricting the numbers of those likely to pursue a vocational course – making the running of such courses unsustainable.

As I discuss throughout, while the difficulties of finding work as a contemporary or ballet dancer are well known (Burns and Harrison 2009; Sommerlade 2018), there are nonetheless over a hundred established contemporary dance companies based in Britain and in Europe alone.¹⁵⁴ These companies offer auditions and employment to contemporary dancers, meaning that a young student can embark on their training with the aspiration to work for companies such as those of Jasmin Vardimon or Hofesh Schechter. The strength of this dream encourages the risk to devote everything to dance on the chance of making it. There is no such incentive for a classically trained Indian dancer – even as an aspiration. For many years, Jeyasingh’s company and subsequently,

¹⁵⁴ This is apparent from a quick glance at the list compiled here: <https://www.danceonline.co.uk/list-of-dance-companies.html> (accessed 16.7.2019).

Angika (1998 – 2008)¹⁵⁵ provided the ‘aspiration push’ at least for bharatanatyam dancers. As described in the introduction, however, Jeyasingh’s company now more often primarily comprises Euro-American trained contemporary dancers. If a classical Indian dancer wishes to take dance as a career, therefore, the dream therefore must be to be prepared to choreograph, co-ordinate, market and fundraise themselves (as well as dancing in their own work). This is a tremendous ask from a young school leaver. Indeed, for Agrawal, expecting young dancers to make this choice without clearer career pathways in place borders the unethical:

I don’t think there are any 16/17-year-olds who would commit to doing this full-time – and that it is not realistic or even fair to ask them to do this when there are no career prospects available. I don’t think that it is right to ask them to finance such a course with no career prospects.

Agrawal Interview 2018

While the lack of employment, or the necessity to form and run their own company may turn out to be the reality for many (even most) young graduate contemporary dancers, they are at least able to embark on their training with the goal of working as a dancer in one of many existing companies.

The framing of classical Indian dance forms as particularly relevant to their own communities has thereby impacted both on the likelihood of students to perceive classical Indian dance forms as a potential career, and, through restricting potential audiences, on the possibility of providing those interested with a viable career should they want one. This has led to the lack of critical mass of students for vocational courses, meaning that despite the perceived need for more intensive training and despite the committed attempts to make this provision, as yet there is none. In terms

¹⁵⁵ A bharatanatyam company established by Subathra Subramaniam and Mayuri Boonham. It achieved RFO status is but closed the same year in 2008. See Kedhar 2020 for a detailed analysis of *Angika*’s work and trajectory. Kedhar argues that RFO status, while it ‘can make companies less precarious financially, can also put added pressure on them to produce and perform at a higher, and often untenable, rate’ (2020: 67).

of professional dance training this means that there is no obvious progression route for committed and talented dancers beyond school age; there is still not the central institute to set standards that Khan hoped for in 1976 and finally, that the best provision for classical Indian dancers in Britain - whether aiming to be amateur or professional - is through weekend and evening classes, with supplementary intensives with their gurus or at summer schools. For Jeyasingh such training

...attracts a different kind of person – either enlightened amateurs or a few very determined mavericks who will make it despite all obstacles. It is certainly not conducive to producing dancers, a profession of dancers, saying ‘this is what we want to do for a living’.

Jeyasingh 1993: 56

Jeyasingh wrote this over 25 years ago, but her words remain as relevant to the practice of Indian classical dance in Britain in 2021. Under this model, as is borne out by the trajectories into dance of many of the professional dancers working in South Asian dance in Britain today, dancers emerge into the professional world more by accident than design. They continue to be ‘the determined mavericks’ who make a decision to give a career in dance ‘a go’, often after they have made their first steps towards a different career.¹⁵⁶

Standards and the Classical Indian Dance Faculty of ISTD, or ‘*Kaushik’s Campaign*’.

Given this lack of options for more serious study, the standards of teaching in these weekend and evening dance classes assume a proportionately greater significance in laying the groundwork for the British professional classical Indian dancers of the future. It was in part the recognition of this, together with frustration with unqualified teachers, tutor isolation, a lack of structured learning

¹⁵⁶ See for example Seeta Patel who had started her training as a medic before turning to dance, or Shivaangee Agrawal who had secured a job as a systems analyst.

and uneven standards of dance training that led Kaushik in 1999 to initiate one of the significant attempts to professionalise the teaching of classical Indian dance in Britain, leading ultimately to the creation of a South Asian Dance Faculty within ISTD (renamed the Classical Indian Dance Faculty in 2012).

In this attempt, Kaushik was treading a familiar path – in fact her concerns echoed those of the founder of ISTD no less, the Victorian dance educator and reformer Robert Crompton, briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. At the end of the twentieth century, the position of dance teachers in England was marked by many of the same issues that beset South Asian dance in Britain today: insularity, the lack of means for professional representation, and a lack of clarity around standards for dance practice, meaning that the number of dance classes taught by ‘so-called professors ... who but certainly had no qualifications to teach that which they themselves but imperfectly performed’ (the contemporary periodical *The Novice*, cited in Buckland 2007: 10). A key figure in addressing these challenges was Robert Crompton, and he conducted a ‘systematic campaign for the realisation of a British professionalised society of dance teachers’ (Buckland 2007:22) as part of his efforts to unite and regulate dance teaching in Britain. This resulted in the foundation of the ISTD (or the ISDT – as it was originally the Imperial Society of Dance Teachers)¹⁵⁷ in 1904, of which he was the first president. I title this section ‘Kaushik’s campaign’ (echoing Buckland’s *Crompton’s Campaign*) in recognition of the common motivation behind both these attempts at reform.

The ISTD has grown over the years to encompass 11 faculties, offering syllabi and examinations for a range of dance styles including Classical Ballet, Latin American Dance and Disco/Freestyle/Rock ‘n’ Roll with the CIDE being one of the youngest faculties. The ISTD’s

¹⁵⁷ The incongruity of the CIDE’s positioning within the *Imperial* Society has not escaped attention. In 2004 Prickett wrote a detailed article looking at the opening of the CIDE, including some wry observations on the ironies of the inclusion of this faculty within a body with such advertised imperial roots.

focus is on ensuring and monitoring excellence of teaching standards, as well as ensuring that teachers cover an agreed syllabus or structure of content through their teaching. The completion of ISTD examinations does not in itself equate to vocational training for a performing artist, and the majority of those taking them focus on dance as a recreational pursuit (Brown, Interview, 2018). However, just as with music grades in European classical music, the examinations provide a clear structure for students who may then proceed to more intensive vocational training, and ISTD does now offer a selection of examinations geared more towards those wishing to take dance as a profession (the Advanced 1 and Advanced 2 levels). Despite many dancers pursuing the examinations as part of a recreational pursuit, as ISTD Artistic Director Ginnie Brown points out, ‘there is a healthy through flow of dancers [taking ISTD] exams who go into the profession’ so ‘there is a strong connection between the recreational and vocational side of things’ (Brown Interview, 2018). ISTD also offers a *Diploma in Dance Pedagogy*, with a route from this to obtaining the QTLS (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills) status that is equivalent to a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education), allowing for salaried employment within a school.

Prior to the creation of this faculty, there had been no central body within Britain to monitor the teaching of Indian classical dance forms within independent dance schools and to provide a sense of quality assurance to parents and students. A number of schools connected to larger institutions, including the Bhavan, the Centre for Indian Classical Dance in Leicester (CICD) and certain of the Tamil schools (including West London Tamil School), devised their own syllabi and examination system, or adopted syllabi and examinations from India to both motivate students, and provide some means of assessing standards. While these measures were sufficient for many, for Kaushik, this meant the adoption of ‘many South Asian qualifications and imported systems [which] suffered from out-dated syllabi irrelevant to the British education system and incoherent assessment infrastructures’ (Kaushik, cited in Sundaram 2014:3). She was further informed by her own experience as Director of Akademi, overseeing the classes the then Academy of Indian Dance

itself ran in different locations across London in its early days. She recalls taking over as director in 1988 and realising that

...Akademi had teachers who were teaching classes in different locations... Surbiton, Holland Park etc – and there was no way of managing these classes. They were the personal territories of the individual dancers who were being paid by Akademi, but doing whatever they wanted. A lot of the classes, I was told, were being used as rehearsal spaces.

Kaushik, Interview 1, 2017

A desire to raise standards, together with a sense that Akademi should avoid replicating work being done by other organisations, such as the Bhavan, motivated Kaushik to rethink the role she wanted her organisation to play, with the result that Akademi hired ‘someone to look at the strategic development of Indian dance and a project that would impact the whole country and the world. And that was the beginning of [the Classical Indian Dance Faculty] of ISTD (Kaushik, Interview 1, 2017).

The formation of a faculty required the submission of syllabi for kathak and bharatanatyam, and Akademi’s research for acceptable syllabi was lengthy and inclusive. It took the form of a 3-year ACE funded research project led by kathak dancer Sushmita Ghosh and ‘involved consulting over a hundred teachers of classical Indian dance in Britain and abroad and sampling their existing curricula’ (Sundaram 2014: 2). Recognising the variations among the different schools or styles of bharatanatyam and kathak taught in Britain (*banis* for bharatanatyam, *gharanas* for kathak), the syllabi have been deliberately designed to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the manifold variations in style. The bharatanatyam syllabus for example specifically acknowledges that *adavus* ‘vary from school to school’ (ISTD 2000: 19). The agreed syllabi are delivered to match the examination structure that applies across all faculties in ISTD (a Primary Class exam, a general grade 1 to 6, followed by 4 ‘vocational’ training qualifications’), examinations which ‘operate in the Regulated Qualifications Framework by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual)’. Further, ‘the Customer Services and Quality Assurance Department monitors

the activities of the organisation and working of the examinations processes to ensure that the ISTD meets the criteria of the Regulators in every respect'.¹⁵⁸ Examiners are 'appointed by the ISTD Council in the UK who are trained, monitored and controlled by the ISTD from the UK'.¹⁵⁹ It is dependent for its knowledge of the different dance styles it examines, however, as well as for its 'development of a particular technique through courses and syllabi updates', on its individual Faculty Committees each made up of experts in their respective styles, who are elected by a ballot of their members every three years'.¹⁶⁰

In several ways, the creation of the CIDF within ISTD has been a remarkable success story. The faculty is growing everyday (Sujata Banerjee, CIDF Chair, Interview, 2017) – and even the Bhavan Centre (which has long been content with its own examination structure) will offer ISTD exams from 2019 (M.N. Nandakumara interview, 2017).¹⁶¹ In September 2013, the ISTD faculty newsheet reported that 'the number of ISTD's classical Indian dance examinations has increased by about 300% over the past year!'.¹⁶² As mentioned above, in 2016, the CIDF conducted 1643 examinations for students in Britain.¹⁶³ In 2017, at *Navadal*, a national youth dance competition for young dancers organized by Akademi, the winners for both solo and group performances for bharatanatyam and kathak were ISTD students, as were the BBC Young Dance South Asian Category winners for the three competitions to date, Vidya Patel (2015), Shyam Dattani (2017)

¹⁵⁸ ISTD guidance on Quality Assurance. Available at <https://www.istd.org/examinations/quality-assurance> (accessed 14.2.18).

¹⁵⁹ Information on ISTD Examiners. Available at <https://www.istd.org/examinations/istd-examiners/> (accessed 14.2.18).

¹⁶⁰ ISTD website. Available at <https://www.istd.org/about-us/faculties> (accessed 14.2.18).

¹⁶¹ This is largely due to the convertibility of ISTD exams to UCAS (University and College Admissions Service) points. Both the Bhavan Centre and Subbiah have been urged by parents to offer Imperial Society for Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) exams in classical Indian dance forms not for the sake of assessing quality in the dance styles themselves, but because ISTD qualifications count towards UCAS points (Nandakumara, Interview 2017; Subbiah Interview 2018), allowing for a stronger application to study a subject affording work in a more stable and lucrative sector.

¹⁶² Classical Indian Dance Faculty News, 9th September 2013 Available at <https://www.istd.org/about-us/documents/classical-indian-dance-faculty-news-september/> (accessed 7.12.17).

¹⁶³ Interestingly, in 2012, the faculty presented its examination curricula and criteria to dance teachers in Mumbai and Delhi – the first initiative in India for the ISTD (Sundaram 2014), and in 2017 there was one ISTD CIDF registered teacher in India and there had been enquiries from 2 or 3 others (Banerjee Interview, 2017).

and Shree Savani (2019).¹⁶⁴ Several of the younger generation of successful professional or semi-professional Indian classical dancers who have trained in Britain are ISTD students including Akaash Odedra, Jaina Modasia and Vidya Patel. Teachers who have adopted it are warm in its praise. Pushkala Gopal, one of the most respected and sought after of the bharatanatyam teachers in Britain (as an indication, she was awarded Milapfest's Acharya Ratna¹⁶⁵ in 2015, in 2016 was honoured at Navadisha for her teaching legacy in Britain and in 2020 was awarded an MBE for 'outstanding and exemplary achievement in service to the community) feels that it is 'one of the most brilliant things' to have happened for the teaching of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, arguing that 'the ISTD movement has awakened the community' (Conversation with Gopal, fieldnotes 27.3.2018). Admittedly, as an ISTD examiner and long-term faculty committee member (as well as being prominently involved in the consultation process for the syllabus), Gopal's perception of ISTD's role is likely to be positive. The very number of teachers who have adopted it however testifies to its value, and to its success in offering a syllabus with a sufficiently coherent structure to be useful to teachers, while remaining sufficiently flexible to embrace variations in technique without teachers feeling forced into a single mould. The emphasis placed from the beginning on inclusivity has led to an acceptance of and respect for stylistic variations that is built into the syllabus and helps it to resist any tendency towards homogenisation or the flattening of distinctions in style that a single syllabus might otherwise encourage.

The CIDF has achieved much in terms of professionalising the teaching of Indian classical dance forms, and thereby in helping to develop potential professional dancers. It provides a clear framework of achievement for students; it encourages collegiality and combats isolation among teachers by providing an umbrella body that can offer support, opportunities for networking and continued professional development, together with a route to qualified teacher status for work

¹⁶⁴ Shree studied to Grade 5 and then stopped. She is however interested in taking the exams up again and is particularly interested in the vocational exams (Savani, personal communication, 23.7.2019).

¹⁶⁵ Literally this means 'Jewel of teachers'.

within schools. It also encourages a baseline of good practice in terms of urging teachers to be DBS¹⁶⁶ checked, insured and committed to continued professional development. The health and safety of students is integral to its thinking – and the syllabi emphasise the importance of warm-ups and cool downs, as well as offering suggestions for style specific body exercises. It offers two qualifications specifically geared to the vocational practice of dance. Moreover, the inclusion of the faculty has helped to establish classical Indian dance forms more firmly on the map of dance practice within Britain. There are a number of events run by ISTD including some student showcases and teacher training residencies which are open to members from across the different faculties, and this provides an occasion for a growing awareness of classical Indian dance styles, and conversely, a growing awareness among classical Indian dance practitioners of the culture and practice of other genres. In 2017 Shyam Dattani featured on the cover of the July – September edition of *DANCE* (Issue 480), the ISTD membership magazine and the magazine regularly features news and images from the CID Faculty. Such exposure is critical in normalising the presence of Classical Indian Dance forms in Britain and underlining its presence in the ‘mainstream’.

In the face of this glamorous appearance of commercial, international and artistic success however, there are those who raise concerns. Part of the work of SAA-UK in Leeds is to provide classes in bharatanatyam and kathak. The director, Keranjeet Kaur, was keen to take on the ISTD model. Having trained in ballet as a child, for her ‘ISTD offers the framework that we need to take a young person on a complete journey where they develop all the techniques that you need on par as I did with ballet.’ She soon found herself facing a situation however in which ‘parents got into the habit of wanting [their children] to jump through hoops and just get grades’ (Kaur Interview

¹⁶⁶ Disclosure and Barring Service. A safeguarding service designed to protect vulnerable groups including children and young people by preventing the employment of individuals in sectors from which they may be barred.

2017). In an attempt to counteract such speed grade taking, she has made it a rule that at SAA-UK, pupils only take grades every two years. After all, as she points out

Given that they [the students] are only meeting once a week and probably only for an hour – you have to do your file work, theory, technique, dance piece, music, on a once-a-week basis 30 weeks a year is just unrealistic to achieve a grading – if you want to do it with excellence and quality.

Kaur, Interview, 2017

This echoes a concern Subramanyam raised with Prickett in 2004. Subramanyam had been involved in the consultation process for the syllabus and explained that it offered an idealised vision of a training programme – what would be accomplished without time constraints. When her own students took the exam however, she realised how difficult it was to really cover the material suggested in the space of a year (Prickett 2004). Kathak artist and teacher Nilima Devi makes a similar point. Talking about the process of devising the syllabus she comments,

I sent my syllabus to Sushmita [Ghosh] and said – I've developed a course based on once a week for one hour. Then Sushmita developed a course based on thrice a week for three hours plus one-hour everyday training at home. And I objected saying that my experience shows that people will not do it. It is unrealistic.

Nilima Devi, Interview, 2017

The concern is that if students are studying in an hour a week what they should be studying in 3 hours (with 5 hours independent practice), how far can they genuinely grasp and embody what they are taught? And if students are passing exams without such genuinely embodied knowledge, what does this say about the exams and their standards? Yadagudde commented from his experience of pupils joining his classes from other teachers,

...many people come here they say they have done the 5th grade or 4th grade, but I don't know what they have learned...The syllabus is very strong – I'm not questioning that....

but some of them, they come with a certificate, but they still have to start from the beginning...

Yadagudde, Interview, 2017

This inevitably raises questions about the quality of the examinations and the examiners themselves. Kaur explains that a number of teachers she encounters are resistant to the ISTD because

...they are not sure about how skilled the adjudicators are. So, there are questions about how they adjudicate, whether they have got a bias about certain things. How neutral, or how objective are these adjudicators – and what training do they go through in order to be an adjudicator?

Kaur, Interview, 2017

From the perspective of professional dancers, where these standards are in doubt, the value of then passing the vocational exams is immediately spurious, as one dancer found to her cost: 'We already have a series of robust qualifications for the sector in the shape of the ISTD exams, and people don't care about that. It wouldn't (sic) matter. I have aced all my ISTD exams, and it makes no difference' (cited in Gorringe et al. 2018: 44). Indeed, for Yadagudde the very focus on examinations is bewildering: 'When I was learning there was no exam for anything.... It's my ability to dance that got me a job here [the Bhavan centre]. My qualifications...nobody bothered about it...Only in the Western culture you have to have such things...' (Yadagudde, Interview, 2017). Akram Khan voices a similar scepticism.

My exam was on stage – that's the real exam. An exam in an academic environment – an exam in a school kind of way – to tick off something, to get a percentage – that was not my training. My training was on stage – in the class and the stage. I enjoyed the study for the exams [Prayag Sangeet Samiti] but they are not what made me – absolutely not.

Khan Interview 2018

The most forthright criticism of the ISTD exams comes from the visionary behind the ISTD exams, Kaushik herself.

When I dreamt of ISTD, it was an opportunity for contemporisation and updating and for bringing classical Indian dance teaching practices into 21st century UK ...It's a great achievement for the sector to have reached where they are. But the problem is that they think that ISTD is the beginning, middle and end of everything. They think that an ISTD grade 6 certificate is going to make the future of dance in this country ... but they don't see that aged 18 a student who has done part time training and graded exams is now barely ready to go for an audition to get into a dance school. They are not professional dancers... So, this is where we need to really open up, we need to see, we need to become brave, we need to look beyond that and say what is it we really mean by a professional dancer?

Kaushik, Interview, 2017

Once again, as Jeyasingh raised in her role of judge at the *BBC Young Dancer* (see chapters 1 and 2), the question of standards collides with the question of time. The body is a stubborn instrument – and takes time to embody movement patterns, as I discuss at greater length in the following chapter. Where such time is not allocated, what does this say about standards of practice?

For Chitra Sundaram, echoing Khan and Yadagudde above, for a performing artist, exams are an irrelevance, and standards are best assessed in the context of performance to an informed audience: 'If you are focusing on performance – this is where we return to the market economy – you give dancers the chance to perform. Then the audience will decide – or the critic – those learned among them will decide' (Sundaram, Interview 2018). This viewpoint suggests a return to a modern-day equivalent of the *arangetram* or *rangmanchpravesh* described at the beginning of the chapter and resonates with the findings of Potter and Alter mentioned in the previous chapter, that success as a professional is associated with 'act of dancing regularly with a recognised company' (Alter 1997: 73). This confronts us again with the inescapable interweavings of cause

and effect as we are returned to the familiar question of performance of what and for whom, which leads naturally to the next section – on ‘constituents’ and *Yuva Gati*.

Constituents and questions for *Yuva Gati*

As discussed, a lack of clear employment opportunities for classically trained Indian dancers, partly due to the actual or perceived lack of audiences for classical Indian dance, has contributed to the non-viability of a school for vocational training in these styles. While the opportunities and demand for classical dancers flags however, there is increasing demand for the bilingual dancer, fluent in classical Indian as well as Euro-American contemporary dance. One choreographer told me, ‘There aren’t enough dual-trained [Euro-American contemporary and classical Indian] dancers’ (Personal communication, post-show event, South Bank, 24.5.2017). This demand was a key motivator in setting up the short-lived BA in Contemporary Dance (South Asian dance strand) at LCDS. Veronica Lewis, explains that the course was instituted to meet

...the perceived need for adequately trained dancers who could traverse the boundaries of contemporary and bharatanatyam/ kathak, to serve the needs of working choreographers...We were hoping to create dancers fluent in both South Asian and contemporary dance – versatile in both.

Lewis Interview, 2018

This emphasis on versatility reflects a global trend that impacts across dance styles. Dancer, choreographer and scholar Melanie Bales describes the process within contemporary dance practice whereby ‘Training has become eclectic...dancers engage in a wider range of styles and classes in order to be technically and stylistically viable to more choreographers’ (Bales 2008: 16). As Foster argues, this trend is fueled by economic need – dancers train to increase their employability. The result is what she calls the ‘hired body’, whereby the dancer’s body ‘does not display its skills as a collage of discrete styles, but rather homogenises all styles beneath a sleek,

impenetrable surface. Uncommitted to any specific aesthetic vision, it is a body for hire – it trains in order to make a living at dancing’ (Foster 1997: 255). The demand for the versatile dancer had an impact not only on this course at LCDS. Its influence can also be seen on the third training initiative for classical Indian dance forms in Britain that I wish to discuss – *Yuwa Gati*.

Yuwa Gati is the South Asian dance strand of the Centres for Advanced Training (or CATs) and is the only way by which government funding is directly channelled to support training in classical Indian dance forms in Britain.¹⁶⁷ The CATs were initially established as the result of research commissioned by the Advisory Panel for the Music and Dance Scheme (MDS) (now part of the Department for Education), in 2003. The research recognised a need to ensure that all young people are able to access music and dance training regardless of their background, and the MDS started to establish CATs across the country to address this need.¹⁶⁸ CATs are about nurturing talent for the dance profession, their aims explicitly including, ‘raising the profile of dance as a career option’, ‘providing opportunities for students involved in the programme to engage with professionals working in the world of dance and providers of vocational training’ and ‘to nurture the next generation of dance students – and ultimately dance artists.’¹⁶⁹ Aimed at 11 – 18 year olds, they provide a ‘pre-vocational’ training, aiming to provide young students with a sufficiently solid technical foundation, together with the motivation, inspiration and information to encourage them to pursue dance as a career.

¹⁶⁷ As some dance schools are run by South Asian arts agencies such as the Bhavan Centre, Milapfest, South Asian Arts (SAA-UK) in Leeds and Kala Sangam which receive Arts Council Funding, the running of these classes, at least in terms of overheads, is to some extent state subsidised. However, most dance classes are run privately by independent dance artists and teachers. These dance artists may receive project-based funding for discrete initiatives, but their schools are primarily run as businesses.

¹⁶⁸ The National Dance CAT website states, ‘CATs exist to help identify, and assist, children with exceptional potential, regardless of their personal circumstances, to benefit from world-class specialist training as part of a broad and balanced education. This will enable them, if they choose to proceed towards self-sustaining careers in music and dance.’ National Dance CATs website, available at <https://www.nationaldancecats.co.uk/what-are-cats/> (accessed 15.2.2018).

¹⁶⁹ These quotations and much of the information in this paragraph is taken from the *Centre for Advanced Training for South Asian and Contemporary Dance Research Study Consultancy Brief (2009)*, obtained with thanks from Dance Xchange and Anita Srivastava.

Having initially focused on Contemporary Dance or Ballet, a South Asian Dance CAT (named *Yuva Gati* in 2013) was piloted between January and August 2009, with the first full academic year starting in September of the same year. It is based at and administered by the Birmingham based national dance agency Dance Xchange, working in partnership with Birmingham based South Asian arts agency Sampad. Unlike the CATs for other dance genres, which operate for a whole day at a weekend every week during term time, and which cater for students from the region, the South Asian CAT in Birmingham serves students across the country. It therefore operates on an intense project basis, running residential courses during school half terms and holidays. Training during the week is supported by ‘home tutors’, or the students’ regular teachers.

Given the professional orientation of the scheme, the test of success for other CAT schemes lies in part in how many of its graduates progress to vocational training courses. As discussed, no such courses exist for classical Indian dance forms, to the frustration of Subramanyam:

...this year we have 3 people graduating, who want to be professional dancers – we can’t send them anywhere. Last year we had 2 dancers who wanted to take up dance professionally – we couldn’t send them anywhere...

Subramanyam, Interview 2017

In the absence of such a measure, programme administrators suggest a measure of success for the programme as being the production of ‘industry ready dancers’ (Henwood and Lewis Interview 2018). This inevitably begs the questions of for which industry, and in what capacity? As ‘classical Indian dancers’ in classical Indian dance choreography? Or as ‘South Asian’ dancers with the versatility to perform within contemporary dance work? As discussed, the latter is the work where there is a demand, and the most likely to provide a dancer with an income, the work most commonly designated professional (Kedhar 2014, 2020; Thobani 2017; Meduri 2020). Given this reality, how should these potential professional dancers be trained?

Dance manager Jane Ralls, part of the team who initially helped set up *Yuva Gati* (then simply the South Asian dance CAT) recalls the complexities involved in drawing up a suitable programme – ‘there was a lot of discussion around how far it should be contemporary/fusion and how far it should be classical, so the content of the curriculum took a while to be shaped’ (Ralls, Interview 2018). For Subramanyam, an element of contemporary dance training is a critical part of *Yuva Gati* training because ‘our young dancers – they are training here in the UK ...– whether or not they take it as a career, they LIVE here. I would like to see them have a dialogue with the wider dance sector, their peer groups’ (Subramanyam, Interview 2017).¹⁷⁰ For Dance Xchange’s Head of Learning and Participation, Alexandra Henwood, the overriding aim of *Yuva Gati* training is in ‘the more classical form – the repertoire and the set vocabulary...’ (Henwood and Lewis Interview 2018). However, the character of the professional dance world, as discussed, means that this aim then conflicts with *Yuva Gati*’s other aim to ‘nurture and develop confident, highly skilled, creative and adaptable dance artists, with exceptional dance technique, who are well prepared for the rigours of professional dance training and future careers in dance’ (CAT Associate Artistic Director call out, email 30.8.18). Thus ‘over the years we have introduced yoga and contemporary dance alongside the bharatanatyam and kathak training to enhance the classical training, and also to add another element to their learning to *keep it in the contemporary context and in the professional world* as well’ (Henwood and Lewis 2018 interview, my emphasis). Ultimately it is this pragmatism that leads the way:

...some of our students are very classical and traditional and that’s fine, we support that journey, but we also want to equip them with the skills to operate in the dance world in any form so what we try and do is make them versatile enough to ensure that they can have a self-sustaining dance career whether that is in the wider dance sector or whether they stay true to their own traditional dance roots...and obviously contemporary has a much wider spread. South Asian dance is definitely present, but it’s a smaller strand in

¹⁷⁰ Subramanyam also believes that contemporary dance CAT students should receive some exposure to and training in classical Indian dance forms.

some senses – so we try to give them everything we can in terms of skills so that they can be in whatever area they decide to be in.

Henwood and Lewis Interview, 2018

Thus as Subramanyam puts it, the students are offered

...training to enable our young pupils to become a versatile dancer. So, we are training them in BN, in Kathak – they also get training in contemporary dance, yoga, pilates, so they have an understanding of their own body – safe dance practice, efficient dancer, dancing body.

Subramanyam Interview, 2017

In 2018, as part of a 10-year programme review, Dance Xchange and Sampad made changes to the management structure and training approach of *Yuva Gati* to ‘ensure the programme remains current, in order to prepare our students for the ever-changing demands of the dance industry’ (Email to all CAT parents and Home Tutors, 30.8.18). In part there was a need to address the tension between nurturing exceptional technique [in classical Indian dance forms] and preparing dancers for ‘future careers in dance’. This tension remains (CAT tutor, personal communication 2019) – unsurprisingly, as to fulfil both objectives the South Asian dance CAT relies either on the development of a wider audience (and hence more demand for work) for professional Indian classical dance, or the ability of CAT to produce dancers trained ‘both in contemporary and South Asian’ to meet the current market demands. Audience development is beyond CAT’s remit – and attempting to create a versatile dancer with ‘exceptional technique’ in at least two dance forms within the 132 hours (or approximately 16 working days) a year the artistic team spends with the students¹⁷¹ is of course an impossible ask. Dance Xchange Executive Director Claire Lewis cites

¹⁷¹ This is independent of the time spent with home tutors, which follows the weekend and evening class pattern already discussed.

their CEO Debbie Jardine as believing that while ‘Contemporary dance’ at the moment is something that can be quite set, she sees it in the future being something much more open ...where there is a fluidity and a flexibility and a fusion that allows people with South Asian dance skills as well contemporary dance skills to all work together ...and adapt and absorb, without watering down styles’ (Henwood and Lewis Interview 2018). While this is an interesting vision of the future, this is certainly not the present case.

In attempting to create a classical Indian professional dancer then, *Yuva Gati* is caught between two constituencies – between the constituency of their student recruits – largely children of South Asian heritage (predominantly girls) learning dance to keep in touch with their culture coming from a context where geographical takes priority over artistic identity, and the constituency of the professional dance world, where the place of classical Indian dance forms remains peripheral. This professional dance world, as I discuss further in the next chapter, remains largely defined by ‘the world of contemporary or independent dance in which South Asian dance forms have found themselves uneasy guests’ (Gorringe et al. 2018: 47). It appears that the Arts Council’s early decision to position art forms such as classical Indian dance ‘within the remit of the new community arts panels rather than the artform departments’ (Khan 2006: 21) continues to play out today.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at the institutions involved in training classical Indian dancers in Britain – the weekend and evening dance schools, the CIDEF, *Yuva Gati* and the failed attempts to create a vocational school. I discuss how the natural instinct of immigrant communities towards ‘cultural reproduction’ (Appadurai 1996) has been reinforced by British Home Office and Art’s Council policy since the 1970s, to create an environment of ‘contained’ diversity (Bhabha 1990), replicating the divisions and hierarchies of colonialism within the frame of ‘multiculturalism’. This has impacted on the teaching of Indian classical dance forms in Britain, such that their framing

has prioritised identity with an ancestral ‘homeland’ over artistic identity. It has impacted on the dance forms’ constituency (or the range of their practitioners and audience) through emphasising their importance as symbols of a specific geographically tethered cultural identity rather than recognising their universal appeal. This restriction of constituents has had a knock-on effect on standards of practice in preventing the development of a critical mass of practitioners who might have made a school for intensive vocational training in these dance styles a viable project. As a result, there is no clear training route for dancers wishing to train in these forms professionally beyond the evening and weekend classes, the private one-to-ones with teachers/ gurus and the Summer school intensives that equally characterise the training routes for those pursuing these dance forms as amateurs. A more intensive and immersive training as a dancer can be achieved only by following a training course in contemporary dance or by training in India (see next chapter). While the CIDF of the ISTD has been largely welcomed as a way of developing professional attitudes and of enabling long term and consistent engagement with training, some raise questions about the standards that the ISTD, as predominantly non-professional examinations, are able to ensure. Such critics suggest that the true test of a dancer’s quality lies not in exams, but in success as a performer– or to use the measure employed by *Yuva Gati*, their preparedness as ‘industry-ready dancers’. However, the restriction of ‘constituents’ which has circumscribed the pool of practitioners has equally also stymied the development of a wider audience. This has led to limited demand for performances of these dance forms and hence for dance artists with this specific training. Arguably classical Indian dancers in Britain cannot be ‘industry ready’ because there is no ‘industry’ ready to receive them. In this light, as the feasibility study referred to above concluded, even were there to be a vocational course it would merely create rather than solve a problem in training dancers then left with nowhere to go.¹⁷² Accordingly, both with the creation of Academy of Choreographic Art (subsequently the Royal Ballet School)

¹⁷² See 5 for further discussion on the audience generation that makes employment a realistic prospect.

in 1926 and the London Contemporary Dance School in 1966, both schools opened in conjunction with partner repertory companies – for obvious reasons the demands for training and for employment go hand in hand.

In the current professional market, however, dancers are typically valued for their versatility. Hence institutions such as *Yuva Gati*, or individual dancers serious about their careers, find themselves pushed to cross-train in Euro-American contemporary dance as a means to enhance employability. I turn in chapter 5 to consider the project of widening taste and audience generation that might make employment for classical Indian dancers a realistic prospect. Before this I take a more detailed look at the push towards versatility, where it comes from and what it means for the professional practice of classical Indian dance forms in Britain.

Chapter 4

Livelihood, Learning, Embodiment

‘Technical Habitus’, classical Indian dance forms and the limits of the Versatile Dancer.

When we started South Asian classical dance was still of interest to the West. It’s not anymore. It has slowly been driven out. It’s all about how you take the form and ‘fuse’ it. ‘Fusion’ is the big thing. And there are so many wonderful; professional dancers who are being forced to make contemporary work – and some of it is bad and some of it is good. But the point is that they are HAVING to do it because they need to survive. And that infuriates me - that they are put in that situation. It makes me sad.’ Akram Khan, Interview 2018

‘And I realised that you need a lifetime, more than a lifetime to train in one artform. Where there is a question of two and three artforms, you can get a feel for other art forms, but you can really, really immerse yourself completely only in one’, Shaalini Shivashankar on Manch UK, 9th May 2020

‘...I also say very proudly that there are people who live in India who speak brilliant English. Similarly, there are those who live in England who perform excellent kathak. You don’t need to live in England to speak the best English. You don’t need to be in India to perform the best kathak.’ Sujata Banerjee, Interview, 2018

‘...the cultural context in which people in India live definitely does enhance their dance. You just don’t get the right body language out of students who are born here – it just doesn’t fit in...’ Nina Rajarani, Interview 2018

‘Someone did once say to me – unless you have trained in India, you are a kind of half cooked artist’ Sonia Sabri, Interview, 2017

Introduction

I am in the Hathi Hall in the Bhavan Centre in London. On the walls are brightly coloured images of Hindu gods and goddesses, including a striking image of Saraswathi, Goddess of arts and learning. Standing about a head above most other students in the class, with my dirty blonde hair and pale skin, I don’t exactly blend in with the shades of brown skin and the black hair of most of

my peers. I feel slightly awkward – a ‘*muzhungakai?*,¹⁷³ with large feet and jutting elbows. Guruji (Prakash Yadagudde) comes into the class, and standing in our rows, we perform the *tattikumbattu*.¹⁷⁴ Guruji recites: *Talangu takadhiku taka tading gina tom* and our bodies respond to this signal to prepare to dance. Suddenly my Otherness drops away. My deep *aramandi*, hard won over years of training makes my height less conspicuous. *Tabatajamtari ta*. As my hands form the familiar mudras, as my feet beat out the well-known rhythm, as my body reaches in the movement that it has performed so many times, and amended through so many corrections, my awkwardness slowly falls away. I know this. My body breathes. I am dancing.

Another time, another place. I am in a studio in East London. I have come for an audition to work with a company that takes dance performances to schools and community groups. I wonder if my training in *abhinaya* and storytelling, whether the highly developed skills in foot percussion given me by my bharatanatyam training might work for the company. I don’t look out of place among the other dancers gathered for the audition and now warming up in the studio, who are a range of heights and skin colours. With my long legs and neck and straight-backed posture, people have often mistaken me for a ballet dancer. As the audition starts this illusion is soon corrected. Coming from a training where legs are often bent and rarely lifted above waist height, I feel distinctly uncomfortable waving my legs around, not to mention that I don’t have the muscle control to do so gracefully. I manage to roll to the floor when required, assisted by the supplementary training I have taken in contemporary dance, but my body still holds a resistance, not helped by the voice in my head of one of my bharatanatyam dancer friends, who innocently asked of me what contemporary dance meant by all this ‘rolling about on the floor’. I feel awkward and flustered and only just manage to limp through the sequence of movements. Unsurprisingly, I don’t get through

¹⁷³ The Tamil word for the ‘drumstick’ vegetable. Also used pejoratively to refer to someone especially tall and lanky.

¹⁷⁴ The danced prayer performed before and after dancing.

the audition. As I sit on the Tube back home, I only wish there had been a chance to demonstrate what I could do rather than showcase what I couldn't.¹⁷⁵

In the previous chapter I looked at some of the 'hows', the 'whos' and the 'whats' of training in classical Indian dance in Britain, looking at the institutions available to provide a training to young dancers, and at the demographics of who these young dancers and their teachers largely tend to be. I looked at the constraints and restraints on the development of the professional classical Indian dancer in Britain occasioned by the role these dance forms play as a means to sustain links to Indian/South Asian cultural heritage. I also touched upon the dilemma facing schools training dancers, particularly *Yuva Gati*, the only institution in the country with a remit for providing young dancers with a professional training in classical Indian dance forms, in terms of deciding what and how to teach their dancers. How best should they balance providing a robust grounding in the technique of a classical Indian dance style, while yet ensuring that students are sufficiently multi-skilled to work within a sector where the professional demand is increasingly for the versatile dancer?¹⁷⁶ I therefore looked particularly at the tensions and the choices faced by institutions.

The quotations and the short personal anecdote cited above reflects the focus of this chapter, which is about how these tensions manifest in the embodied reality of individual dancers, and in the choices they make in order to take dance as a profession or make it their livelihood. The chapter is divided into two sections, the first looking at the context from which the professional dancer emerges, the second turning to the context within which that dancer must then find work. In the first part of the chapter, I consider the impact of training within Britain in dance forms that originated and developed in India. As I discuss, for some teachers there is a cultural 'dissonance' between the body language and disposition that comes with being, for example, a 21st-century

¹⁷⁵ I would like to thank Avanthi Meduri for encouraging me to start with an anecdote from my own experience.

¹⁷⁶ Avanthi Meduri makes the point that versatility is a particular tense question for classical dance artists who invest so much into perfecting a particular technique (Personal communication, November 2019).

Londoner and the body language and disposition demanded of a bharatanatyam dancer. Rajarani's experience, grounded in over thirty years of teaching is that 'You just don't get the right body language out of students who are born here – it just doesn't fit in. It doesn't come to them naturally' (Rajarani Interview 2018). From a different perspective, kathak dancer, choreographer and teacher Sujata Banerjee observes 'You don't need to be in India to perform the best kathak' (Banerjee Interview, 2018). The implications of this debate on the practicalities of training and working in classical Indian dance in Britain are such that it demands attention.

In the second part of the chapter, I turn to the question highlighted by the first two quotations above – the impact of the professional demand for the versatile dancer, and how the classical Indian dancer must adapt her embodiment of these classical forms in order to better access the dance labour market. Once a dancer has gone through the arduous and time-consuming process of shaping their body in line with classical Indian dance training, and acquiring the physical and cultural capital of that particular form, what does it mean for that dancer and that dancer's body to then be required to fulfil the demands of the professional dance world for versatility – and thereby, to get work? What does it mean when, as Khan puts it, a classically trained Indian dancer is 'forced to make contemporary work to survive'? If it is true that 'it takes more than a lifetime to train in one art form', what is the impact of the demand for versatility on the way that the body of a professional dancer (in this case, particularly a professional classical Indian dancer) is shaped?

Rehabilitating the 'habitus'

In considering these questions, I draw on Bourdieu's concepts of *cultural capital* and *habitus* together with the notion of *physical capital*, coined by sociologist of the body, Chris Shilling (1991). Bourdieu (1984) pointed to the idea of physical capital in identifying *embodied capital* as one of three manifestations of cultural capital (the others being objectified and institutionalised). Shilling argues, rightly in my view, that 'the 'physical' is too important to be seen merely as a component of cultural

capital' (1991: 654) and therefore introduces the notion of *physical capital* to describe the physical assets pertaining to an individual, automatically through genetic inheritance, or acquired through training. I use this concept together with that of *habitus*, a concept that forms a key part of Bourdieu's sociological analysis. It is also, as the Bourdieusian sociologist Diane Reay remarks, 'probably Bourdieu's most contested concept' (Reay 2004: 432). I will therefore take some time to explain my understanding of the concept and to highlight why I have decided to use it before returning to the main questions of the chapter.

As a starting point, Bourdieu explains habitus in his essay *An Outline for a Theory of Practice* as 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experience, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' (1977: 82 – 83). It is the 'immanent law, *lex insita*, laid down in each agent by his (sic) earliest upbringing' (1977: 81). Further, it is '...close to what is suggested by the idea of habit, while differing in one important respect. The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated into the body in the form of permanent dispositions' (Bourdieu 1993: 86). Bringing these ideas together, *habitus* can be described as an embodied disposition or inclination, serving, in the words of sociologist Lindsay Garratt, as a kind of 'somatised lens' (Garratt 2016: 80), both shaped by and in turn shaping, a person's knowledge and experience.

Bourdieu's intention in 'reviving', as he puts it, the term from its earlier use by sociologist Marcel Mauss, and even Aristotle (Bourdieu 1993: 86), was as a means by which to describe 'the embodiment of social structures and history in individuals' (Power 1999: 48), in such a way as to tread a middle ground between determinism and subjectivism (Power 1999; Morris 2001; Edgerton and Roberts 2014), or in such a way as to acknowledge the influence of an individual's environment and cultural context while leaving space for their agency and choice as an individual.

The range of contexts in which the concept is used, not least by Bourdieu himself, together with its different inflections of meaning¹⁷⁷ has meant that it has been critiqued as being vague and ‘overburdened’ (Shilling 2012 [1993]: 160). It has also been read, as overly deterministic and ahistorical, which is somewhat ironic given Bourdieu’s intention in its use (Jenkins 2002 [1992]). In the specific context of dance anthropology, a notable critique has been presented by Farnell (2000), for whom Bourdieu’s attempt to ‘avoid objectivist, behaviourist accounts of human activity...without returning to their subjectivist opposite’ (Farnell 2000: 402) founders in its failure to sufficiently account for human agency, with the use of habitus locating agency ‘somewhere ambiguously behind or beneath the agency of persons’ (Farnell 2000: 403). Furthermore, Farnell sees in Bourdieu’s understanding of habitus as something that functions ‘below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny and control by the will’ (Bourdieu 1984: 466) an unhelpful perpetuation of ‘a misconception in dualist thought, that thinking is what goes on in the head or brain quite distinct from the actions of the body’ based on an assumption that a lack of ‘discursive facility entails a lack of consciousness’ (Farnell 2000: 409).

There are certainly occasions where Bourdieu can be seen to perpetuate dualist thinking. While discussing the term ‘*l’esprit de corps*’ for example, in *A Program for a Sociology of Sport*, he argues that ‘if most organisations...put such a great emphasis on bodily disciplines, it is because obedience consists in large part in belief and belief is what the body (*corps*) concedes, even when the mind (*l’esprit*) says no’ and that bodily disciplines serve as ‘a way of obtaining from the body a form of consent that the mind could refuse’ (Bourdieu 1988: 161). There is clearly a strong image here of a mind/body divide. The overall impact of Bourdieu’s work on habitus however has (perhaps paradoxically) been a renewed focus on embodiment – and the lack of a ‘hard separation between bodily conduct and intelligent conduct’ that he extended from the thinking of Merleau-Ponty

¹⁷⁷ Wacquant observes that there seems ‘a drift over time’ in Bourdieu’s thoughts on *habitus* from a more mentalist to a more corporeal emphasis (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 120).

(Moya 2014: np). Sociologist Nick Crossley argues that it has ‘put embodiment centre stage, facilitating a strong sociological grasp on it’ (Crossley 2001: 88).

In an attempt to focus on ‘talk from the body’ rather than ‘about the body’, Farnell proposes a ‘semasiology of action’ as an alternative to habitus. Thus, she suggests that in a ‘semasiological reading’, her Nakota consultant’s culturally inflected mode of giving directions,

is not being activated by her *habitus*. Rather, the semiotic modalities of vocal and action signs provide her with culturally shaped means of conceptualizing (using) her corporeal space.

Farnell 2000: 41

By contrast with *habitus* which makes Nakota people

...unconsciously disposed to use the symbolic form of the four directions and circle as a ‘generative schema’ when they give route directions...according to the semasiology of action, when Nakota people give route directions, they are causally empowered dynamically embodied persons utilizing resources provided by the systems of signifying acts into which they have been socialized

Farnell 2000: 410

My understanding of Bourdieu, however, is that what Farnell means by ‘semiotic modalities of vocal and action signs providing a culturally shaped means of conceptualizing space’, is very much what Bourdieu means by ‘habitus’, though he would include a greater a range of physical (and mental) ‘modalities’. Furthermore, as Crossley (2001), Reay (2004), and Wainwright et al (2006) among others maintain, by arguing that habitus exerts an influence not consciously registered by the agent, this is not to say that the agent is robbed of all scope to act as a ‘causally empowered dynamically embodied person’. The particular example of a Nakota woman that Farnell uses brings with it an emotional load in that this woman is unlikely to be able to (or even to want to) defend her autonomy in an academic paper. However, if we take the example of a British sociologist - who might provide directions to a stranger with the unthinking use of an index finger pointed in

the direction they intend – this unthinking and habitual gesture does not imply a lack of autonomy in other areas – just that this particular action is unconscious and unexamined. Such lack of reflection is not confined to actions – as the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests have brought sharply into focus, many of our thought patterns are also automatic and unexamined, resulting in ‘unconscious bias’. In Bourdieu’s terms, such unconscious bias is the logical extension of an engrained habitus, meaning that the agent takes his or her own way of acting, being and doing as the ‘norm’.

Foster, like Farnell, finds habitus an overly deterministic concept, reading it as possessing a ‘conservative, retentive function’ (2009: 8), resting on an understanding of culture as ‘relatively stable, cohesive and distinct’ (2009: 7). It is true that Bourdieu does insist on the pull of ‘inertia’, and the gravitational pull of the ‘status quo’, arguing that

Cumulative exposure to certain social conditions instils in individuals an ensemble of durable and transposable dispositions that internalizes the necessities of the extant social environment, inscribing inside the organism the patterned inertia and constraints of external reality.

Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 13

He also describes habitus, as seen above, as a pattern incorporated into the body as a ‘permanent’ disposition. So far, so determinist. He moderates his view elsewhere, however, to argue that though an ‘enduring disposition’, habitus is not in fact ‘permanent.’ Rather, ‘habitus change (sic) constantly in response to new experiences’ (Bourdieu 2000: 161). Notably, habitus can be changed through ‘awareness and... pedagogic effort’ (Bourdieu 2005: 45). Dispositions are ‘long lasting; they tend to perpetuate, to reproduce themselves, but they are not eternal’ (Bourdieu 2005: 45) and are ‘subject to a kind of permanent revision’ (Bourdieu 2000: 161).

A key to the modification or 'revision' of habitus is 'awareness', or a recognition of the force of the structures and conditions that constrain us. This awareness is what allows for the toppling of convention and offers the escape from the 'conservative' and 'retentive' force not only of the habitus, but of other social forces. In Bourdieu's words, 'The specific efficacy of subversive action consists in the power to bring to consciousness, and so modify, the categories of thought which help to orient individual and collective practices' (Bourdieu 1990: 141). To change, in other words, one must recognise and acknowledge one's 'unconscious bias'.

As I argue in the introduction, Bourdieu's theoretical tools (including habitus) are best understood in the context both of his own personal circumstances and of his vehement opposition to 'rational action theory' which understands the functioning of society on the basis of individual behaviour as directed by a series of individual (and rational) decisions or choices. For Bourdieu this 'founding myth of the uncreated creator...is to the notion of habitus as the myth of genesis is to the theory of evolution' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 132- 3). Thus, while he does not deny 'strategic choice and conscious deliberation as a modality of action' (ibid.: 131), he does want to emphasise the extent to which 'the individual is always trapped, save to the extent that he (sic) becomes aware of it...within the limits of the system of categories he owes to his upbringing and training' (ibid.: 130). His contention is, he points out, 'in a sense very banal...that social beings are at least partly the product of social conditioning' (ibid: 132). He asks, with some impatience at his critics, 'What is it about this that is so shocking?' (ibid.).

It is in this light that I find habitus a helpful tool through which to look at dance, dance fields and how they are shaped, particularly when researching how non dominant dance styles struggle to stake their space within a field governed by dance forms that characteristically evince and favour a different aesthetic, a different *doxa*, a different habitus. The term provides a shorthand through which to recognise the way in which a person's actions, stance, gestures and gait are all socially

and environmentally inflected - 'how any individual moves, speaks or symbolizes emerges from the intricate process of living in society' (Cohen Bull 1997: 270), which it seems unhelpful to discard. With apologies to Farnell, it seems to me easier and no more vague to employ a repeated use of the term 'habitus' in analysing acquired and historically embedded patterns of movement than the phrase 'semiotic modalities of action signs' (Farnell 2000: 41).

Habitus and dance – Building on Wainwright, Turner and Williams' tripartite distinction of habitus

Part of the reason for the level of disagreement about what Bourdieu intended by his various concepts (especially that of habitus) is that he conceived of them as being open to modification in the light of empirical work - he 'sees his concepts as in a continual process of being reworked' (Reay 2004: 439). He explicitly requested that scholars and researchers employ a method of 'comprehension through use' (Bourdieu, cited in Wainwright et al. 2006: 553) in approaching his work. In this light, a number of Bourdieusian scholars (Reay 2004; Wainwright et al. 2006; Thatcher et al 2016) see the extension and development of his concepts, or their 're-appropriation...in creative ways' that 'he himself did not use' (Thatcher et al. 2016: 1) as part of a necessary and legitimate updating of his work that he himself would have sanctioned. In this spirit, sociologists Steven Wainwright and Bryan Turner, and social scientist Clare Williams (2006, 2007) build on his work to identify three variants of habitus they perceive as operating in the field of ballet, which they label 'individual', 'institutional' and 'choreographic'. I have found this tripartite extension of the concept a helpful frame through which to consider some of the struggles faced by classical Indian dancers in Britain. While some Bourdieusian purists may balk at this use of Bourdieu, I hold that it is an extension that remains true to the intention of his work, not least in adapting his concepts through a '21st century exegesis' that allows 'the relevance' of his work 'to endure and expand' (Wallace 2016: 52). For the remainder of this chapter therefore, I adopt the

tripartite schema of habitus that Wainwright, Turner and Williams propose. To this schema, I add a fourth variant of habitus, which I term ‘technical habitus’. This fourth variant is necessitated by the extent to which training in classical Indian dance forms is provided within Britain (and to a lesser extent within India) outside of a formal institutional structure.

Within Wainwright et al’s schema, ‘individual habitus’ refers to the habitus the person acquires due to the environment in which they are born. This habitus develops in relation to a person’s ‘physical capital’ in the sense of their physical (and genetically acquired) attributes such as height, a long Achilles’ tendon or hypermobile feet. It also includes the physical (and mental) predispositions they acquire through living in a particular social environment – such as sitting more naturally on the floor than on a chair (or vice versa) or learning to eat with one’s hands or a knife and fork. A dancer’s individual habitus means that one dancer might favour, for example, movements in *chowka talam* (a very slow tempo) rather than a higher speed because *chowka talam* suits their particular physicality and temperament better. ‘Institutional habitus’ refers to habitus dancers acquire through ‘schooling’ or training within a particular institution and adopting the habits, skills and mannerisms of the ‘field in which they are located’ (Wainwright and Turner 2004: 101). Wainwright et al. use the example of the ‘fast footwork’ of the Royal Ballet, or the emphasis on flexibility and extensions in dancers of the Paris Opera to illustrate how different institutions inflect the habitus of their dancers. Within classical Indian dance, ‘institutional habitus’ manifests in the different stylistic traits of different *banis* or *gharanas*. Bharatanatyam dancers following the Kalakshetra style for example characteristically pride themselves on their clear lines and precision, while dancers of the Vazhavur style are marked by more rounded movements and a softer energy. ‘Choreographic habitus’ refers to the habits, skills and mannerisms acquired through ‘rehearsing and performing in a certain style’ (Wainwright et al. 2006: 545). Choreographic habitus extends physical capital in a dancer’s ability to perform fluently the signature movements of a particular choreographer and again predisposes them to a particular sequence or emphasis of movement. Where choreographic

habitus builds physical capital in one context, it can compromise physical capital in a different context. Even a short spell as an apprentice dancer in one dance company for example, left my body wishing to push any still position into an imbalance and transform a stillness to a suspension, an inclination I needed to consciously moderate in performing classical work.

I suggest ‘technical habitus’ as a fourth variant of habitus to describe the moulding of habitus acquired through training and ‘pedagogic effort’ yet not necessarily acquired within the formalised context of an institution. It also serves as a way of referring to the habitus imbued by training with a broader scope than that offered by institutional habitus. Training in a particular dance form can unite the practitioners through a ‘technical habitus’ where their specific institutional habitus may differ. Technical habitus extends and inflects a dancer’s physical capital through building strength, developing the capacity, in a bharatanatyam context, to sustain a deep *aramandi* over long periods, or to hold the arms in the specific elbow raised position of the *natyarambbe*. It also imbues them with a particular physical bias or expectation. A bharatanatyam dancer for example may experience a sense of unease if she or he does not perform a short, danced prayer (*tattikumbattu/namaskaram*) before and after dancing, or a sense of incompleteness if a movement pattern performed to the right is not then repeated to the left.

‘Technical habitus’ allows for the recognition that the formalised actions, stances and techniques of particular dance forms, independent of the physicality of the specific dancers who embody them, and independent of the institutions in which they may be taught, likewise bear the imprint and carry the history of the context in which they originated. As Keali’i’nohomoku famously argued in 1969 (see chapter 1), ballet continues to carry the cultural codes of its courtly European origins despite its contemporary status as a globally recognised art form,¹⁷⁸ and the expectations (physical

¹⁷⁸ Think how culturally revealing it is’, she reminds us ‘To see the stylized Western customs enacted on the stage, such as the mannerisms from the age of chivalry, courting, weddings, christenings, burial, and mourning customs...Our aesthetic values are shown in the long line of lifted, extended bodies, in the total revealing of

and mental) of ballet dancers are modified accordingly. A ballet dancer's habitus is modified therefore to expect that taking the right leg behind the left and bending the knees while tilting the body slightly forward is a way to express a respectful greeting. Classical Indian dance forms likewise retain, and to a certain extent imbue, the cultural imprint of their place of origin – which is of course what makes them so attractive as a form of 'cultural education' for certain groups of young British Asians (as well as elsewhere in the Asian diaspora – see Srinivasan 2012). The dances drawing on the Hindu texts and traditions, the languages of the songs to which the dances are performed, the flora and fauna referred to within them (lotuses, creepers, deer, elephants, crocodiles), the aesthetic values placed on (for women) a bare midriff, large eyes and covered legs, all speak as eloquently of the specific customs, 'morals, ethics and values' of their specific cultural origins as ballet does of its Western European provenance.¹⁷⁹ A dancer's habitus is modified through the performance of bharatanatyam, for example, to expect that arms stretched out in a straight downward diagonal, with open hands, palms facing down, should move from right to left before being bent to allow the palms to touch the eyelids, as a means to express respect and devotion.

'...if you have never drawn a kolam¹⁸⁰ before in your life, how are you going to show that on stage?'

Dance forms, changing space and individual habitus

'...not one of them could hold the veena properly and I assume it's because half of them haven't seen a veena and even less have actually held a veena and don't understand it. But if you grew up in Chennai – you know what veena

legs...in the lifts and carryings of the female...there are societies whose members would be shocked at the public display of the male touching the female's thighs...(Keali'inohomoku 2001: 40).

¹⁷⁹ This also means, as dance scholar Anurima Banerji argues, that aspects of the 'technical habitus' of Indian classical dance forms enshrine an 'identitarian politics of difference on the grounds of gender and caste' (Banerji 2021: 133) which perpetuate damaging gender and caste stereotypes. Banerji's suggestion (which no doubt Bourdieu would have applauded) is that we treat the 'Laws of Movement' prescribed in the *Natyasastra* and subsequently embodied in the 'technical habitus' of classical Indian dance forms with a 'critical consciousness' (2021: 149) so as to employ 'radical and transformative interpretations' of textual and bodily languages and instead 'perform egalitarian social relationships' (ibid.). Banerji raises here a very important point about ensuring that damaging power structures are not imported with a specific 'technical habitus'. There is not space here to discuss this point at greater length, but I endorse Banerji's approach of critical engagement with 'technical habitus' to transform and redeploy it.

¹⁸⁰ A *kolam* is an intricate pattern of dots and weaving lines, characteristically made out of white and coloured rice flour, usually drawn outside houses in South India to repel the evil eye. Drawing a *kolam* is a common activity depicted within bharatanatyam dance pieces.

looks like – you have 90 % touched one ...if you have never drawn a kolam before in your life, how are you going to show that on stage?’ Bharatanatyam dancer, observing a class of British born bharatanatyam dancers (Field work notes, 12.4.2017)

In this quotation, the bharatanatyam dancer quoted voices a question that preoccupies – one could even say troubles - a number of the practitioners teaching classical Indian dance forms in Britain, returning us to the first of the two questions that form the focus of this chapter. If we accept that an individual’s habitus reflects their social and environmental context, and if we likewise accept that a dance technique bears the imprint of its place of origin, given that any dance technique necessarily builds upon a dancer’s individual habitus, what happens when the cultural contexts of these to different forms of embodiment are mismatched or non-aligned? How does this culturally inflected social conditioning of an individual’s body interact with the body’s more formal conditioning through training in a (culturally inflected) dance form? As the quotations opening this chapter reveal, different practitioners take different views on this.

This view, restated in Bourdieusian terms, suggests that the individual habitus acquired through the absorption of the cultural context of living in India is a prerequisite for full, convincing or authentic embodiment of the institutional habitus of classical Indian dance forms: it is easier to create the image of someone playing a veena if you have held, and possibly played a veena yourself.

The same dancer explains,

I think it’s really important [to spend time in India] because there are so many things ...If you haven’t woken up because a rooster has woken you up instead of a clock, how are you going to understand that?...I believe that you should go and see the temples that you are dancing about ...the Thanjavur temple. You can see it in a book a thousand times, but it’s not until you stand IN the courtyard and you look UP – that you understand what all those *varnams* are about. That’s what I’m saying – that you need to have that certain amount of rootedness in the country.

Fieldwork notes 12. 4.2017

This is not a lone voice. Continuing my training in London as a teenager, after our family had returned from India, my dance teacher expressed a similar sentiment, remarking on the ease with which I embodied the bharatanatyam movements compared to my peers (who though of South Asian heritage had been born and brought up here) because I had ‘more of India in me’. Sabri references the view she has encountered that ‘unless you have trained in India, you are a kind of half cooked artist’. Rajarani, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, likewise experiences problems with a cultural mismatch between the everyday environment of her students and that of bharatanatyam. For her,

...the cultural context in which people in India live definitely does enhance their dance. You just don’t get the right body language out of students who are born here – it just doesn’t fit in. It doesn’t come to them naturally...I think sometimes that if you do it with them when they are young they are not inhibited. If you try to teach them when they get older – pre-teens – there are so many inhibitions and they are so self-conscious. So I try and do *abhinaya* really early on – as early as possible to get over all of that. For example, I’ll ask them to move their head like this (moves head side to side) – it’s a cultural thing – they just won’t do it – even when I say that it is simply *parivahitam*. They just refuse to do it. Even doing their eyebrows in alarippu – they just don’t like that.

Rajarani interview, 2018

In a frequently cited image, Bourdieu describes a habitus which ‘encounters a social world of which it is the product’ (or a familiar ‘field’) as like ‘a fish in water’, taking ‘the world about itself for granted’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127). What Rajarani and the dancer quoted above describe here is how trying to construct a classical Indian habitus within Britain is the reverse – it is ‘a fish out of water’. The impact is less categorical, as one can still train in classical Indian dance forms in Britain (it is not quite a dead fish) – it is just a harder, or a less natural, proposition. Yadagudde articulates this perspective clearly:

It’s not necessary for them to go to India and learn...but if you go for some time and see..., that is much better because dance is a mirror of culture. And culture you can see only in the people – by going to the market, going to the temple...going to the festivals. There are many festivals in India – here there are very few. This is the reason that we do festivals in the Bhavan...it’s to help the girls who come...because the girls are never usually exposed to this...

Dancers for whom a clenched fist with an outstretched thumb (the *shikara* hand gesture) represents questioning within their everyday context (inflecting their individual habitus) will find it easier to assimilate a technical habitus which seeks to embed the same movement for a similar meaning. Dancers who customarily signal assent by swaying their heads side to side in their social context will find it easier to reproduce that particular movement pattern in an artistic context.

While this is to some extent undeniable, this apparently unexceptional position demands some interrogation, particularly in relation to the way in which some of the quotations above could be interpreted to see the development of individual habitus most suited to classical Indian dance forms as somehow geographically tethered. I consider this question firstly in the light of what social geographer Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) describes as a ‘relational’ understanding of space and secondly in relation to the significance of both ‘technical’ and ‘institutional habitus’.

Turning first to Massey’s understanding of space. Under this construction, space (and within this wider dimension, the specific location of ‘place’)¹⁸¹ is not static but is ‘always being made’ (Massey 2005: 90)¹⁸²; it is ‘continually built and rebuilt by relations’ (Sergot and Saives 2016: np). This dynamic, creative understanding of space questions the modernist organising of space which ‘refuses to acknowledge its multiplicities, its fractures and its dynamism’ (Massey 2005: 139). It is an understanding of space which displaces an India evoked as a repository of cultural forms with a fluid India under permanent re-creation (as are all places) by ‘histories which are ongoing in the present’ (2005: 245). Spaces and places change, and an impact of the processes of globalisation mean that these changes are ever more rapid and unpredictable. Rajarani voices concerns about

¹⁸¹ Massey describes place as not ‘bounded’, but ‘open and porous networks of social relations’ (1991: 121).

¹⁸²A concept she links to Appadurai’s understanding of ‘areas’ in motion, or ‘process geography’ (Appadurai 2000).

the ability of her pupils to embody certain movements. Similar reservations, however, about students' ability to truly understand what they are representing are found increasingly within India.

Shanti Pillai notes,

The narratives that abhinaya seeks to express have also simplified. This is in part because many dancers do not have thorough knowledge of the languages in which songs are sung. Young middle-class residents of Chennai do not even have a firm command of Tamil, the language of many dance compositions. Furthermore, many lack an overall knowledge of the mythology and literature that would permit them to explore poetry with greater sophistication or to improvise for longer periods of time upon any single line...

Pillai 2002: 21

Considering the disjuncture between the world of classical Indian dance students in Britain and the dance world they seek to represent, the dancer asks, how many of the British based students 'have ever been awoken by a rooster'? But it can equally be asked, how many dancers in Delhi have had this experience, or in Mumbai? How many students of classical Indian dance forms today, in India, Britain or anywhere else, have experienced churning milk into butter with a stick (a commonly depicted motif), or hunting with a bow and arrow, or herding cows? He speaks of the importance of visiting the temples one is dancing about but how far does a visit to Thanjavur today provide anything like the experience of Thanjavur two hundred years ago when the *varnams* were written? In this time period, the Thanjavur temple has ceased to function as a temple for daily worship, instead forming part of a world heritage site, and bharatanatyam has become a global phenomenon, or in the words of O'Shea, 'a dynamic global practice characterized by local variation' (2007: 166). The danger of too great an emphasis on place lies in too small an appreciation of the effects of time.

It is true that a child in India is more likely to find themselves frequently in environments where, for example, a '*shikara*' is understood to mean a question and '*parivahitam*' is understood to mean assent. As Rajarani recognises, one response to any such lack of experience (both in Britain and in India) would be to try and work with dance students 'as early as possible', so that the teacher's

own classical Indian dance habitus (including their bodily *hexis*¹⁸³ or that part of habitus which particularly concerns physicality or motor function) can be absorbed by his or her students.

Bourdieu spells out the reality we all encounter, that children learn by imitation:

The child imitates not ‘models’ but other people's actions. Body *hexis* speaks directly to the motor function... in all societies, children are particularly attentive to the gestures and postures which, in their eyes, express everything that goes to make an accomplished adult - a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and of using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech, and (how could it be otherwise?) a certain subjective experience...

Bourdieu 1977: 87

A child does not limit him or herself however to a single model. An influential model embodying the habitus of an Indian classical dance style can have a profound influence especially if the child encounters that person consistently from a young age. Katie Ryan, whom I mention in the previous chapter as having early and consistent lessons with odissi dancer Sanjeevini Dutta, describes her own experience of absorbing the *hexis* and the technical habitus of odissi:

I think that's all quite subtle and I think I learnt it - I just absorbed it - and I had the advantage of having started at a young age, so I observed my teacher on a weekly basis and picked up mannerisms that way. And I was still at the age that I was developing mannerisms outside dance. I think children do pick up the way they talk, the way they move, the way they act from the people around them. And because I had a lot of contact with the dance teacher during those years, I think it was quite a natural way of learning it.

Ryan interview, 2017

Such learning through example, however, is not tied to a specific location. Ryan's description relates to her experience in the historic market town of Bedford in the East of England. Her experience of Bedford the place is dictated by the specific confluence of social relations she has

¹⁸³ Habitus can be seen as *hexis* plus a certain socially conditioned way of being in the world. Thus, my bodily *hexis* means that I find the gesture of *anjali* with both palms joined together at the chest a natural one to assume, while my habitus means that it is the more automatic form of greeting I assume than a ‘handshake’. Of course, Covid 19 has shifted the habitus of many in this regard.

encountered in that location – which for her included exposure to the *hexis* of odissi dance through her relationship with Dutta. The same place of Bedford will mean something very different to someone else who experiences a different set of social interweavings that this location has to offer. Habitus responds to the influences of the environment – but the reality of globalisation, migration and social movement; the pervasive reach of cable T.V. and the internet; the increasing ability of the global rich to insulate themselves from the demands of the physical environment means that the greater divide today is arguably not the geographical divide between middle class children in an affluent suburb of London and middle class children in an affluent suburb of Chennai, but the more substantive economic and socio-relational divide between both these groups and those children for whom poverty makes dance classes impossible.

‘an ear for rhythm most Europeans lack’?

A brief note on race

Furthermore, a danger of the identification of classical Indian dance forms with a particular place, is that it can too easily elide into their identification with a particular race. At Navadisha 2000, a conference on South Asian dance in Britain, the then Director of Birmingham Royal Ballet, David Bintley, argued against the practice of South Asian dance forms by non-South Asian dancers, his concern being the ‘purity of dance’ and the ‘need to preserve the origins of each traditional dance form.’¹⁸⁴ I discuss below some of the difficulties involved in ensuring that the vocabularies which make each dance language distinctive are practised and maintained. This may well have been Bintley’s overriding concern. However, a response that conflates culture with race highlights just how easy it is to slide from concern about particularity into the chimera of essentialism. Working as a dancer with a colleague in the Devonshire town of Totnes in the early 2000s, a (white) audience

¹⁸⁴ I was present at Navadisha 2000, and still recall the shock and disappointment I felt when Bintley raised this question. For this account however, I draw on dance artist and cultural activist Anita Ratnam’s record of events (Ratnam 2000).

member remarked on how ‘the stamping of the feet’ of my (brown) colleague was so much more distinct than that of mine and asked why this was the case. My colleague responded by saying that she hadn’t noticed this and asked the audience member to explain why she felt this, something the lady found impossible to identify except as a ‘feeling’. While footwork can be more or less distinct as a result of better or worse technique, a lack of a clearly articulated ‘stamp’ has not been highlighted by my (expert) teachers over the years as one of my more obvious flaws. In this case it seemed likely that the lady in question was responding less to my footwork than to my (white) race. While her comment was intended as a compliment to my colleague, it was a double-edged compliment along the lines of Agnes De Mille’s 1963 assertion highlighted by Keali’inohomoku that ‘barefoot savages have an ear for rhythms most Europeans lack’ (De Mille, cited in Keali’inohomoku, 2001: 39). Like Bintley she exhibited, as Grau reflects on Bintley’s comments, a ‘romantic ethnocentrism’ (Grau 2001: 38), or exoticism. And, as the politician David Lammy puts it, with the preoccupation with the ‘exotic’, with ‘marketable objects of wonder...the underlying force is still racism, even if it has a smiley face’ (Lammy 2019: np). Keali’inohomoku reflects on Walter Sorell’s 1967 ascription of differences between dance forms ‘to ‘race’ to ‘racial memory,’ and to ‘innate’ differences which are ‘in the blood’, commenting that ‘these ideas are so outdated in current anthropology, that I might believe his book was written at the end of the nineteenth century rather than in 1967’ (Keali’inohomoku 2001: 38–39). Such beliefs, however, have so pernicious a hold that thirty years later a senior figure in the dance world felt unembarrassed to proclaim them. A further twenty years after this, a quick search on the American question and answer website Quora, brings up ‘Why are black people so good with music?’ ‘Why do Africans have so much energy to dance vigorously all the time?’¹⁸⁵ As we know too well, racial stereotypes die hard.

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.quora.com/Why-are-black-people-so-good-with-rhythm-music> (accessed 1.10.2020).

In her witty exploration of sexism, *How to be a Woman*, journalist Caitlin Moran observes,

I have a rule of thumb that allows me to judge, when time is pressing and one needs to make a snap judgment, whether or not some sexist bullshit is afoot. Obviously, it's not 100% infallible but by and large it definitely points you in the right direction and it's asking this question; are the men doing it? Are the men worrying about this as well?

Moran 2011: 86

Combining the approaches of Moran with that of Keali'inohomoko (2001), I have adopted a similar rule of thumb for classical Indian dance forms, which is asking the question: would the same observation apply to ballet? Are ballet dancers worrying about this as well? So, in terms of spending time in India being a precondition to properly embody Indian classical dance forms, I ask, must a ballet dancer who wishes to embody *Giselle* first spend some time having a picnic on the banks of the Rhine? Is the ballet danced by ballet dancers in China less balletic because the dancers haven't been to Paris? Individual habitus is shaped by place, environment and culture – however place, environment and culture are not static, but subject to constant change. 'Habitus' is both structured and structuring in a constant exchange with its environment which results in the incremental change of both.

While aligning one race as particularly suited to the practice of a certain type of dance (ideally) in a certain location, this same view excludes that race from the practice of a different type of dance in another location, the logical conclusion being the separation of cultures and races into different spheres, different places, different nations. India posited as the standard of authenticity for classical Indian dance forms at the same time call into question their ability to represent Britishness. Under this construction, classical Indian dance forms in Britain are only ever given a provisional leave to remain.

Labour, physical capital and ‘technical habitus’

This is not to suggest that the geographic or architectural particularities of a place are entirely irrelevant or unimportant. Returning to the reference to the Thanjavur temple, the significance for a bharatanatyam dancer of visiting, for example, the temples at Chidambaram or Thanjavur, is something that many dancers and teachers subscribe to – I would certainly encourage my own students to visit these places if they went on a trip to India. As a keen dance student, I visited these temples myself, and it is undeniable that the majesty of the Thanjavur temple fires the imagination. It did so in part however because of the layers of interpretation I imposed on it through my reading about the temple and its role, and because of my sense of familiarity with and affection for the temple I had already acquired as a student learning dances which referred to it. Art historian Simon Schama argues that ‘Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is a work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock’ (1995: 7). The same applies to the architectural landscape. Returning to the discussion of aesthetic and artistry raised in chapter 2, to achieve more than an immediate or sensual grasp of the significance of the Thanjavur temple relies on a proper grasp of the narrative in which this temple is a part. This in turn relies on the labour spent on acquiring this understanding, rather than some sort of transfer of meaning by osmosis through contact with the earth on which the temple is built.

In Bourdieu’s terms, such an understanding of the significance of the Thanjavur temple relies on a particular cultural capital. Like all forms of capital, cultural capital represents ‘accumulated labour’ (Bourdieu 1986: 241). ‘Embodied cultural capital’ in particular ‘cannot be transmitted instantaneously...by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange’ (Bourdieu 1986: 244) but necessitates ‘a process of embodiment...through a labour of inculcation and assimilation...invested personally

by the investor' (Bourdieu 1986: 244). 'The work of acquisition is a work on oneself (self-improvement)' and requires an investment 'above all of time' but also of '*libido sciendi*' (or a desire, or thirst to know) '...with all the privation, renunciation and sacrifice that may entail' (Bourdieu 1986: 244). Culture, he argues elsewhere, is achieved through 'ascesis' (from the Greek *askesis*, or training) or discipline (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Such discipline inflects and remoulds a person's individual habitus with one that is consciously and deliberately acquired (though it then becomes unconscious or 'second nature'), by 'pedagogic devices' or 'awareness and pedagogic effort' (Bourdieu 2005: 45). In the dance context, this labour endows the individual with specific physical and cultural capital embodied within what I have called a 'technical habitus'. 'Technical habitus' relates to its social context but is also to an extent insulated from it in that is governed by the framework of its own 'field' and its own discipline.

Thus while 'technical habitus' builds on and either accentuates aspects of a person's 'individual habitus', there is obviously a difference, as dance ethnologist Deirdre Sklar (2008) points out, between everyday gesture and gesture as used in art, even when those gestures may appear 'the same'. 'Technical habitus' is not 'natural' but acquired and rests on the deliberate labour or exertion put into acquiring it. Very simply, a person living in India who does not study and practise kathak will not (despite all the advantages of a sympathetic social context) be as good a kathak dancer as a person who spends hours each day doing their *njyaaz* (practice) and perfecting their *chakars*, though they might live in an environment less obviously aligned to their dance form. It is the distinction between what is absorbed (through one's environment) and what is acquired (through one's effort) that allows Banerjee to argue in the quotation at the start of the chapter,

...there are people who live in India who speak brilliant English. Similarly, there are those who live in England who perform excellent kathak. You don't need to live in England to speak the best English. You don't need to be in India to perform the best kathak.

This is also why the technique of a dancer in the National Ballet of China may be inflected by individual and institutional habitus, but the technical habitus remains recognisably that of ballet. In this way, any dance technique necessarily builds upon a dancer's individual habitus, but beyond this relies on training to instil in the dancer the distinctive habitus of their distinctive dance style.

Ascesis, sadhana, technical habitus and the limits of location

For hours and hours we would just do 'nadbindhin da, nadbindhin da' ...for 1 or 1 ½ hours...And I think that that precision of the 'nadbindhin da' is so embedded within me that now I don't need to do 4 or 5 hours of riyaaṣ - one or two hours of good riyaaṣ helps me to go on stage.

Ashwini Kalsekar, Manch UK, 12th May 2020

The concept of a cultural form or a 'technical habitus' as requiring patient cultivation and 'ascesis' is one that resonates for many bodily disciplines (see for example sociologist Loic Wacquant on the culture of boxing, 1995) and classical Indian dance forms are no exception. As Foster (1997) points out, such training tends to be repetitive, and is most effective when pursued every day because the daily routines best create 'bodily habits.' She explains, 'Drilling is necessary because the aim is nothing less than creating the body. With repetition the images used to describe the body and its actions become the body' (Foster 1997: 239). As with Wacquant's boxers, the training that many dancers (including classical Indian dancers) undergo is such that it 'practically reorganizes their entire corporeal field...bringing to prominence certain organs and abilities and making others recede, transforming not only ...physique, but also...body-sense' (Wacquant 1995: 73). It is a process that requires a level of discipline and self-denying commitment to the artform identified by classical Indian dancers as *sadhana* – a Sanskrit term meaning 'methodical discipline

or exercise towards a desired knowledge or goal’, which has a clear correspondence with the term ‘asceticism’, including with its religious connotations. The value of *sadhana* is high within the field of classical Indian dance. In 2018, for example, Akram Khan described his choice of a couple of bharatanatyam artists for the Classical Indian dance and music festival *Darbar*, explaining, ‘I was impressed not only by their virtuosity, but as you say, their way of thinking – their commitment to their dance – their *sadhana* – their devotion to their dance – it comes across in their work’ (Fieldnotes, 23.11.2018). *Sadhana* in the dance context (it is a concept found across several fields), takes the form of committed and rigorous practice of one’s art form – the *riyaaṣ* that kathak artist Ashwini Kalsekar describes in the quotation above.¹⁸⁶

Practice, or *riyaaṣ*, as any dancer knows, can be relentless and exhausting. Any structure, therefore, that can support the pursuit of this practice will make for a more conducive learning environment. In this sense, not in the sense of a determinist geographical tethering, but in terms of a recognition of the type of institutional support available, it absolutely remains the case that training within classical Indian dance forms in India is an easier proposition because, at present at least, the environment offers more opportunity for immersion within the field of classical Indian dance. Dancers in Britain, as discussed in the last chapter, train and acquire a technical habitus, through a mixture of weekend, evening and holiday classes, not infrequently conducted in front rooms or converted garages (see also Srinivasan 2012). The acquisition of any specific institutional habitus within this is obviously hampered by the lack of institutions.

As discussed, there is currently no full-time training available in classical Indian dance forms within a British institution. This is a lack keenly felt by dancers within the sector. Gorringe et al’s report cites one dancer saying, for example,

¹⁸⁶ See Srinivasan 2012 (29– 38) for a beautiful and detailed description of the highly specialised labour that goes into the formation of a bharatanatyam dance artist’s body.

I feel that if I had full-time training at some point, I would be better equipped as technique, stamina and understanding would be developed considerably compared to have a once-a-week class and practising in my own time. Classes and practise in one's own time cannot be compared to full-time training in terms of rigour and intensity.

Dancer cited in Gorringe et al. 2018: 35

Another observes, 'I think I would be much more equipped to work as a dancer in the UK if I had more rigorous and constant training' (ibid.)

Additionally, the lack of a vocational school means that it is harder for dancers to find the motivation and energy that comes from training in a group. Pushkala Gopal explains:

...if you get to a good class in India, you find enough people of your standard in a particular group. Here you could be getting a little stagnant because you are the best among 5 or 6 others in your class – and... there isn't anyone else ...whom you could pick up tricks from. And then also the pace of the class has to go at a mean level for the others to match the standard – and therefore you are more likely to find classes with more challenging material in India.

Gopal, Interview, 2017

This is a sentiment echoed by Rajarani,

If I wanted to go to a morning class here, where would I go? There isn't one. A group class where there are 10 people of the standard I am dancing to? I would have to dance on my own and pay a huge fee to somebody. And it's not the same thing. I found it so motivating to dance in a group of people in a similar situation to me – who just wanted to dance.

Rajarani, Interview 2018

Without such support, dancers find that they need to be ‘really self-motivating’ (Vidya Patel, Interview 2017), with one dancer describing her training journey as ‘years of solitary training and work being done in the background...to work as a dancer has been a slow and independent journey’ (Dancer cited in Gorringe et al. 2018: 35).

Against this context, India remains, unsurprisingly, a favoured destination for dancers wanting to train intensively. Thus, Sabri

One of the advantages of training in India is that there is access to that full-time training. You are not only working with your peers – but you have the opportunity to work with musicians, poets, vocalists, yoga – all the constituent elements that make up the study of your art – you have full access to that in India. So, in an institute like a Kendra, in the morning you do your yoga. Then you do your tabla practice. Then your training – 6 hours – then back to theory – then body conditioning. That’s a full day immersed in the art form. Here that’s a huge void... To be embedded in the fraternity of your art, of kathak, or music – that positive energy, that constant thinking and questioning and talking – to be immersed in that is hugely, hugely important in your training – and that is non-existent here.

Sabri, Interview 2018

Or again, Ryan, ‘over there [India] I was able to train every day and I have not really been able to do that here...Summer schools did give me that kind of opportunity, but that’s always for 10 days at a time, and that’s quite a short period of time’ (Ryan Interview, 2017).

Does this present reality, however, mean a geographical tethering of Indian classical dance forms to the geographical location of India? While at present, on a number of levels, including institutional infrastructure, India offers an environment more conducive to the practice of Indian classical dance forms, does this necessarily mean that this will always be the case?

Choreographic habitus and training in classical Indian dance forms in Britain.

There is a further factor that limits the training of classical Indian dancers in Britain, in this case particularly with respect to the training of professional dancers, and this is the lack of (professional) demand for the ‘technical habitus’ that a training in classical Indian dance forms affords. This brings me to the second key focus of this chapter and relates to the question raised in the previous chapter – ‘what are we training for?’ This is where Wainwright et al’s third category - that of ‘choreographic habitus’ - becomes relevant. The term ‘choreographic habitus’ begs a question in the context of classical Indian dance forms, where the dance styles (as mentioned in earlier chapters) have characteristically been performed as part of a solo dance tradition. Whether the arrangement of movement on a solo dancer is rightly called choreography, and how far this term from the Euro-American dance context can appropriately be applied to classical Indian dance forms are important questions but are not key to my point here. Rather, I use the term to signal the habitus that dance work in Britain demands, the kind of habitus that choreographers are looking for, and thereby the kind of habitus that will be reinforced by ‘rehearsing and performing in a certain style’ (Wainwright et al. 2006: 545). In the cases where there is some limited institutional support for classical Indian dance training in Britain, such as through *Yuva Gati*, or in through the short-lived BA at The Place (see chapter 3) these institutions, as illustrated, then face difficult choices about what they choose to teach and how they decide to train young dancers so that the ‘technical habitus’ they are imbued with can find a place within the ‘choreographic habitus’ of the professional world.

As touched on in earlier chapters, classical Indian dancers in Britain characteristically find themselves answering to two very different performance or choreographic demands – the demands of the diasporic community, or of others aiming to highlight and celebrate aspects of the culture of the diasporic community, and the demands of the professional dance world (O’Shea

2007; Kedhar 2014, 2020; Meduri 2020). Though there are encouraging signs that this is now changing, as I discuss in the next chapter, until very recently it has certainly been the case that, as Thobani observes

...dancers often contrast ‘professional’ performances and venues with their ‘community’ counterparts...the latter encapsulate classical performances presented to mostly South Asian audiences...in contrast, the professional designation is most often reserved for performances of contemporary South Asian dance ...

Thobani 2014: 109

The ‘contemporary South Asian dance’ referred to often requires a level of fluency with Euro-American contemporary dance styles. The audition call-out for Akademi’s touring work *Paradiso* for example, which aimed to ‘illustrate how British Indian dance is integral to the UK dance scene’ (Akademi programme notes for *Paradiso*) sought for the performance of ‘British Indian dance’, ‘highly skilled and experienced contemporary dancers’, with ‘South Asian Dance Experience desirable, though not essential’,¹⁸⁷ and as discussed previously, contemporary dance experience is a frequent requirement of several of the more established companies that also draw on classical Indian dance styles, including Shobana Jeyasingh and Akram Khan Companies. Gorringer et al. cite classical Indian dancers describing how ‘...most dance company/ project auditions value non-stylistic movement quality in the UK, which was obviously limited in my classical training’; how ‘...I have also found that I need to have some training in ballet/ contemporary dance if I want to stand a good chance at a company audition’, or most damningly how ‘I feel that my training has equipped me very well in classical Indian dance – but that this is not what is wanted in the UK’ (2018: 36).

There are clearly some parts of Britain in which classical Indian dance forms are ‘wanted’. As Banerjee observes, ‘In some ways, ironically, South Asian dancers probably get more platforms to

¹⁸⁷Akademi email audition call-out for auditions on 15.3.2017 (sent 2.3.2017).

perform – in that they could be invited to perform for Diwali and on other such occasions’ (Banerjee Interview, 2018). However, these are on the whole ‘...more community performances. There aren’t many professional companies’ (Banerjee Interview, 2018). Importantly for dancers, it is often the ‘professional work’ that is reasonably competitively paid, while dancers might be expected to give a community performance for free or for an honorarium. In Bourdieu’s terms, within the field of British dance, the position of classical Indian dance forms, as non-dominant forms with limited legitimacy and establishment support, impacts upon a dancer’s ability to transform the cultural and physical capital that s/he has acquired into financial capital. While classical Indian dance forms may retain high cultural and symbolic (if not financial) value within South Asian communities, within the field of British dance this value is yet to be established.

As seen in the last chapter, rather than a dancer trained intensively and in depth in a classical Indian dance form alone, it is a dancer who can ‘traverse the boundaries of contemporary and bharatanatyam/ kathak’ who are in demand ‘to serve the needs of working choreographers’ (Veronica Lewis, Interview 2018). In this way, in order to succeed in the professional dance world, many dancers find themselves having to significantly alter or abandon the ‘habitus’ of their primary dance training, and training institutions, such as *Yuva Gati* feel the pressure to try to make their students ‘...versatile enough to ensure that they can have a self-sustaining dance career whether that is in the wider dance sector or whether they stay true to their own traditional dance roots...and obviously contemporary has a much wider spread’ (Henwood and Lewis Interview 2018). In order for the cultural and physical capital painstakingly acquired by classical Indian dancers to be harnessed in the professional field of British dance, it has commonly needed to find a way of combining with, or in some other way integrating within the values of Euro-American contemporary dance, with dancers often facing repeatedly the kind of discomfort and

embarrassment I describe as my own experience at the beginning of the chapter.¹⁸⁸ Rather than do this, those who have simply chosen to opt out. Gorringe et al. cite one dancer who admits, ‘One of the reasons that I left dance was that I felt pushed into doing contemporary work’ (dancer, cited in Gorringe et al. 2018: 57), while others, ‘rather than compromise what they see as the integrity of their art forms simply choose to avoid the professional context in Britain and find other ways to fulfil their dreams and ambitions as dancers’ (ibid.).

Perhaps it is unrealistic to expect a career today for anything other than a versatile dancer. An article in *The Stage* is unambivalent: ‘Today’s perfect dancer is versatile: ‘They have not one foundation technique, but two, with competency in a third style or more,’ says Rachel Rist, head of dance at Tring Park School for the Performing Arts’.¹⁸⁹ Dancers across the board, as the previous chapter highlights, boost their employability by an ever-greater range of skills, including circus skills such as juggling and gymnastics. The demand for the ‘versatile dancer’, then, can be perceived as a leveller. If all dancers are required to be ever more multitalented, what does it really matter what one’s ‘foundation’ form is? All dancers will be required to have multiple competencies after all. The apparent logic of this position, however, founders in two main ways. First, because ‘versatility’ in dance, as I discuss below, characteristically comes at a cost, a cost more likely to be paid by non-dominant dance forms, or at the expense of the non-dominant technical habitus. Second because ‘versatility’ is not a neutral entity, and the perception of one’s ‘versatility’ largely depends on how that versatility is defined and on who decides on what it looks like. Accordingly, I now take a closer look at ‘versatility’ in the context of British dance and what the demand for it means for the professional practice of classical Indian dance forms in Britain.

¹⁸⁸ It is true that there are occasions when a contemporary choreography will seek out the distinctive cultural and physical capital of classical Indian forms for work in a piece, as for example with Richard Alston’s use of Vidya Patel’s kathak in *An Italian in Madrid* (2016) or Rosie Kay’s use of Shivaangee Agrawal’s bharatanatyam in *Modern Warrior* (2017). (Agrawal performed in the 2018 version). Such instances however remain, for the time being at least, very much the exception rather than the rule.

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/advice/2016/dance-artists-are-not-born-but-made/> (accessed 20.9.19).

The limits of versatility

In a fascinating article reflecting on how different training styles differently shape the bodies of ballet dancers, Geraldine Morris (2003) draws on the work of the former orthopaedic surgeon for the Royal Ballet, Justin Howse, to illuminate her argument. He explains how ‘Constant, exact repetition or practice will produce an engram - a condition where individual muscles or movement are not consciously considered’ (Howse 2000: 19). In Bourdieu’s terms, Howse describes here the mechanics behind the physical aspect of habitus, the *hexis*. This condition of an unconscious facility or instinct for movement is one dancers recognise, without necessarily appreciating the physiology behind it. Thus, in the quotation from kathak dancer Kalsekar earlier on in this chapter, she describes the fluency of movement she gained through hours of repetition of a single movement. Pushkala Gopal makes a similar point in an interview with Guardian journalist Aditya Chakraborty,

‘I trust in rote learning,’ she says. ‘Someone who learns their times tables processes maths much more easily.’ Can the same apply to the arts? ‘Absolutely. Repeat something 200 times and you know it completely – and in performance you can pull out things you didn’t know were there.’

Gopal in Chakraborty, 2009 np.

A reliance on engrams or being able to rely on one’s body to ‘pull out things you didn’t know were there’ is arguably vital for the professional dancer in that they ‘allow a complicated movement to be performed far more rapidly than would be possible if conscious thought of each pattern were required’ at the same time as producing ‘inhibition of unwanted movements’ (Howse 2000: 19). Dancer and choreographer Joshua Monten explains the benefits on ‘engrams’ in practice: ‘...considering the number of muscles, joints, dynamics, rhythms and outside events that dancers need to co-ordinate – it is often a blessing to be able to bypass deliberation and rely on one’s instincts...’ (Monten 2008: 61).

What happens to the ‘instincts’, or more widely, the ‘*hexes*’ pertaining to each distinct dance form when a dancer is required to train in a plurality of dance styles? For Monten, whose own experience of training was in a range of dance forms, ‘To the extent that training is about making choices, developing versatility is a boon. But to the extent that it is about instilling instincts, having too many training techniques can be problematic’ (Monten 2008: 61). As an illustration, he cites dancer and choreographer Twyla Tharp whose eclectic training meant that she felt that her movements derived from ‘rational decisions’ where for her fellow dancers in the company they ‘seemed like instincts’ (Tharp, cited in Monten 2008: 62). She had to work to perform what to her colleagues came naturally. Ultimately, she felt, ‘I was suffering from my eclectic training...I had been given too many options’ (Tharp, cited in Monten 2008: 62). In the course of Monten’s own training in several different movement styles he found that he was forced to ‘learn to negotiate physical imperatives that often seem mutually exclusive’ (2008: 60). He describes vividly how his efforts to master the low crouch and groundedness of his capoeira training conflict with the demands for lightness and extension in his ballet class. ‘Although the cumulative effect of these varied subjects was a general, slowly increasing physical proficiency’, he reflects, ‘interferences and confusion did occur along the way’ (2008: 60).

For Tharp, ultimately, while she never attained ‘the level of seamless integrated classical training that she was aiming for’, she found that she was able to combine the differing demands of her diverse training to find a ‘new language capable of saying new things’ (Tharp in Monten, 2008: 62). Monten cites the choreographer and critic Elizabeth Dempster who likewise holds a positive view that eclectic training offers, ‘a body available to the play of many discourses. Post-modern dance directs attention away from any specific image of the body and towards the process of constructing all bodies’ (Dempster in Monten, 2008: 62). Yet, as Foster (1997) and Monten (2008) argue, such versatility comes at a cost. This is because, to quote Foster, ‘Each dance technique constructs a specialized and specific body – one that represents a given choreographer’s or tradition’s aesthetic

vision of dance' (1997: 241). Versatile bodies can apparently 'do anything' – but they cannot always embody the particular qualities of bodily bearing and dynamics that characterise a specific form.

The reality of this was memorably brought home to me in 2003 while watching *Polar Sequences*, a set of pieces choreographed on Wayne McGregor's *Random* company dancers by three different choreographers, including one piece by Shobana Jeyasingh. *Random* dancers have a justified reputation for brilliance and this occasion was no exception - their skill, strength and flexibility were such that it seemed they should be able to do anything. Part way into the dance Jeyasingh had choreographed a '*tat tei ta ha*' sequence – a commonly used bharatanatyam *adavu* set that requires the dancer to sit in *aramandi* (a position somewhat akin to a demi plié), stamping alternate feet and jumping (while maintaining *aramandi*) onto the toes or balls of the feet, while the arms stretch out to the sides and across the body with the hands held in *tripataka* (a mudra where the fourth finger is bent forward). Suddenly the fluidity and poise that had marked the dancers to that point was replaced by uncertainty and discomfort. Their hands strained awkwardly to hold the unfamiliar mudra; their *aramandi* lacked groundedness as they jumped on to their toes. These dancers for all their brilliance simply did not possess the bharatanatyam *habitus*.

Clearly it is possible for certain dancers to possess a fluency in multiple dance languages to the extent that they are able to embody multiple *hexes* and switch between these as the occasion demands. One example of such a dancer would be the ballet, contemporary and bharatanatyam dancer Mavin Khoo. He has achieved this however not by replacing the hours spent on bharatanatyam with hours spent on ballet, but by increasing the overall time he has spent working. The same is true of Akram Khan who in order to work as a contemporary dancer without compromising his kathak, starts his day with '3 hours of classical Indian dance from 6 to 9 in the morning before my rehearsals begin.'¹⁹⁰ Just as with the dual career dancers discussed in chapter 2

¹⁹⁰Akram Khan, In conversation with Akram Khan and Mavin Khoo, Sadler's Wells, 23 November 2018.

however, this requirement to work overtime to continue one's practice of a classical dance style is highly demanding, both mentally and physically. How realistic is it to expect such commitment not from the exceptional, but from every dancer?

Without such labour-intensive and time-consuming efforts to counterbalance it, a danger with eclectic training (and with the 'versatile dancer') will be that the dancer's primary aesthetics and instincts to default to that of the hegemonic dance discourse. Dempster enthuses about the eclectically trained body as 'a body available to the play of many discourses' – conjuring an image of a fluid to and fro between several discourses. In reality, however, just as in the wider conversations in a multi-cultural society, the minority viewpoint must fight to hold its own. In the Euro-American context the dominant discourse embraces a Euro-American aesthetic, and the body 'available to the play of many discourses' will reflect this dominance accordingly. In a reflective article on global trends in the representation of Asian dance forms, Chatterjea cautions that, 'sharing space requires an interrogation of historic inequities and hostilities, and we need to be vigilant that these old violences are not perpetuated under the guise of the "new" global ventures' (Chatterjea 2013: 14). In other words, in the 'play of discourses', we must not forget which of those discourses is holding a microphone.

To continue with this image, this 'microphone' can take several forms, including, as touched on above, a better resourced infrastructure. Thus, a dancer attempting to train in contemporary dance as well as classical Indian dance will encounter a gravitational nudge towards contemporary dance at every step of their training – simply because this is the direction in which they are channelled by the available infrastructure. Without a clear route to vocational training, classical Indian dancers in Britain lack a further means Bourdieu identifies to establish the value of cultural capital – 'sanction by legally guaranteed qualifications' (1986: 248). An aspiring professional dancer, looking for full-time intensive dance training must therefore make their own arrangements without

institutional backing in a manner, as Bourdieu points out, ‘that can be called into question at any time’ (1986: 248). If seeking institutional support and affirmation, the options are to choose between training in India¹⁹¹ or opting to study contemporary dance. Alex Croft, Director of Bradford based arts organization Kala Sangam reflects,

We have to find a way of picking up those young people who have that burning passion to be a kathak dancer, to be a bharatanatyam dancer and what there is missing at the moment – is - if we found that gem of a person here at Kala Sangam, where would we push that person to? At the moment where I would push them to is into contemporary dance because you can go through high quality contemporary dance training, here, in the North. At the moment there isn’t anywhere else to send them.¹⁹²

Alex Croft Interview, 2017

In October 2019, *Yuva Gati* graduate Aishani Ghosh started a degree in Contemporary dance at LCDS. However, her mother remarked that

...as a parent I feel that actually she is a South Asian dancer. Her body is a bharatanatyam body. Doing other things are an extra. If she could do a degree in South Asian dance and do other styles (e.g., contemporary) on the side, she could be true to herself.

Cited in Gorringe et al. 2018: 53

Once dancers have graduated, the infrastructural bias continues. Asked about her chief challenges as a bharatanatyam dancer working in Britain Shivaangee Agrawal replied,

The biggest challenge is training. I don’t have a regular and affordable way of training - it’s really frustrating. Private classes with Guruji are great – but I can only afford them once a week. I want to be able to train like contemporary dancers train – to go to morning class as a thing I do every morning before I start my day. So that’s probably the biggest challenge – funding this incredibly expensive training. Not that Guruji is incredibly expensive – his fee is reasonable relative to other options – but it just seems crazy to me that I have to spend that much money to maintain my skills when contemporary dancers are paying £4 a class.

¹⁹¹ Thus the Scottish Bharatanatyam dance artist Kirsten Newell decided to pursue a 4-year degree in bharatanatyam at Kalakshetra (2009 – 2013).

¹⁹² Indeed, Akram Khan famously did end up studying at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

Archana Ballal, a graduate of the short-lived LCDS BA in Contemporary dance (South Asian dance strand) makes the same point.

...Then I go to contemporary class. I'm not doing bharatanatyam class at the moment, but I practise. I have a friend who teaches yoga in Hackney – so sometimes I can use that space to do my *adavu* practice – or in my own home – in my kitchen...Contemporary classes are easier to fit in because they're central ... and they are also a lot cheaper – like £4 or £5 – that helps doesn't it?¹⁹³

Cost and practicality make it substantially easier for a dancer to continue regular training in contemporary rather than classical Indian dance. The microphone stays with contemporary dance.

Whose versatility?

This amplification continues through the types of technical habitus and the type of versatility then sought by choreographers. Who decides what constitutes versatility? It is not uncommon, for example, for classical Indian dancers in Britain to have a knowledge of two classical Indian dance styles (for example bharatanatyam and odissi, or bharatanatyam and mohiniattam) and many dancers extend their versatility through, for example, training in the martial arts form kalarippayattu. Such versatility however, judging by the experience of the dancers in this study, is not usually sufficient to land regular work as a performing artist in Britain. The British dance field,

¹⁹³ In September 2018 Greenwich Dance Agency Professional classes were £5.50 a class. In Spring 2020 (before Covid forced cancellations) The Place offered professional classes at £5/ a class or 5 classes for the price of 4 (in one week). In Autumn 2020, The Place online professional classes were between £5 and £8 a class <https://www.theplace.org.uk/online-classes-courses-autumn-term-2020> (accessed 25.5.2021).

it appears, seeks a different kind of versatility, one that takes as its starting point the aesthetics and the technical habitus of Euro-American contemporary dance forms.

Returning to the example of *Paradiso*, Archita Kumar, the only dancer in the piece without a contemporary dance training, is not in the ensemble work, and for much of the piece remains on the outside of the drawn circle, looking at the dancers within. This is justified within *Paradiso*'s overarching narrative in that Kumar represents Beatrice whose role is in itself somewhat apart from the other 'characters'. Equally, however, the lunges, leaps and floorwork of the ensemble choreography do not play to the strengths of a kathak dancer. Had the ensemble work featured fast staccato footwork, or the nuance of the distinctive relationship between text and movement found in *abhinaya*, the roles would have been reversed - and those dancers without a depth of training in classical Indian dance forms may have remained 'outside' the circle. Kumar's positioning within *Paradiso* offers, on a small scale, an illustration of the wider pattern of representation of dance in Britain, where classical Indian dance forms remain on the outside of the drawn circle, looking in. It is telling that in *Paradiso*'s audition call out, training in South Asian dance was 'desirable but not essential'. In the eventual piece, two of the six dancers had the 'technical habitus' of a classical Indian dance form – Kumar and the contemporary and bharatanatyam dancer Kamala Devam.¹⁹⁴ The other four dancers had the 'technical habitus' of contemporary dance.¹⁹⁵ Thus, when the other four dancers performed the vocabulary of classical Indian dance, their movements bore the unmistakable accent of their contemporary dance training.

¹⁹⁴ Devam is another dance artist who, like Khoo and Khan has invested sufficient time training in both bharatanatyam and Western contemporary dance forms to allow her to switch between the 'hexes' of both.

¹⁹⁵ As Meduri (2020) documents, *Paradiso* was one of two pieces commissioned by Akademi which caused controversy in being choreographed by 'male, white male choreographers' (Meduri 2020: 113) rather than South Asian choreographers. An additional concern was that the choreographers selected both had as their primary 'technical habitus' contemporary dance. This influenced their choice of dance artists thereby further limiting employment options for South Asian dance artists already struggling for work. Of course, most dance artists struggle for work, but for South Asian dance artists, work is, if possible, even more scarce than for other dance artists. As Meduri puts it, 'If dance in the UK is the Cinderella of the arts in terms of funding, South Asian dance gets less than 2 per cent of the overall dance allocation' – with the knock-on impact on available work.

Embodying a dance form is not simply about making shapes. As Foster puts it, when learning another dance technique,

...imitating movements and shapes is just the first step. It must be accompanied by studying and internalizing elaborate anatomical, functional and expressive metaphorical systems that give colour and meaning to movement.

Foster 1997: 64

Or, in Bourdieu's terms, habitus relies not only on a physical disposition (*hexis*), but also on a particular mindset; being 'endowed with habitus implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the game', and includes not only a set of physical dispositions, but also a 'set of beliefs' (Bourdieu 1993: 72). Whatever the physical dispositions demanded of a 'versatile dancer' in Britain, the 'set of beliefs' belong to those of that 'wonderfully unifying and legitimizing aesthetic category of "contemporary dance" (really meaning Euro-American modern/contemporary dance)' (Chatterjea 2013: 10). Against this dominant set of beliefs, the technical habitus of the classical Indian dancer in Britain is positioned as always already that of deficit, or a perspective that frame's a group's qualities (or capital) 'based on what they lack' (Wallace 2016: 38). One tutor describes the insidious impact of this framing on students:

...they come to the course with a fairly open mind, but as things progress, they get to the idea that if they have not done ballet or contemporary dance, that they can't be professional. ...This sense that they need to train in contemporary dance and ballet – is like the smoke in the air.

Anon. interviewed by Gorringe for the Dance Hub Feasibility report, 2018

Friedman points out that such internalising of a 'deficit perspectives' should not be underestimated but serves as 'an active constituent of the notion of barriers to success' (Friedman 2016b: 117). In this light, the 'play of discourses' is not even about who is holding the microphone. It is about who owns the stage.

British dance is defined by its diversity?

Serving on the panel of judges for the *BBC Young Dancer* competition 2019, contemporary dancer and choreographer Wayne McGregor observed that ‘British dance is defined by its diversity’. On the same programme, hip hop dancer and choreographer Jonzi D commented of the four dance styles featured that it is ‘going to be difficult in future to isolate these styles as they are continually influencing each other’ (Wayne McGregor and Jonzi D, speaking on the *BBC Young Dancer* Final 2019, broadcast 18.5.2019, BBC 2). If Jonzi D is right, what shape will this intertwining of forms take? Given the dominance of Euro-American contemporary dance discussed, it is difficult to see how this ‘intertwining of forms’ will reflect any other than this dominant habitus, with elements from other dance styles, including the ‘*hugely* skilled practice’ of classical Indian dance forms being scattered within this habitus ‘like putting sprinkles on ice cream’ (Sonia Sabri Interview, 2018). Chatterjea’s range of experience in her various capacities supports this view. Her perception is of a ‘slow and steady erasure of difference in the name of globalization’ (2013: 12):

While the idea of the “global” seems to offer the promise of a range of aesthetics and a range of bodies from different contexts marking widely different understandings of beauty and power, the reality of what materializes on stage seems to suggest that there are some unspoken conditions for participation on the global stage that ensure some kinds of conformity.

Chatterjea 2013: 12

In this scenario, what happens to the ‘diversity’ that McGregor feels ‘defines’ British dance?

In raising this question, I share with Chatterjea the discomfort about seeming to ‘end up as some kind of champion for encrusted categories of tradition’ who would deny choreographers their ‘aesthetic choice’ (Chatterjea 2013: 12). At the same time, it seems evident that, in the words of

former Greater London Council dance officer, Lynn Maree, ‘These things are always organic, but *if you only teach to the developed and never go back to the roots, you lose something*’ Lyn Maree, Interview, 2017 (my emphasis). So how do we ensure, to repeat Akram Khan’s question cited in chapter 1, that ‘on the one hand...South Asian dance [is] still protected in a sense of its form’, while on the other that artists are allowed to ‘find a way to ...take aspects of South Asian dance to a more contemporary place’?

In 1999, cultural theorist Stuart Hall addressed a conference looking at the ‘impact of cultural diversity on Britain’s Living Heritage.’ In his keynote speech, he cautioned that ‘unless the younger generation’ had access to

...their repertoires, idioms and languages of representation...and can understand them and practise them to some extent at least, from the inside, they will lack the resources – the cultural capital – of their own ‘heritage’, as a base from which to engage with other traditions.

Hall 1999: 22

What Hall, Maree and Khan advocate is a cultivation of ‘repertoires, idioms and languages of representation’ on their own terms, running parallel with the way such repertoires are then transformed and entwined in the inevitable exchange of cultural flows.

An obvious question is whether the existing institutions and teaching schools, such as the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the ‘60 – 80’ schools within London and the ‘350’ teachers across Britain (see chapter 3) are not sufficient to this end? Applying the previously cited ‘Moran test’ once again, would institutions offering part-time classes primarily at evenings and weekends be considered to provide a sufficient grounding in the ‘repertoires and idioms’ of ballet or contemporary dance forms? Possibly, for those taking dance as a hobby, but what about those taking dance as a profession? What is the cultural, symbolic and economic impact on classical Indian dance forms

of the continued lack of a full-time vocational course in Britain? What does this mean for these dance forms attempting to hold their own in the ‘play of discourses’ of the professional dance arena?

Almost 30 years ago, Jeyasingh argued that

South Asian, African and Caribbean dance styles are major elements of British national dance culture, and should have their own schools and training institutions for the development of professional dancers and these styles in Britain.

Jeyasingh in Brinson 1993: 56

To work with dancers trained in India was, she felt, like ‘...having the nursery in India and the orchard in England’. Rather, she argues for the establishment within Britain of

...an institution where somebody could undertake serious full-time training in Indian dance. Then the message would be given that this degree of specialisation can’t be left to the domain of part time and evening classes.

Ibid.: 57

Gorringer et al. reflect likewise, that for South Asian dance forms to maintain the distinctive aesthetic sensibility and rigour that characterise them, ‘and yet equally reflect the distinctive quality and preoccupations of the UK that speak to our present moment’,

... we need to decide whether these forms are central to our national culture, or whether they remain exotic imports that occasionally enliven our customary diet of ballet, Western theatre and contemporary dance. If the answer is the former we will need to invest – and crucially we will need to invest in training.

Gorringer et al. 2018: 61

Yet to invest in training, as this chapter and the previous chapter have argued, is of little use unless there are also jobs suited to the training these dancers have received. To create such jobs relies on building an audience for the type of work these dancers can perform. To put it another way, it involves shifting the onus ‘versatility’ away from the dancer and onto the audience, away from the watched and onto the ‘watcher’. The more versatile the audience, the broader their ‘horizon of expectations’ (Mignolo 2007: 494), the less the dancer must work over-time, distort their preferred dance form or otherwise contort themselves to conform to the narrowness of desire.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have raised the challenges of training (or of acquiring a technical habitus) in a dance form that originated in one cultural context for a dancer whose individual habitus has been inflected and shaped by a very different cultural context. Arguing for a dynamic view of both ‘culture’ and ‘space’ (Massey 2005), I have argued against a geographical tethering in which a culture and a territory is seen to have an unnegotiated link, while acknowledging the wider socio-political frame that might make one location provide an artist with better infrastructural and institutional support than another (and hence making the India of 2020 an easier place in which to immerse oneself in training in a classical Indian dance form than the Britain of 2020). I have also discussed the rise (in Britain and beyond) of the demand for the ‘versatile’ dancer. I argue that the weight of a dominant Euro-American dance discourse, amplified by greater resources and infrastructural support load the die against the development of a classical Indian dancer in Britain. I suggest that a commitment to a Britain in which dance is ‘defined by its diversity’ rests on being able to provide dancers with facilities to acquire not only the *bexis*, but the *habitus* of classical Indian dance styles within Britain. Such provision is only viable, I argue, where there is the development of a corresponding professional demand for the dancer with this particular ‘technical’ habitus - a demand which necessitates the development of versatility not of the dancer, but of the audience.

Having thus far considered the creation of performers, therefore, the next chapter looks at the other, crucial factor in the equation of professionalisation – the creation of demand, or in the case of dance, of audiences.

Chapter 5

Legitimacy

Professionalising classical Indian dance in Britain and entering the ‘national cultural canon’.

Introduction

On 28th of January 2021, Sadler’s Wells Theatre in London teamed up with BBC Arts to present a three-part series called *Dancing Nation*. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic meant that theatres were closed. In part in order to give dancers a chance to perform (‘because they need to’),¹⁹⁶ Sadler’s aimed to bring ‘world-class dance featuring UK companies’¹⁹⁷ to audiences watching on their screens at home. In curating the programme, Sadler’s Well chief executive Alistair Spalding expressed his wish to ‘to celebrate all the dance that is a happening across our nation at the moment and make the centre of it Sadler’s Wells.’¹⁹⁸ Presenter Brenda Emmanus exclaimed ‘never has your programme, I guess, been so eclectic’. Spalding agreed: ‘This was the idea – the idea was to represent not just the big companies but everything that is going on in dance...the whole range’. As a result, Emmanus continued, ‘Dance in all its forms is on show in this festival, a testament to the really extraordinary range and diversity of work being produced across the UK.’¹⁹⁹

Given such a bold and inclusive aim for the series, it was particularly disappointing for classical Indian dancers watching it that classical Indian dance forms were conspicuous by their absence. Work was featured (now with a level of predictability) by Shobana Jeyasingh and Akram Khan. Jeyasingh’s featured piece, *Contagion* was a (movingly harrowing) contemporary work, employing

¹⁹⁶ Spalding, interviewed on *Dancing Nation*, Part 1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p097qzkz/dancing-nation-part-one-breakin-convention-and-matthew-bournes-spitfire> (accessed 3.3.2021): ‘They’re almost like athletes, dancers, they need to perform’.

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p0952ph6/dancing-nation> (accessed 3.3.2021).

¹⁹⁸ Spalding, interviewed on *Dancing Nation*, Part 1, see link above.

¹⁹⁹ Brenda Emmanus on *Dancing Nation*, Part 1.

exclusively Euro-American contemporary trained dancers. In Khan's duet with Royal Ballet principal Natalia Osipova, *Mud of Sorrows*, his 'technical habitus' as a kathak (as well as contemporary) dancer imbued the quality of all his movements, and the duet is a distinctive and beautiful work. Its dominant aesthetic conventions, however, remain the weight shifting partner work of ballet or (Euro-American) contemporary dance – and the piece is unlikely to be recognised as representing kathak by the hundreds of students attending kathak classes each weekend (see chapter 3). As a result, the series, for all its claims to diversity, offers no space in which classical Indian dance artists, including all those children and young people learning bharatanatyam, or odissi or kathak in Britain, can see themselves and their art forms represented. It would seem that classical Indian styles do not form part of the *Dancing Nation*.

This chapter discusses the role played in the professionalisation of dance forms by their 'consecration' (Bourdieu 1991: 58), or by their acquisition of 'legitimacy' – in particular by their inclusion into what Hage dubs the repertoires of 'national cultural capital' (Hage 2000), or the national cultural canon. The professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, as I have argued throughout this thesis, is only a viable proposition if there is sufficient audience demand to make it so. Moreover, the dance forms require enough symbolic capital to be able to secure the economic capital (through the patronage of either audience or state) to enable their practice. As sociologist of art Janet Wolff (1993 [1981]) makes clear in her classic work on the subject, the field of art is also shaped not only by its production, but by its distribution and its reception. Inclusion within the 'national cultural canon' impacts upon the reception and distribution of artforms, thereby influencing the infrastructure supporting, and the circumstances surrounding, their production.

What constitutes a 'national dance canon' is contentious – there is no official list of dance works that comprise it; no set process by which a work achieves 'canonical' status. Moreover, the ephemeral nature of dance means that it is less amenable to the process of canonisation than, for

example, literature (the context in which the term is more commonly used). Nevertheless, there are some dance works that can be considered ‘canonical’ by virtue of their restaging, year after year, season after season; by their inclusion as set works of study within school and university syllabi;²⁰⁰ by the attention paid these pieces (and their reworkings) by the press and academia. Additionally, considered less from the specific perspective of canon and more in broader terms of what constitutes ‘national cultural capital’, this can refer more generally to the kinds of literature, the type of art works and the forms of dance that are curated by institutions of national significance and standing (such as BBC Arts and Sadler’s Wells). This is why, returning to the topic of the first chapter, the inclusion of ‘South Asian dance’ as a category was of such importance to the sector, and why, conversely, the lack of representation in *Dancing Nation* was felt so keenly.²⁰¹

One measure of an artform’s position in the ‘national cultural canon’ can be derived from the level of funding that it is assigned – by companies, by organisations and (where such funding exists), by government. The allocation of ACE dance funds to South Asian dance forms is ‘basically... about 5%’ (Fieldwork notes November 2019), which contrasts with the about ‘55% of the dance budget’ that Burns and Harrison noted that ballet still received in 2009. This comparison may not seem notable until one considers that ballet is in fact not so very much longer established as a ‘British’ dance form than classical Indian dance forms. It is therefore illuminating here to contrast the way in which other dance forms have been integrated into British dance practice to assume a centrality within the ‘national cultural capital’ that now rests unquestioned.

²⁰⁰ In this light it is worth noting that there is no mention of South Asian dance forms at all in the 2021 syllabus and only marginal mention of Shobana Jeyasingh and Akram Khan in the A Level syllabus. This is in marked contrast to the years between 1992 and 2007 when works by Jeyasingh, Khan, Pushkala Gopal, Nahid Siddiqui and others featured consistently as set works (Sanders 2006). Thanks to Ann R. David for highlighting this point.

²⁰¹ See <http://www.pulseconnects.com/dancing-nation> (accessed 3.3.2021). As noted in the introduction, my investment in South Asia dance in Britain is personal as well as academic. Together with Elena Catalano, I therefore wrote to Sadler’s Wells to voice my disappointment. This letter can also be found here (beneath the review). I should note that Spalding subsequently replied to this letter, writing ‘With regard to the lack of inclusion of Classical South Asian dance – I can only agree and perhaps in retrospect it’s a rich area that we failed to represent on this occasion’ (Spalding, personal communication, 4.3.2021) and also expressing the intention of Sadler’s to encourage ‘younger artists’ in the field.

Other tales of arrival - the comparison with ballet and Euro-American contemporary dance

On February 10th 1920, the Musical Association in London gathered to discuss the topic ‘Why not British Ballet?’. The discussion was launched by a paper delivered by the dance writer Mark E. Perugini who argued strongly in favour of establishing British ballet, suggesting that all that was needed to achieve this were ‘regular opportunities’ for the English dancer to ‘display... her art’ (1919: 53). Until the early twentieth century, as Perugini’s plea makes clear, while ballet was performed in Britain, any attention and glamour attached to its performance were primarily focused around visiting artists (with homegrown dancers unceremoniously tucked away in the ballet *corps*).²⁰² This was the case to such an extent that another dance writer, P.J.S Richardson ‘satirized this situation in his divertissement with words, ‘No English Need Apply’, which he published in *The Dancing Times* in 1923’ (Genné 1995: 442), and British artists famously felt the need to change their names to succeed.²⁰³ Unjust as it is to the many dancers who formed the *corps de ballets* at theatres such as the Empire and the Alhambra in the preceding decades (Guest 1992; Carter 1995), it is only within the last hundred or so years therefore that ballet has cultivated a status as a ‘British’ form.

It has done so remarkably successfully. Despite reforms within the Arts Council and even though the 55% of the dance budget it received in 2009 represents a significant reduction on the 77% it had received ten years earlier (Burns and Harrison 2009: 63), ballet continues to receive by far the largest proportion of dance funding. For the years 2018 to 2022, the three companies allocated the largest Arts Council subsidies were all ballet companies (the Birmingham Royal Ballet, the English National Ballet and Northern Ballet Limited (see chart below).

²⁰² Hence Guest records: ‘for while the Alhambra corps de ballet was made up of English girls, a foreign background was considered essential in a principal dancer’ (1992: 19). See also Carter 1995.

²⁰³ Phyllis Bedells is a notable exception. See Genné 1995.

Chart 1. Top ten funded Dance NPOs, including dance companies and agencies²⁰⁴

	Company	Region	Art form	Funding 2018 – 2022
1	Birmingham Royal Ballet	West Midlands	Dance	31,564,000
2	English National Ballet	London	Dance	24,856,000
3	Northern Ballet Limited	Yorkshire	Dance	12,448,000
4	Sadler’s Wells	London	Dance	9,824,412
5	Rambert	London	Dance	8,948,000
6	Contemporary Dance Trust	London	Dance	7,175,980
7	Re: Bourne	South East	Dance	5,176,000
8	Dance East	South East	Dance	3,240,612
9	Dance Xchange	West Midlands	Dance	3,040,504
10	OneDanceUK	West Midlands	Dance	3,000,000

Figures taken from Arts Council Document for NPO funding 2018 - 2022, compiled by M.Gorringe²⁰⁵

In 1956, the Queen’s granting of the title ‘Royal’ to Ninette de Valois’s²⁰⁶ school and company, to form the Royal Ballet School and the Royal Ballet, secured ballet’s status as an establishment art form, both legitimised by and helping to legitimise a particular version of ‘Britishness’ while the Ballet Rambert nurtured a new generation of choreographers, including Frederick Ashton, Anthony Tudor and Walter Gore, who brought a distinctively British sensibility to the established vocabulary.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ The Royal Ballet is not included on this chart as it is not listed on the ACE’s chart of NPO funded bodies. The Royal Opera house is listed, against the primary art form of ‘music’, with funding recorded at £96,115,360 for 2018 – 2022.

²⁰⁵ I have modelled these charts on similar charts drawn up by Ann R. David for her PhD thesis (2005).

²⁰⁶ Ninette de Valois was herself an example of a dance artist who felt compelled to change her name to succeed. Christened Edris Stannus, she took the stage name Ninette de Valois ‘with its implication of not only French but royal origins’ (Genné 1995: 442).

²⁰⁷ This was despite the fact that the founders of neither of the leading ballet companies at the time were themselves British. Ninette de Valois, who founded the Royal Ballet, was originally from Ireland, while Marie Rambert, founder of Ballet Rambert was an émigrée from Poland.

‘Contemporary’ dance – initially imported from America and Europe - has made a similarly successful transition to accepted ‘Britishness’ as dance scholar Stephanie Jordan recounts in *Striding Out* (1992) - despite the initial wariness of ‘British dance goers who... seemed to regard it [contemporary dance] as something best left to the Americans (and before the war, the Germans)’ (Anderson 1993: 283). The establishment of the Contemporary Dance Trust by Robin Howard in 1966²⁰⁸ and the transformation of Ballet Rambert from a classical to a contemporary dance company, Jordan notes, rapidly brought a ‘professionalism in contemporary dance that stood comparison with that of ballet, with wide public and critical recognition of a new genre of dance’ (Jordan 1992: 1). This led in the 1970s to a gradual development of a ‘British contemporary dance with its own identity, independent of the American tradition’ (ibid.). British contemporary dance schools such as the London Contemporary Dance School, Laban, and the Northern School of Contemporary Dance now attract students from across the world, and British contemporary dancers and choreographers such as Richard Alston, Siobhan Davies, Wayne McGregor, and, indeed, Akram Khan have received international recognition and acclaim. Despite their immigrant status, therefore, both ballet and Euro-American contemporary dance relatively swiftly acquired an unquestioned status and legitimacy as ‘British’ forms.

²⁰⁸ The centrality of Robin Howard’s role in the establishment of contemporary dance in Britain through the foundation of the Contemporary Dance Trust (CDT), or The Place is of such significance that for dance critic Clement Crisp (Crisp 2004), it is almost impossible to imagine the development of contemporary dance in Britain without him. In this light, the following account from former GLA Dance and Mime officer Lynn Maree is arresting:

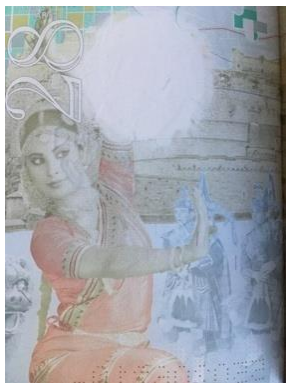
When Robin Howard saw Tara dance, it was probably about 2 weeks after he had fallen in love with Martha Graham. And he once told me that if he had seen Tara before he had seen Martha Graham, he would probably have made a big push behind classical Indian dance – and not contemporary dance. And he meant it.

Interview with the Lynn Maree November 2017

It is extraordinary to think about the difference it could have meant to the trajectory of classical Indian (and Western Contemporary) dance forms in Britain had Howard encountered Rajkumar before Graham. Howard still had a significant role in the development of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, despite the greater part of his largesse going towards contemporary dance. Rajkumar recalls his role in Akademi’s very beginning: ‘Robin Howard... was so generous – he listened and our relationship grew so much that he asked his mum to host a fundraising event at her home. This was amazing and meant that we got access to the arts elite who were able to come and help with the fundraising’ (Rajkumar Interview, 2017). He was later instrumental in Akademi being given a home for many years within the Contemporary Dance Trust, a location with more than a symbolic significance in allowing Akademi, as Kaushik put it, to become ‘engrained within the dance scene’ (Kaushik Interview 1, 2017).

British ‘classical Indian’ dance?

There is some basis for arguing that classical Indian dance forms have been similarly accepted within Britain. Akram Khan’s Company, for example, with its blend of contemporary dance and kathak, had a starring role in the Opening Ceremony for the Olympics in London 2012 (Mitra 2015; Kolb 2018; Kedhar 2020; Meduri 2020). The ACE Corporate Plan for 2018 – 2020 makes specific mention of ‘South Asian’ dance forms, committing to ‘work across artforms to investigate how dance can maximise available support networks and develop progression routes, with a focus on South Asian Dance, urban genres and new technologies’ (p.27). As I highlight in chapter 3, there is a ‘Classical Indian Dance Faculty’ within the (British based) ISTD. In chapter 1 I discussed the inclusion of ‘South Asian’ dance in the *BBC Young Dancer* competition for British dancers. There is even a bharatanatyam (or kuchipudi – it is not quite clear) dancer representing Britain as one of the images in the British passport (see image).²⁰⁹



A bharatanatyam (or kuchipudi?) dancer on page 28 of the British passport (Passport designed in 2015)

Despite these symbolically significant examples, however, as the preceding chapters illustrate, the position of classical Indian dance forms in Britain remains precarious. A little over 50 years after the success of the first ‘all British ballet’, *Job*, Akademi (then Academy of Indian dance) made the first submission to the Arts Council for funding for an Indian dance production, *The Adventures of*

²⁰⁹ Sadly, this is no longer the case. As of 2021, Britain’s new blue-black passports are devoid of any images.

Mongli (1984).²¹⁰ Where 25 years after *Job* however, ballet's place in Britain was endorsed by royal charter and patronage with several established schools and companies, 25 years after *The Adventures of Mongli*, as previously discussed, there is still no training school for classical Indian dance forms in Britain; there is no repertory company with a primary aim to explore and sustain the dance styles rather than communicate the creative vision of a particular choreographer and classical Indian dancers report feeling 'not wanted in Britain'. Where classical Indian dance forms have been accepted into the professional sphere, this has been largely on the basis of their 'hybridization with Western choreographic and movement aesthetics' (Kedhar 2020: 33; Thobani 2017; Meduri 2020).

Royona Mitra argues persuasively that choreography such as that by Akram Khan dances us along a path of 'new interculturalism', Khan's work destabilising 'white mainstream culture from within' (Mitra 2015: 26). This was also the logic behind Akademi's work *Paradiso* (discussed in the previous chapter): 'Just as Dante composed *The Divine Comedy* in Italian (the common language, rather than Latin) so it could be enjoyed by the masses, we will take this show on a tour of London, performing on the streets reaching as diverse an audience as possible, on their ground' (Akademi programme notes for *Paradiso*). Such work can be read as occasions where, as cultural theorist Robert Young explains Homi Bhabha's theory, 'the direction of the translation is reversed...the migrant... translates his or her own culture into that of the new host community' (Young 2010: 160), thereby intervening 'in the hegemonic culture that he or she finds him or herself confronted with' (ibid.).

This argument for the artist infiltrating the mainstream from within and thereby moderating and transforming settled aesthetic perceptions is a powerful one. The kathak featured in Khan's pieces, such as *Mud of Sorrows* may shift the aesthetic range of a ballet fan without them even noticing it, while his unforgettable reinterpretation of *Giselle* for the English National Ballet both discomfited

²¹⁰ The first performances of classical Indian dance in Britain, of course, occurred much earlier – see Bor 2007; David 2005; Erdman 1996.

and recalibrated the understanding of ballet for audiences in packed theatres across the country.²¹¹ Despite their success as touring pieces, Akademi's classical based *Bells* and *Sufi:Zen* received a fraction of the press coverage afforded to the contemporary based *Paradiso* and *The Troth*. In terms of reach and profile, and of introducing a wider audience to at least some of the elements of classical Indian dance forms, the advantages of this approach are evident. Akram Khan's company is the only company that can be seen to explore and represent classical Indian dance forms at any level to make the list of the top ten dance companies (excluding dance houses and agencies) in receipt of the highest Arts Council subsidies (see chart below - Akaash Odedra and Shobana Jeyasingh Companies make the top twenty).

Chart 2. Top Ten Funded Dance Company NPOs

	Company	Region	Art Form	Funding 2018 – 2022, figures in £
1	Birmingham Royal Ballet	West Midlands	Dance	31,564,000
2	English National Ballet	London	Dance	24,856,000
3	Northern Ballet Limited	Yorkshire	Dance	12,448,000
4	Rambert	London	Dance	8,948,000
5	Re: Bourne	Southeast	Dance	5,176,000
6	Siobhan Davies	London	Dance	2,328,072
7	Studio Wayne McGregor	London	Dance	2,060,848
8	Akram Khan Company	London	Dance	2,002,440
9	Motionhouse	West Midlands	Dance	1,875,224
10	CanDo Co	London	Dance	1,791,556

Figures taken from Arts Council Figures, compiled by M. Gorringe

²¹¹ I attended a performance of *Giselle* at The Mayflower theatre, Southampton in 2016 and overheard a full range of audience responses - from the indignant 'well, it's not really what you would call beautiful is it...I expect a ballet to be beautiful', to the enthralled - 'well, wasn't that amazing!' (Fieldwork notes 27.10.2016).

Yet the successes of Khan's work, or Jeyasingh's, or of the two Akademi productions *Paradiso* and *The Troth*, which find their poetry in Bhabha's 'in-between' spaces, leave little space for employment for the classical Indian dancer.²¹²

While I agree with Mitra's assessment of the imaginative complexity of Khan's work, which 'interrupts banal representations of otherness' (Mitra 2015: 26), as yet his success has not had the effect of increasing the demand for, and employability of, dancers trained in classical Indian dance. Khan's own company uses primarily contemporary trained dancers. Thus, while these translations may disrupt and unsettle the sensibilities of the mainstream audience, this disruption is certainly not more than that encountered by classical Indian dancers, who have largely been 'translated' out of the picture.

Turning to classical practice, the shine attached to the classical Indian dancer placed 'in the picture' on the British passport is rather clouded by the accompanying commentary to the design which makes clear that the dancer is used to represent a 'mela' and notes, 'melas reflect the diverse South Asian communities in the UK. They are usually large-scale, outdoor festivals, featuring dance, music, cuisine and many other aspects of South Asian culture'.²¹³ While the intention is inclusive, this positioning marks the dancer's place within Britain as still contingent. Hers is not a British, but a 'South Asian' form and its inclusion serves thereby as a marker of Britain's diversity and multicultural credentials as much as it does a celebration of the art form itself.²¹⁴ It is telling that both South Asian and Caribbean aspects of British culture are featured on the passport on the

²¹² Odedra's work has certainly represented classical kathak (in the stunning solo work *Echoes*, for example, choreographed by Aditi Mangaldas, he flies across the stage like a reincarnation of the music legend Prince born to perform kathak). His recent ensemble work, however, as I indicate earlier, is a work for (western) contemporary dance artists.

²¹³

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/473495/HM_PO_magazine.pdf (accessed 13.1.21).

²¹⁴ Not to mention of course, that a year after this passport was designed, Britain voted to leave the European Union, deferring to a more parochial vision of Britishness. And putting a premature expiry date on this design of passport...

same page in the context of ‘mela’ and ‘carnival’. In the multicultural society, Hage argues, ‘carnival’ is often used to represent the spectacle and enrichment provided by the ‘migrant’ cultures to the host culture, a latter day ‘great exhibition’ – presenting not so much what Britain ‘is’, but what it ‘has’ (Hage 2000: 140). Multicultural and cultural diversity policies, he argues, in presenting majority world (or non-white) cultures as cultural traditions that the White nation *has* (rather than *is*), thereby present them as within the ‘sphere of influence’ (2000: 89) of the White nation. In this way, ‘Their belonging to the national environment in which they come to exist is always a precarious one, for they never exist, they are allowed to exist. That is, the tolerated are never just present, they are positioned’ (2000: 90). Following this line of thought, the ‘South Asian’ dance developed into what Kedhar calls ‘the signature aesthetics of a distinctly *British* contemporary dance genre’ (Kedhar 2020: 118, Kedhar own emphasis) is what Britain *is*, while the classical Indian dance forms unmediated by such (Euro-American) contemporising influence are what it *has*.

Though, as discussed in chapter 3, there was a period during which Arts Council funding was not readily available for classical work (see also Kedhar 2020; Meduri 2020), there are signs that this is no longer the case. Srivastava cites several of her successes with her clients as evidence of a changed approach:

None of the applications I have made have been for contemporary work. The claims that Arts council doesn’t fund classical work or doesn’t fund work from outside of London both are not a reality...For example, I wrote an application for Nina Rajarani’s work *Jham* – which was a purely classical work – there was no contemporariness in it – that was funded. Anusha Subramanyam’s *Murugan*, Chitra Sundaram’s *Stridham*..., Sujata Banerjee’s *Draupadi*, Swati Raut’s various projects starting from *Basant Bells*, *Half of me* –... *it’s all classical work*

Srivastava interview 2018, Srivastava own emphasis

This shift of attitude within the Arts Council, however, cannot shift the reality that when artists and organisations promoting or practising classical Indian dance forms make the decision to engage with the wider world of professional British dance, they necessarily step into a field governed by a very different set values, aesthetics and axiomatic principles, or *doxa*, to return to Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, and that are placed in a very different narrative (see chapter 1) to that of the field of Indian classical dance forms. Thus a field which privileges nuanced and complex foot percussion; an integral relation to the visual arts (particularly sculpture); the ability of one performer to assume multiple roles; the re-imagination of the archive as a fount of creativity; the intimacy rather than the spectacle of performance - must make its way in a field that values by contrast the interplay between two or more performers; the ability to make an impact on a proscenium stage and creativity as the construction of the new.

Classical Indian dance forms and the 'national cultural canon'

What is it that prevents classical Indian dance forms from securing a more certain role in the 'national' cultural canon? A larger stake in the national 'cultural capital'? In particular, what prevents the celebration of the classical forms as an expression of intrinsic British identity, rather than of 'South Asianness'? The Royal Ballet, for example, is not held up as 'reflecting the diverse Italian/French communities' within Britain. Why, as I ask in the introduction, is 'South Asian' dance sector in Britain still in a similar state of infrastructural precarity to that noted by Naseem Khan in 1976?

As I show through this thesis, the reasons for this are multiple (though interrelated). Chapter 2 highlights the deliberate distancing of classical Indian dance forms from the (professional) business of earning a living. Chapter 3 shows how this divorce between arts practice and livelihood is perpetuated in a diasporic situation whereby training in classical Indian dance forms takes place

within the context of dance as providing a link with ‘cultural heritage’ and long-distance cultural nationalism. The identification of arts with ‘heritage’ is in turn consolidated by government policies of multiculturalism - ‘a form of interpretation in which race and ethnicity are elevated and reified as absolutes and in which difference gets contained within symmetrical or at least similarly-configured social and cultural units’ (Gilroy 2009: 671). This leads to a situation in which the training in Indian dance forms in Britain takes place (for participants who are overwhelmingly British South Asian and brown skinned) in a space identified by the British passport designers as the ‘mela’ - the (brown) space of the ‘South Asian community in Britain’, the space of ‘culturally diverse Britain’ in which classical Indian dance artists are wheeled into primary schools at Diwali to ‘enrich’ students through exposure to ‘other cultures’. These same dancers attain wider marketability and acclaim, however, as I discuss in chapter 4, only once they have left this world and entered the (white) space of contemporary dance (Thobani 2017; Kedhar 2020; Meduri 2020), with all the limitations and restrictions that this entails.

The failure of South Asian dance in Britain to make more head way than it has yet done is often also ascribed (by observers from both in and outside the sector) to insufficient vision, collegiality and ‘joined up thinking’ among South Asian dance agencies and dancers. As noted in chapter 1, Hackett’s observation of the sector that ‘...it is not as unified as it could be and there are a lot of people working on their own in their own little islands...’ (Hackett Interview, 2017). An officer speaking on behalf of the Arts Council likewise expressed the view that there was not enough ‘finding common ground’ (Interview, 2019) while a dancer and teacher from within the sector suggested that ‘if these organisations *really* had a vision and a commitment to dancers and dance – rather than to themselves as organisations, I think South Asian dance would be in a better place’ (Interview 2018).

The ACE South Asian dance and mapping report (2021), which drew for its findings on conversations with 84 members of the sector and survey responses from 219 refers to the ‘tribal nature of the sector’ (Courtney Consulting 2021: 59) and states

A core theme that ran through every conversation was the unhelpful politics and power paradigms of the sector. This has undermined collaborative and partnership working to date, resulting in a lack of joined up thinking and weak sector advocacy. Combined, these factors have impeded the sector’s ability to be truly integrated and influential in the wider dance, music and cultural sector ecology in the UK and internationally.

2021: 95

As Agrawal, Dutta and Gorringe comment in their response to the report, it is disappointing to see the term ‘tribal’ repeated in the main body of the report, even though in doing so it repeats a term used by one of the report’s respondents. The term serves to reinforce, they argue, ‘a perception that the South Asian dance and music sector are somehow something Other, operating on their own terms and according to their own rules (Agrawal, Dutta and Gorringe 2021: np).

Furthermore

Although the attention afforded to the issue of the NPO leadership is undeniably important, it cannot be at the expense of acknowledging the structural racism that these NPOs have been navigating. By failing to acknowledge the deeper causes of NPO behaviours, we risk putting the next generation of South Asian NPO leaders under the same inequitable pressure, with the added expectation that they will carry through huge changes for South Asian arts.

Agrawal et al. 2021: np

As with any sector, there are certainly ways in which agencies and companies could work to develop better relationships, a wider sector vision and a more coherent national strategy. Meduri, drawing on the distinction identified by Singh (2016) between the ‘community’ facing South Asian arts organisations and the public funded NPOs, rightly identifies that these different organisations

cater to ‘different audiences’ and have therefore been ‘unable to agree a unified vision...for the South Asian dance sector in the UK’ (2020: 111). Caught between ACE demands for (a culturally specific version of) ‘innovation’ and the frequently equally parochial concerns of the community organisations, the NPOs have faced an invidious task. The sector (and its leaders) face cultural and political challenges posed by the context in which it is situated – which lie outside its own control or jurisdiction. Indeed, the very precarity of its positioning within this wider context in part predisposes the sector to greater factionalism – as Hackett concedes, ‘To some extent this happens whenever a sector is poorly resourced and supported, so that people are competing for the same small pool of resources’ (Hackett Interview 2017).

Additionally, Agrawal et al. point out, a dissatisfaction with leadership is not unique to South Asian dance but is endemic within the charity sector. They cite charity sector commentator Andrew Purkis who recognises this dissatisfaction and acknowledges that there are undoubtedly occasions where organisation and leadership could do better, but points out that fundamentally, ‘Some political and ideological roadblocks can be just too big to shift...Blame the umbrella bodies [NPOs]? You might as well blame the sea for ‘failing’ to break down granite cliffs’ (Purkis 2021: np).

Underlying the policies of multiculturalism and the greater marketability of the (Euro-American contemporary dance oriented) versatile dancer, the disputes between different parts of the sector and the apparent failure to have made more significant progress are political and ideological roadblocks that overshadow the sector just as implacably as granite cliffs. Amongst the most striking and pervasive of these is clearly that classical Indian dance forms in Britain must stake their place in a context in which they transgress the ‘somatic norm’ (Puwar 2003); where they must take their place within a framework of ‘institutionalised whiteness’ (Ahmed 2007: 157), in the context of the ‘White nation’ (Hage 2000). In this light, the Art’s Council report’s focus on failures

in sector leadership seems naïve at best and a cynical deflection of responsibility at worst. After all, it is not only the ‘South Asian’ dance sector that appears to be in stasis. Programmer, researcher and writer Jemma Desai makes the point that this is a more widespread reality in the arts, and asks the more pressing question:

Why, despite 30 years of sustained professional development programmes, recruitment drives and ‘mentoring’ programmes resulting in a highly qualified, well networked and credible set of individuals from a range of ethnic backgrounds, the industry in its static nature is still focussed on the individuals who are excluded rather than those who do the excluding?

Desai 2020: 15

The habit of ‘whiteness’

In one way the role of race in preventing the more wholesale incorporation of classical Indian dance forms into the ‘national cultural canon’ is very obvious. After all, probably the most immediate distinction between the dancers who brought ballet and contemporary dance to Britain, and those who brought classical Indian dance forms is the colour of their skin.

The differential treatment of immigrants on the basis of race is one woven into Britain’s institutional and legal codes. The expansive inclusivity of the British Nationality Act 1948 which ruled that, as social historian Arthur Marwick observes, all citizens of countries within the British Commonwealth were also ‘all full British subjects and entitled, without let or hindrance, to settle in Britain itself’ (Marwick 2003: 132) very swiftly unravelled. The minutes of a 1955 government working party record ‘...it cannot be held that the same difficulties arise in the case of Irish as in coloured people...The outstanding difference is that the Irish are not...a different race from the ordinary inhabitants of Great Britain’ (cited in Winder 2005: 342). This is a bureaucrat’s rephrasing

of the football hooligan chant ‘There ain’t no black in the Union Jack.’²¹⁵ As historian Robert Winder puts it, ‘those of a different skin colour, it went without saying, presented difficulties’ (ibid.).

A few years later, Harold Macmillan’s Conservative government passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962, condemned by then Labour Leader Hugh Gaitskill as a piece of ‘cruel and brutal anti-colour legislation’ (cited in Younge 2020: np), which did not prevent the succeeding Labour government under Harold Wilson from introducing and passing a second Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1968 reinforcing this earlier Act, which, Winder observes, ninety-nine times out a hundred, would favour whites (ibid.). Though Britain has always been ‘multicultural’ in that, as Todorov argues (see chapter 4) there are no ‘pure’ cultures, it is only when these cultures come linked to a particular skin colour that the term arises and sticks – as if prior to the migrations from the Commonwealth, Britain had been a culturally homogenous unit. In this way the term ‘multi-cultural’, together with its successor, cultural diversity, ultimately serve as euphemistic expressions for ‘racially mixed’ (Winder 2005), or in Gilroy’s words, ‘multiculturalism is also often a coded way of speaking about race and about the dangerous processes through which race becomes a matter of culture’ (Gilroy 2009: 670).

The insidious impact of this racialisation of culture, has been, as I argue in chapter 3, to Other South Asian dance forms, making them specific arts for a specific people. The hold of this perception is enduring and corrosive. Thus, while it is true that the ACE Corporate Plan for 2018 – 2020 makes specific mention of its aim to develop South Asian dance forms (suggesting an inclusion in the ‘national cultural canon’), at the same time, in a conversation with a Dance Officer

²¹⁵ This is also the title of Paul Gilroy’s (2000) excellent book on being black in Britain.

at ACE, a connection was drawn between the numbers of Asian people living in Britain and the allocation of funding for South Asian dance (suggesting a containment of their relevance):

...basically it's about 5% - project grants are divided into under 15K and over 15K, and then also, national activities [NPOs], and then you have DYCP (Developing Your Creative Practice) – so I have looked at all 4 of those. So, it's kind of small. But if you think about Asian people living in Britain, you could say – well actually it's representative. Because if I am not wrong, I think it's about 5%.

Fieldwork notes, 25.11 2019

The (perhaps unintended) implication is that the proportion of funding is appropriate because it reflects the proportion of those who may be interested in the dance form – *because they are Asian*. Such a perception anchors the place of South Asian dance as always already 'minority' arts.

Race impacts the choreography of the everyday – by making it harder to fill in a form ('English is my second language, so ACE applications are very hard and complicated'), or by making it harder to approach an institution ('People are quite intimidated by the Arts Council; I am as well', Respondents in ACE report, Courtney 2020: 100). Rajkumar relates her initial struggles in her attempts to establish Akademi in the 1970s:

...there was a lot of racism...If you walked around wearing a sari at that time, there was a presumption that you were not educated – that you couldn't speak English...but I am one of those rebels with a cause – so I used to wear a sari and a big *potthu* deliberately. And I'm quite good with accents. So, I used to really put on an Oxford accent as far as possible – and people were shocked when they saw a woman in a sari speaking like this.

Tara Rajkumar Interview, 2017

Ram Gopal relates similar experiences:

Quite often in London I would be approached at parties, and in galleries and someone would come up to me and say, 'Can you speak English?'. I'd say, 'Yes, I can, can you?' And they'd say, 'What a lovely tan you've got'. I'd say, 'I'm sorry, I can't say the same for you.'

You look such a horrid, pallid white...'. I have a very quick, triggered reaction to these comments.²¹⁶

In a reminder of how little things have changed, writing in 2019, Purkayastha records facing the same litany of questions (2019: 139).

Race also impacts the choreography of the creation of dance works. As feminist and post-colonial theorist Sara Ahmed argues, race is not simply about prejudiced responses to different levels of melanin, but about a certain orientation towards being in the world encompassing 'styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits' (2007: 154); it is about a particular (unquestioned) *doxa*; a specific (unconscious) understanding of what constitutes the norm. Hence, in Ahmed's words, the 'habit' of whiteness (2007: 165). When art forms do not conform to this 'habit' and are not established as part of the 'national cultural canon', their practitioners are confronted with the need to communicate with an audience who do not recognise the narrative of their art forms, and do not understand their artistic conventions.

Performing for the white gaze

'South Asian dance agencies (and dance companies) have had to choose whether they will play the 'heritage-in-multicultural Britain' game or the 'contemporary Britain' game.' Chitra Sundaram, *Interview*, 2018

*No, you're not
listening to me. No I can't perform Nritya. No I can't because if I
perform that part I'm not being who I am...I'm being who YOU want ME
TO BE!!!*

*Excerpt from script of Shane Shambhu's Confessions of a Cockney Temple Dancer (COACTD),
reproduced by kind permission of the author.*

In his classic work on how taste is formed, *Distinction*, Bourdieu observes

²¹⁶ Ram Gopal, from the 1989 documentary made on him 'Bandung File: Ram Gopal, Dancing to the Music of Time'. (Dir. Zoe Hardy, researcher Smita Bhide). Thanks to Ann R. David for sharing this wonderful story.

A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence – that is the code – into which it is encoded...A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason...

Bourdieu 1984: 2

This is true of any art form – where an audience member who understands, for example, the mime code of ballet or the specific technique employed in a painting – is likely to be able to place the artwork in its narrative context, to understand it more deeply, and arguably, to gain more from it. While (returning to the distinction between the ‘artistic’ and the ‘aesthetic’ discussed in chapter 1),²¹⁷ the necessity for a familiarity with the ‘narrative’ of an art form is essential for its artistic understanding, where the artwork originates from a cultural context different to that of its audience there can be barriers even to its ‘aesthetic’ appreciation. Beyond the understanding of any specific artistic code, sociologist Howard Becker argues, ‘Only because artist and audience share knowledge of and experience with the conventions invoked does the artwork produce an emotional effect’ (Becker 2003 [1974]: 90). Such conventions include not only the conventions particular to an artform, but wider cultural conventions for example of dress, of the meaning of a specific colour, or the expected mode of relationship between young people and their elders. Where such a shared set of conventions does not exist, an artform is more likely to remain for the spectator, as Bourdieu puts it, ‘a chaos of sounds and rhythms...without reason’. To the extent that it is admired, this interest or admiration is likely to rely as much on its compelling and curious Otherness as on its offering a pathway to any sense of connection or understanding. The result of this for classical Indian dance forms in Britain, as Sundaram summarises in the quotation above, has been either fetishised display, or an attempt to fit the dance forms into the dominant aesthetic (and artistic) conventions.

²¹⁷ Chapter 1 discussed how an ‘artistic’ appreciation differs from the ‘aesthetic’ by representing a response shaped by a knowledge of the conventions and the narrative of that art form. It is, in other words, an informed response – rather than an immediate, or sensual response.

While the route to ‘Britishness’, in the case both of ballet and contemporary dance certainly took some work,²¹⁸ with ballet adapting the themes, sets and costumes of its performance to align itself more securely to a representation of ‘Britishness’, and while it is also true that British ballet has a particular inflection that distinguishes it from French, or Danish or American ballet, both ballet and contemporary dance have ultimately developed their own fields in Britain, with their own autonomy and aesthetic standards. As discussed in chapter 2, classical Indian dancers by contrast, in order to achieve a space for themselves as recognised professionals, have had to compromise their autonomy and adapt their aesthetics in order to make a space within the field of Euro-American contemporary dance practice.

Entering this space has meant performing the demanding and delicate dance mentioned in chapter 1 between exoticism and assimilation, finding a way, in Kedhar’s words ‘to perform both South Asianness and Britishness, to be simultaneously exotic and legible, particular and universal, different and accessible, other and not other’ (2020: 3). It has meant a hyper vigilance about costume to avoid ‘succumbing to the exploitation of the exotica such as make-up, costume, flowers, jewellery’ which make it seem ‘more important for dancers to look “pretty” on stage than to focus on the dance itself’ (Khayyam personal communication, 21.5.21). At the same time, it has meant being wary of criticism (from within the field of classical Indian dance) that says, ‘you can’t do this because you’re misrepresenting bharatanatyam, that’s not what bharatanatyam is about’ (Agrawal, on Manch UK, 18.6.2020). It has meant the exhausting task of attempting to avoid commodification as a ‘marketable object of wonder’ (Lammy 2019, np), or as spectacularised

²¹⁸ In the case of ballet in particular, a deliberate effort was made to ‘Britify’ the form. Between 1931 and 1946 for example, as ballet historian Tanya Dawn Wetenhall has shown, ballet in Britain was moved consciously away from its Russian incarnation, and ballets such as *Job, The Rake’s Progress* (1937) or *Miracle in the Gorbals* (1944) delivered visual iconographies of Britain – including *Job* which opened with a front curtain for the work by designer Gwen Raverat on which was painted an what appears to be an English oak, based on an engraving by William Blake (Wetenhall, personal communication). The audience was left in no doubt as to the ‘take home’ message. Whatever ballet’s provenance, these images announced, it was now equally a British art form.

representation of the Other in Britain, while on the other hand playing catch up in a world determined by the mores of contemporary dance. Unsurprisingly, the experience of black and African people's dance practitioners is very similar. Dancer and scholar Funmi Adewole notes that black and African's people's dance is positioned 'on the one hand as traditional forms of dance as representative of lands of origin *for the migrant group* and on the other as fusions between traditional and social dance forms and Western dance technique as an expression of integration into Britain' (Adewole 2016: 145, my emphasis).

An interview with an Arts Council officer, who has a record of being very supportive of South Asian dance forms reveals the unequal context in which South Asian (and African people's) dancers are required to work:

And I say this to the hip hop people as well and they say 'we don't want to do contemporary dance.' Well, no, but if you work within theatrical conventions that have been going on for X amount of years and where people have experimented – then it's a duty for you to know about those things and the things that have gone before and either accept things or reject them, but not be almost as if it hasn't existed.

Interview with the author, London, 2019

Returning to the theorisation of narratives of art, how much additional labour does this place on the South Asian (or hip hop) dancer? A South Asian dancer must on this basis be familiar not only with the history and development of classical Indian dance forms and the significant developments in this field, but also be conversant with the conventions and developments in the field of Euro-American contemporary dance. Huge as this expectation is, it might not seem so unreasonable if it were matched by a corresponding desire for contemporary dancers to be conversant with the field of South Asian dance. This is not, however, the case. In the meantime, South Asian dancers, are once again placed in a position of being valued by a deficit-based reading of 'cultural capital'

(see chapter 4), disempowered by measurement by ‘a standard which ignores their chosen aesthetic frame of reference and its particular demands’ (Gottschild 1997: 171).

Kathak artist and choreographer Amina Khayyam relates a similar deficit-based reading of approaches to choreography found in South Asian dance:

I think choreography is a very hazy, cloudy area of dance – for example in contemporary or Western choreography, you would think that the choreographer would generate the vocabulary to give to the dancers which is what happens with South Asian classical forms. The teachers or the choreographers give us the movement – and we just copy that – we copy – but we also make it our own. But here it’s the opposite. The dancers generate the movement and then the choreographer takes that and shapes that to what they want. So, all this is totally topsy turvy in a way from where I come from. And there is that hierarchy that we don’t have choreographic knowledge – and it’s true – we don’t have choreographic knowledge in western terms. But we do have choreographic knowledge in the way that we work – which is a very different approach to the contemporary or the western approach. And I think this is something that has not been addressed sufficiently analysed or looked at, except that I always hear the superiority when it comes to choreography of the western concept, and the inferiority of the eastern concept.

Khayyam, Interview 2018

From a different perspective the Ghanaian dancer and choreographer Nii Yartey makes the same point

The word choreography is alien to us as Africans. This does not mean that we as Africans did not do choreography, otherwise there would not be all these beautiful dances

Yartey cited in Ramdhanie, 2016: 80

In the meantime, South Asian dancers are encouraged to make up for the ‘deficit’ in their practice, by seeking the guidance and mentorship of contemporary dance choreographers in making their work. In fact, Khayyam relates how a significant London based dance theatre

...wouldn’t programme my work unless I went through a mentoring process with someone they chose. They might let me select – but they wanted a contemporary influence in it...I

have to go through *their* mentorship in order for me to put my work out there...But how can a contemporary dancer give me guidance on my form when he or she doesn't have a clue about my form?

Khayyam Interview, 2018 (Khayyam own emphasis)

The invocation of 'choreography' licenses the non-South Asian curator or critic to 'to assess and evaluate South Asian work' (Rai Interview, 2021) and the non-South Asian artist's deficit (in terms of knowledge of South Asian arts) is turned into the South Asian artist's deficit in terms of their adherence to a particular interpretation of 'choreography'.

In thinking about presenting their work, classical Indian dancers at every stage must consider how to adapt, hybridise, truncate or translate their work to make it legible and palatable for Euro-American audiences and (perhaps more importantly), Euro-American programmers. This means that on top of the extra labour of learning the conventions of the contemporary dance world is layered the further labour of working out how one's own form might fit within it. Given all this, it should not really be a surprise that South Asian dancers are often well into their twenties before they feel ready to present work,

...whereas contemporary dancers who are younger than me – they have created a piece and off they go – festivals, tours, building their repertoire of work that they are making...there is none of that kind of sand in your brain about what is the relevance or legitimacy of what I'm doing?! What am I doing – who's going to be interested in this...they just don't think about it. It's not an issue – it doesn't enter their brain...

Agrawal, Interview 2019

On the other hand, they may decide that the massaging and manipulation to which they will probably need to subject a loved dance form is simply not worth it. Reflecting on why she chose

not to pursue dance professionally, the beautiful (and award winning) bharatanatyam dancer Uma Venkataraman observes,

Also – I really enjoy dancing, but *I really enjoy dancing what I want to dance* and I just thought that if it was my career I may not have the flexibility to do what I wanted in dance’

Uma Venkataraman, Interview, 2017 (my emphasis)

Counter to the intense frustration expressed by Shambhu in *COACTD* cited at the beginning of this section, Venkataraman wants to dance what she wants to dance – and be who she wants to be.

In chapter 3, I refer to the attempt made to set up a BA in Contemporary dance (with a South Asian dance strand) established at LCDS. At the time, there was some surprise and disappointment at the low level of applications received from the many South Asian dancers in Britain. However, as Gorringer et al. point out, in being primarily a contemporary dance course, it ‘immediately distanced itself from those whose primary goal and dream is to excel in classical Indian dance’ (2019: 52). Dancers did not apply because the course did not offer them a way to be true to themselves. Similarly, when the way to reach ‘a general public who doesn’t understand the code that dance is written in’ (Respondent in Courtney 2020: 88) is to ‘come up with random ways that compromise their practice’ (respondent in Courtney 2020: 85), and submit to the ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu 1991) or the ‘cultural invasion’ (Freire 2017) of responding to the ‘values, standards and goals’ (Freire 2017: 126) of others, refusing to professionalise can be seen as an act of resistance.

At the beginning of the thesis, I ask the question ‘why professionalise’ in the context of a performance at the Bhavan centre which may not have met the ‘professional’ criteria of some, but which was entirely successful on its own terms. Across London, there are other organisations like

the Bhavan centre that organise performances for predominantly Asian audiences whom they know will appreciate the performers they curate.²¹⁹ They have no interest in being part of the mainstream circuit of professional British dance because, as Sundaram points out, ‘they are worried about what else will come with it’ (Sundaram, Interview 2018). Where to professionalise means changing one’s identity, it is unsurprising that the answer of many is simply to opt out.

‘Visibility is a trap’?

Feminist theorist Peggy Phelan (2004) articulates how visibility and representation (such as might come with further professionalisation) are often grasped as a means to empowerment. She cautions, however, ‘There is real power in being unmarked and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal... Visibility is a trap. It summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/ imperial desire for possession’ (2004: 6). Are the many (potential) professional classical Indian dancers who have chosen a different route opting for the power of the ‘unmarked’? Returning to the organisations which choose to remain ‘off the circuit’ mentioned above, Sundaram suggests that the desire for visibility would be greater if it was clear what the returns for this might be - ‘If they were going to get more press reviews and financial help...that would be different’ (Sundaram interview, 2018).

Certainly, financial assistance has proved of significant help to some organisations, enabling them to achieve more ambitious programmes and secure a more robust infrastructure. For Nandakumara, Director of the Bhavan Centre in London, funding from the Arts Council has made a noticeable difference:

It has helped us to streamline our activities, to ensure that we continue to provide all the services we offer. It has helped us to focus on improving a variety of activities offered. Then it has helped us to improve our facilities, our programmes – we can plan them well in advance, maintain our building. And it’s a big, big recognition as well... We can complement our teaching by inviting external teachers to Summer schools. We can

²¹⁹ In London these are primarily Tamil community led organisations such as the London Tamil Sangam. David (2008; 2012) has conducted research on these institutions. They remain, however, a largely understudied area, in part, possibly because, for the reasons discussed, they do not court such attention.

concentrate on diversifying – for example until recently we didn't have kuchipudi or odissi classes. Now we know that we can use our marketing and other strategies to attract more people. All of this is thanks to the blessings of the Arts Council.

M.N. Nandakumara, Interview, 2018

At the same time, the limitations of visibility are evident when we consider a couple of British based reviews of works featuring classical Indian dance forms. In one, which featured in a prominent national newspaper, a review of the major Indian dance and musical festival *Darbar* held at Sadler's Wells, opened with a declaration that 'The eight Indian classical dance forms have been around for a couple of thousand years', going on to observe that 'for the uninitiated, classical art forms can feel impenetrable'.²²⁰ The damaging Orientalist tropes of stasis and obscurity are thereby invoked within the review's first 150 words. In another, in this case a review written for *The Place*, the reviewer's level of understanding of classical Indian dance forms was so negligible that they were unable to make the fundamental distinction between the (markedly distinct) dance forms of bharatanatyam and kathak.²²¹ While reviews from prominent and internationally esteemed institutions continue to broadcast ignorance and Othering (for which, in the case of *The Place*, there was not even a recognition of the problems with their approach), the returns for visibility seem only to be, as Phelan warns, misrepresentation and myth.

South Asian dance for South Asian people?

I think it [classical Indian dance] cannot develop in another country being relevant only to a small group of immigrants from that country. For it to flourish it has to get its life source from the society and give out to everyone' (Bisakha Sarker Interview, 2017).

²²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/nov/26/darbar-festival-review-akram-khan-sadlers-wells-london> (accessed 12.6.20).

²²¹ The reviewer to erroneously describe a dance artist's work as grounded in kathak, when her form is bharatanatyam. To add insult to injury, the institutional response from the *The Place* to the dance artist pointing out this error, was to tell her that the onus lay on her to make her form clearer as the *Place* 'did not have the time or resources' to do so (Agrawal, personal communication, 2020). The *Place*, as I highlight below, is in receipt of funding almost equal to all the South Asian companies and agencies put together. For such an institution to put the onus responsibility for this work on an individual artist citing their own lack of resource would be laughable if it were not so entirely unacceptable. The review in question with the conceded amendment can still be viewed here <https://www.theplace.org.uk/blog/resolution-review-2018/tue-23-jan-lydia-touliatouyanaelle-thiranhinged-dance-co> (accessed 12.6.20).

One way out of this conundrum is to accept that classical Indian dance forms will necessarily have a restricted audience. For zeroculture's Hardial Rai, the attempt to adapt classical Indian dance forms to be read by a wider audience only results in compromised integrity, in work that tries to be 'all things to all people. And what's the point in that?'. Rather we need to 'accept that certain art forms are only going to be patronised by and relevant to certain sections of the community' (Rai interview 2021). Instead of adapting work to meet the culturally specific vision of a programmers with little understanding of the codes governing classical Indian dance forms, his answer is to seek out opportunities and spaces which will enable the commissioning and the framing of work to come from a place of understanding and knowledge. This will enable dance that is 'everywhere, every weekend – in community centres, theatres, theatres hired by community groups, local organisations' to take its space in the 'established theatres'. In this way, without attempting to moderate or adapt the codes and conventions that make them distinctive, 'the little story... told honestly, truthfully and in a heartfelt manner...can become the universal story...'
(Rai interview 2021).

Rai makes an important point about refusing to surrender the integrity of art forms in favour of accessibility. It should not be necessary to broaden the appeal of classical Indian dance forms by taking them into the (Euro-American) contemporary dance sphere, or by introducing mainstream audiences to other aesthetic conventions without their necessarily being aware of it - almost as if the (Euro-American) contemporary dance gives a 'sweet' coating to the (Indian) classical dance 'bitter' pill. This view echoes the call of writer and teacher Kelsey Blackwell for places in which black people can 'gather free from the stereotypes and marginalisation that permeate every other societal space we occupy' (Blackwell 2018: 1).

While respecting the need for safe spaces (spaces that I certainly appreciate as a woman in a man's world), following the analogy from the women's movement, the long-term vision must surely be

that such spaces are made redundant by the ‘making safe’ of the wider environment. This is important because, as Sarker observes in the quotation which opens this section, classical Indian dance forms in Britain will continue to struggle to attain the symbolic and economic capitals necessary for them to thrive while they continue to be viewed ‘as relevant only to a small group of immigrants’ from another country. Or, in the words of Jeyasingh, ‘if bharatanatyam is seen as having relevance only to a small group of people mostly of one ethnicity then it diminishes its influence and reach’ (Jeyasingh Interview 2018). To really develop a professional classical Indian dance sector in Britain; to genuinely make such space for the ‘little story’ in ‘established theatres’ demands, I suggest, an unseating of the (largely unspoken and often unrecognised) idea that any one ‘little story’ is more ‘universal’ than any other. It demands an acceptance that any ‘universal story’ is only ever accessed through multiple and various ‘little stories.’ This in turn demands a radical evaluation of both what constitutes Britain’s ‘national cultural canon’ and of what is regarded as ‘professional’. And the labour to achieve this, to echo Desai, must rest not upon those ‘who are excluded’ but on those ‘who do the excluding’.

Un-suturing, de-linking: breaking the ‘habit’ of whiteness and transforming the canon

Establishing Indian classical dance forms as part of the ‘national cultural canon’ first necessitates acknowledging these art forms as part of Britain’s collective heritage (in Hage’s terms, making them what we ‘are’, not what we ‘have’). Rather than accepting the parameters of a limited audience as Rai suggests, and equally, rather than inclusion within the cultural canon depending on these art forms abandoning their artistic codes and conventions to fit them more to the dominant (Euro-American) culture, the task must be to familiarise a wider audience with those codes and conventions which will allow them to appreciate classical Indian dance forms on their own terms. It depends, in other words, as former Director of Milapfest (1990 – 2019) Prashant Nayak urges,

on ‘making relevance’. Asked whom he felt might prove an appropriate audience for classical Indian dance forms, Nayak’s response is that relevance is relative:

...it will depend on...how much these communities are exposed to it [classical Indian dance]. The more the communities are exposed to it, the more relevant it will become for them...I think it is up to us in the arts community to make it relevant. Relevance cannot be prescribed and it’s not God given - it’s something that can be brought into existence by us.

Nayak Interview, 2017

Returning to the examples of ballet and Euro-American contemporary dance, neither genre started off with an established British audience, but both worked to create one. At the same meeting with which this chapter opened, the music critic F Gilbert Webb (1919) who was chairing the meeting, observed in a post-talk discussion, ‘I do not see that there is anything to prevent the establishment of British ballet on the same lines as Russian, except want of faith which would discourage financiers from supporting the concern. Of course, it must be several years before it would acquire sufficient public attraction to make it pay’ (Perugini 1919: 55). Within a decade of this meeting, such ‘public attraction’ had been developed and British ballet was well on its way. Similarly, the place of contemporary dance in Britain was supported and secured, in part through the efforts of the early British contemporary dance company, *Strider*, which made a point of touring to ‘colleges of education, small theatres, arts centres and art galleries’ (Jordan 1992: 40) thereby introducing new kinds of dance content to audiences around the country (ibid: 57) and later through the Arts Council initiative Dance Umbrella²²² which worked on ‘building audiences beyond a narrow group of dance aficionados’ (ibid: 96).

²²² London’s international annual contemporary dance festival, started in 1978.

Such ‘bringing into existence of relevance’, however, is not something that can be achieved by the South Asian dance companies and organisations alone. As Piali Ray observed in a focus group meeting, ‘South Asian dance and music should not be only our responsibility. We cannot do it on our own’ (Fieldnotes 26.2.2020). Yet despite the recommendation of Graham Devlin in 1989 that some of the National dance agencies (NDAs) ‘specialise in non-Western dance forms’ (Devlin 1989: 39), not one NDA does so. Furthermore, not all NDAs feel they have a responsibility to support classical Indian dance styles as one among many styles – let alone specialising in them. Rather, certain NDAs see South Asian specific arts agencies as relieving them entirely of their responsibilities towards South Asian dance and dancers. Agrawal, for example, reports approaching an NDA for support, and being referred to the local South Asian specific agency instead (Agrawal, 2020). A cursory glance at the relative levels of funding for NDAs and South Asian specific agencies suffices to reveal how far such an approach disadvantages South Asian artists. Comparing the figures in Chart 1 (above) and Chart 3 (below), any one of the top three funded companies in Chart 1 received more funding than the funding allocated to all the South Asian dance companies and agencies put together.²²³ In this light it becomes apparent that to make a substantive impact, the pursuit of a wider relevance for Indian classical dance forms must necessarily be first accepted as relevant to (and the responsibility of) the wider institutional infrastructure for British dance.

²²³ This is with the contentious* inclusion of Akram Khan and Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Companies in this list without which the total figure for South Asian dance NPOs is £7,969,228. This means that the total allowed for all South Asian dance companies and agencies put together is only about £800,000 more than the grant accorded the Contemporary Dance Trust as a single entity. *Contentious because while these companies do draw on classical Indian dance forms, both choreographers now class their own work as contemporary dance and use primarily contemporary dance artists. Yet, as I raise in chapter 1, they are still touted by members of the arts establishment as examples of ‘South Asian dance’ companies, in a manner that makes one wonder whether they will ever escape the category markers of their skin colour and names.

Chart 3. Chart of all the South Asian dance NPOs, including dance companies and agencies (including, contentiously, Akram Khan and Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Companies)

	Company Name	ACE Region	Discipline	Funding 2018 – 22
1	Akram Khan Dance Company	London	Dance	2,002,440
2	Leicester Dance Theatre Ltd (Aakash Odedra)	East Midlands	Dance	1,460,000
3	Milapfest Festival Trust	North West	Combined Arts	1,451,632
4	Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company	London	Dance	1,034,928
5	Sampad South Asian Arts	West Midlands	Combined Arts	975,624
6	Akademi	London	Dance	860,000
7	South Asian Arts Uk (SAA Arts)	Yorkshire	Music	724,000
8	Balbir Singh Dance Company	Yorkshire	Dance	601,840
9	Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan	London	Music	515,996
10	Sonia Sabri Company	West Midlands	Dance	500,136
11	Gem Arts	North East	Combined Arts	480,000
12	Kala Sangam – The Academy of South Asian Performing Arts	Yorkshire	Combined Arts	400,000

Figures taken from Arts Council Document for NPO funding 2018 - 2022, compiled by M. Gorringe

To enable such a ‘creation’ of relevance, and to prevent a return to the superficialities and confusions of multiculturalism, requires first a ‘decentre-ing’ of the norms and values of ‘dominant white culture’, to allow space for a fuller expression of humanity and (as part of this project) a wider appreciation of classical Indian dance forms. To develop a possible route towards this, I turn to three distinct yet (in my view) related suggestions. These are philosopher of race George Yancy’s (2017) call for ‘un- suturing’, sociologist Anibal Quijano’s (2007) argument for ‘de-linking’ and Stuart Hall’s 1999 proposal for ‘re-imagining of the post nation’ (Hall 1999).

In his powerful study of white racism in America, Yancy cites novelist and activist James Baldwin who writes,

White man, hear me! History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, *the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.* It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations

Baldwin, cited in Yancy 2017: 247 (my emphasis)

From a different perspective (and rather more poetically) Baldwin makes here a similar argument to Bourdieu, emphasising the extent to which our acquired *habitus* determines how we act and how we think, so that we embody our predispositions, our presuppositions - and our unconscious bias. It is the same point that Ahmed (2007), who also draws on the notion of *habitus*, makes in her argument about ‘orientation towards whiteness’, building on psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon’s attention to the ‘historic-racial schema’ (Fanon, cited in Ahmed 2007: 153). Yancy elaborates, ‘white gazing is a deeply historical accretion, the result of white historical forces, values, assumptions, circuits of desire, institutional structures, irrational fears, paranoia, and an assemblage of “knowledge”’ (Yancy 2017: 243) – resulting in racism.

If Yancy discusses the construction of the ‘white gaze’, Quijano’s argument discusses the way in which, from a broader perspective, not only white people, but people of all races lie subject (since colonialism) to ‘hegemonic ideas of what knowledge and understanding are and, consequently, what economy and politics, ethics and philosophy, technology and the organization of society [and, one might add, the nature of professionalism] are and should be’ (Mignolo 2007: 459). In both cases, the result is a diminishing of horizons, a narrowness of vision, and an inability to really hear or grasp a perspective that derives from alternative ‘epistemic and axiological frames of reference’ (Yancy 2017: 254).

As a way to escape, overcome and breakdown the pernicious constraints of such conditioning, Yancy urges that ‘white people’ must come ‘to terms with the vicious history of white supremacy’, through ‘a practice of un-suturing, ...a critical distancing from (or disruption of) various hegemonic norms’ (2017: 256). This demands not only an acceptance, but an embrace and a pursuit of the process of ‘de-centre-ing’ whiteness. Yancy explains,

Un- suturing disrupts; it troubles and unsettles; it is not afraid...un- sutured gestures that are linked to the ways in which the world reveals itself differently...un- suturing is a form of exposure, an opening, a corporeal style, and a dispositional sensibility that troubles the insularity of whiteness; that troubles and overwhelms the senses, revealing our somatic porosity and instigating instability; that sense of being thrown off balance, off center (sic) and exposing different (and counterhegemonic) ways of being attuned to our inter-corporeal existence, our mutual touching.

Yancy 2017: 259

Similarly, Quijano argues for the process of ‘de-linking’ as means to reverse the ‘colonization of the imagination of the dominated’ which has served (among other things) ‘to impede the cultural production of the dominated’ (2007: 169). The process of ‘de-linking’ works ‘to change the terms of the conversation, and above all, of the hegemonic ideas of what knowledge and understanding are’ (Mignolo 2007: 459). While ‘de-linking’ has a wider scope than Yancy’s ‘un-suturing’, the de-centring of whiteness remains central to this approach because of colonialism’s inextricable intersection with race – or in Mignolo’s words, because ‘racism and the colonality of being are one and the same cognitive operation’ (Mignolo 2007: 480). The effect of de-linking, like that of un- suturing, results in a widening of the ‘horizon of expectations’ and thereby a widening of an understanding of the multiple ways in which to be human. This should not rest on ‘a total rejection’ of the ‘Eurocentred paradigm of knowledge’ which might result only in the imposition of one ‘totality’ in place of another. Rather, it is the work towards

A world in which many worlds could co-exist can only be made by the shared work and common goals of those who inhabit, dwell in one of the many worlds co-existing in one world and where differences are not cast in terms of values of plus and minus degree of humanity

It is work towards a world of 'pluriversality' in which there will remain no space for a 'deficit' model of cultural capital - because no single version of cultural capital will set the rules.

In his 1999 address, Stuart Hall provides some pointers to what such 'un-suturing' or 'de-linking' might mean in practice in the specific case of the British 'white nation'. The first step he identifies is 'a redefining' of nation – a 're-imagining of 'Englishness' in a more profoundly inclusive manner' (1999: 19). This 're-imagining' of Britain must start, not only from an embrace of what Hage points to as the decentre-ing of whiteness through migration, but by a historic 'decentre-ing of whiteness' based on an appreciation that it is only as a result of the use (and exploitation) of the labour, land and resources of the majority world that Britain is where it is today. As Mignolo points out, 'when the industrial revolution took place, race was not a visible issue. The appropriation of land in the colonies was invisible [in Britain]' (2007: 486) – which does not mean that it was not happening. Such a reimagining must start, in other words, from an effort for Britain to 'take seriously its own decolonisation' (Mbembe 2010: np) by fully appreciating colonisation 'as a historical phenomenon with historical and contemporary consequences' (ibid.). Such an endeavour, rooted in what Mbembe terms an 'ethics of consequences' (ibid.) necessarily brings with it a profound recognition of the realities of migration, summarised succinctly by anti-racism activist Sivanandan Ambalavaner's aphorism – 'we are here, because you were there'.²²⁴ Hall comments that

The Brits owe this not only to us, but to themselves, for to prepare their people for success in a global and de-centred world by continuing to misrepresent Britain as a closed, embattled, self-sufficient, defensive, tight little island would be to fatally disable them

Hall 1999: 19

²²⁴ Ambalavaner, *Catching History on the Wing*, Speech given at the Institute of Race Relations 2008 <https://iirr.org.uk/article/catching-history-on-the-wing> (accessed 5.6.2021).

It is not only the British artists, who, post-Brexit, are barred from touring Europe without visas, customs waivers and work permits for each individual member state,²²⁵ or the Scottish shellfish farmers for whom Brexit has meant the loss of ‘centuries old markets’,²²⁶ who will appreciate the prescience of Hall’s words.

Britain’s identity, then, must be based on a less myopic understanding of history, which also understands ‘identity’ as a process in the making, rather than as an object to be defended and maintained. This must lead, to come to Hall’s second point, to an overhaul of the British cultural canon so that it gives ‘recognition, exposure and visibility to artists from the South’ (1999: 19) and so that it is no longer the case that ‘even when asked directly, white British respondents who identify themselves as cosmopolitan still find it hard to name specific artists, musicians or filmmakers from Africa, South America or Asia’ (Flemmen and Savage 2017: S239).

Towards a British Natyam?

‘What we need is a conservatoire, a youth dance company and a repertory dance company. Let’s get on and do it’. Jan de Schynkel (Then Dance Relationship Officer, Arts Council England). Meeting of the South Asian Dance Alliance, Nebru Centre, London, 29 June 2017 (Fieldwork Notes).

What might such a decentring, such a reimagining of identity and overhaul of the British ‘national culture canon’ mean for classical Indian dance forms in Britain? A place in the British cultural canon would provide these dance forms with a wider legitimacy, underlining that they take their place in British society as ‘common assets’, not only as ‘ethnic minority art forms’ fulfilling ‘a specific need of a specific people’ (Araeen 1987: 19). This in turn will increase the value of the cultural capital of minority communities as being also part of ‘the cultural repertoires associated

²²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/jan/20/uk-government-rejects-musician-passports-as-stars-attack-shameful-touring-deal> (accessed 21.1.21).

²²⁶ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/international-business/european-business/article-brexit-red-tape-a-catastrophe-for-scottish-fisheries-that-export-to-eu/> (accessed 21.1.21).

with ‘national belonging’ (Flemmen and Savage 2017: S238). One practical means towards this might be that selected primary and secondary schools offer students a regular weekly class in a classical Indian dance style, just as the amateur movement enabled Dutta to provide Ryan and her classmates in the early 1990s (see chapter 3). A further measure would include the reinstatement of classical Indian dance works as set works (or as making up part of the ‘core’ dance anthology’ for GCSE/ A Level dance. Such initiatives would help build a wider knowledge and understanding of classical Indian dance forms, while emphasising their place as an intrinsic part in British culture (rather than as ‘enriching’ extras).

Such suggestions seem sadly utopian in a context where engagement in the arts of any kind is currently being stripped back from the school curriculum. A recent government document affirmed that ‘music, dance, drama and performing arts; art and design; media studies; and archaeology’ are not among its ‘strategic priorities’.²²⁷ On the other hand, the failure to acknowledge the intrinsic interweaving of Indian classical dance forms (amongst many others) with the ‘British’ cultural narrative could result in increased problems from a fractured society – and the argument can even be made if necessary in terms of economics. Parekh argued in 2000 that ‘In an increasingly global yet diverse world, it is societies that know themselves to be internally diverse, and are at ease with their internal differences, which stand the best chance of economic success’ (2000: 163).

To help develop opportunities for dancers to work (or sustain their livelihood) while staying true to the aesthetics and vocabulary of the classical styles, a repertory company might be established, devoted to the exploration of classical Indian styles in and of themselves. Such a company would be governed neither by nostalgic demands of ‘long-distance nationalism’, nor by the extrinsic

²²⁷ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8610a7a4-0ac3-47d3-9129-f234e086c43c/consultation-on-funding-for-ay2021-22-finalforweb.pdf> (accessed 7.6.21).

conventions and values of Euro-American contemporary dance, but could speak to a ‘contemporary sensibility’, a term used by Akram Khan in a conversation at *Darbar 2017* to invoke performing work in a way that asks questions from ‘the voice of today’. As Khoo elaborates:

My example is always – when I am dancing *Yaaro Ivar Yaaro*,²²⁸ my reference point is always Olivia Hussey in the Franco Zeffereilli *Romeo and Juliet*. I always go back to the movie and watch her. I sometimes don’t think dancers understand how to look at Anish Kapoor and appreciate that work, and then genuinely apply their contemporary sensibility into a *varnam*, thereby making the *varnam* contemporary. Instead, they might think ‘I’ll wear jeans and that will contemporise it’ – but that’s actually very superficial. No! Do the *varnam* properly – but don’t be afraid to show who you are within it. I don’t go to Chennai and think ‘oh I’m going to stop being a Londoner now’ – not at all.

Khoo, Interview 2017

In other words, a seventeenth century Tamil *varnam* can be restaged just as a Shakespeare play is restaged today - not as a way of recreating a seventeenth century experience but as a way of reinterpreting the experience and insight of that particular playwright in that particular century in a way that speaks to our here and now.

Once dancers have a means of securing a livelihood through the practice of (and the value lent) to their particular form of expertise, knowledge and craft, it follows that there will be demand for further training, so that the long desired vocational school for classical Indian dance forms in Britain might finally prove a realistic proposition.

At this point of meeting the demands of legitimacy, livelihood and expertise, classical Indian dance forms will be able to develop their own autonomous field in Britain, as ballet and Euro-American contemporary dance have done before, creating, as Kaushik proposed at a South Asian Dance

²²⁸*Yaaro Ivar Yaaro* (Who, oh who is that?) is a well know Tamil padam (or expressional piece) composed by Arunachala Kaviraya, which captures Rama’s emotions on first catching sight of his future wife, Seeta.

Alliance meeting in 2017 ‘a British brand of classical Indian dance’ (Fieldwork notes, 17.2.2017). At this point we will be able to truly claim to have a ‘British Natyam’, or a ‘natyam’ (dance/drama, as for classical Indian dance forms the concepts are not separate)²²⁹ that has a British inflection, that presents a British *bani*.

The ‘National Cultural Canon’, *Eudaimonia* and communities of practice

How realistic is the pursuit of a ‘British Natyam’ in the face of the visceral fear of loss arising in response to accelerating cross global migration, cultural exchange and the ‘global forces of postmodernity’ (Hall 1997: 36), and a realisation that the dominant values of ‘whiteness’ are being (and must be, for all our sakes) displaced? For Hage, there is an urgent need ‘for rethinking a new cultural politics capable of recognising and dealing with the sense of cultural loss from which neo-fascism is being fed’ (Hage 2000: 26). A claim to a ‘British Natyam’ could evoke such a sense of loss both among certain British nationalists questioning the right of Natyam to make a claim on Britain, and among certain Indian nationalists questioning the right of Britain to make a claim on Natyam.

The nature of global exchange (accelerated in the last century but present for as long as human history) means that it can be very difficult to identify where one particular ‘national’ canon should stop, and another begin. How ‘national’ is a ‘national cultural canon’ if it embraces and co-opts artforms that originated on the other side of the world? Does the rejection of an unrealistically exclusivist nationalism mean a surrender to the globalisation of art forms whereby, as with the versatile body discussed in chapter 4, the nuance and detail of distinctive dance forms are lost in surrender to a dominant discourse? The alternative approach, however, is no less difficult. In 2019, a colleague and I listened with a mixture of amusement, distress and disbelief as two 2nd year

²²⁹ From the Sanskrit word ‘nata’ – to act or represent.

dance degree undergraduates, seemingly in tune with the *zeitgeist*, questioned the ‘Irishness’ of Irish dance given that it had been influenced in the 12th century by the arrival of the Normans. How should we maintain the striking specificity and precious particularities of art forms on the one hand, while avoiding the perils either of mummification or of dogmatic essentialism on the other?

In a comment on identity, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah reflects,

...each human life begins with many possibilities. Everybody has - or, at least, should have - a great variety of decisions to make in shaping a life. And a philosophical liberal, like me, believes these choices belong, in the end, to the person whose life it is.

Appiah 2006: 18

Clearly, he says, we all exist within constraints: ‘I was born into the wrong family to be a Yoruba Oba and with the wrong body for motherhood; I am too short to be a successful professional basketball player and insufficiently musical to be a concert pianist’ (2006: 18) – and there are other social and environmental factors that restrict our choices as well, as this thesis has discussed. Ultimately, however, the decision as to what constitutes their identity should belong ‘to the person whose life it is’ and should rest on what allows for each person’s ‘eudaimonia’ - ‘Aristotle’s word, perhaps best translated as ‘flourishing’ (Appiah 2006: 17). Appiah cites John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*:

...different persons also require different conditions for their spiritual development... The same things which are helps to one person towards the cultivation of his higher nature, are hindrances to another.... unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic statures of which their nature is capable.

John Stuart Mill (1963 – 1991: 270), cited in Appiah 2006: 19

In other words, the choices as to what constitutes a person’s identity should not be forced, and should not be dictated by their ethnicity, their gender, their class, their sexuality, or anything else,

but by what is most likely to allow them to flourish. What this means in terms of the practice of Indian classical dance forms is that their practice should not be determined by class, gender, race or nationality, but by a particular individual's affinity with the dance style, and the sense that it best allows them to express, in Mill's terms, their 'nature'. A bonus of globalisation (to counter some of its problems) is that it is not (or should not) be a surprise that Miyako Yoshida (born in Japan) was a Principal Guest Artist of the Royal Ballet; that Sheku Kanneh-Mason (whose parents are from Antigua and Sierra Leone) was 2016 BBC Young Musician of the Year (as a classical cellist), or that Katie Ryan, born and brought up in Bedford, U.K. is an Odissi dancer.

In September 2019, in the Bhavan centre in London, Stella Subbiah presented an evening's performance of bharatanatyam entitled *Udal* or *Bodyscapes*. The performance brought together a range of practitioners from a range of different backgrounds – different nationalities, different social classes, different ages. The Italian Marcella Capelletti performed next to the half Tamil, half Malayali, P.T. Rakesh. The part Tamil, part British Australian Chris Gurusamy performed next to a Tamil working mum now living in Wembley, North-West London. In this way *Udal* served to question the dubious and dangerous conflation between culture and genotype and instead insisted on the importance of a 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998), or as dance scholar Judith Hamera terms (2011) it, a 'dancing community'.

Educational theorist Étienne Wenger defines a community of practice as 'a community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise' (Wenger 1998: 45). The value of this notion, as the linguistics scholar Penelope Eckert points out, is 'that it identifies a social grouping not in virtue of shared abstract characteristics (e.g., class, gender) or simple co-presence (e.g., neighborhood, workplace), but in virtue of shared practice' (Eckert 2006: 684). Thus, returning to *Udal*, it is not being born Tamil or being born a Hindu that makes a good bharatanatyam dancer, but the day-to-day commitment, time and work (*sadhana*) given to embodying the art form. A Yorkshire born, Christian bharatanatyam practitioner sustains the specificity of bharatanatyam; a

British, yet East African born Asian woman now living in Devon turns up at her village hall to sustain the practice of morris. In a globalised world, I suggest, the best chance for the retention of the specificity of art forms is not through the dogmatic and exclusive identification of art with nation but through the patient, creative and generous work of multi-national, multi-faith, multi-lingual and multi-coloured, ‘communities of practice’.

This is not a radical suggestion. More radical is what this might suggest for example, for the practice of bharatanatyam and other classical Indian dance forms in Britain. To truly break the nationalist claim of one nation upon a specific artform demands, in some ways paradoxically, a claim by many nations upon many art forms. A government funded ‘dancing community’, such as British school of Natyam for example, would extend a sense of British national belonging to those familiar with classical Indian dance forms, while making the legitimate claim that these dance forms are now also British. As with the National Ballet of China or the School of Irish dance in Richmond, Virginia, or, at some point in the future – who can tell – the Mumbai Academy for Morris dance - such a globalised yet specialised embrace of these specialist yet globalised art forms is not only welcome but necessary for their future.

Returning to the first chapter, the discussion of the BBC Young Dancer is a vivid demonstration of how the ‘expansion of the canon’, or of curatorial choices can have a limited impact within the context of wider systemic inequities, where art forms that express and derive from different aesthetic and artistic narratives are nonetheless positioned within the framework of a dominant aesthetic understanding. A meaningful expansion of the canon must rest within what visual arts scholar Ruth Iskin dubs (drawing on Mignolo), a ‘pluriversal canon’ (Iskin 2017: *passim*). Under this understanding a canon is no longer to be valued so much for offering a space of ‘consensus’ as for offering a space ‘of debate’. She cites the acclaimed curator Okwui Enwezor who declares his interest in the ‘exhibition space’ as a ‘space of encounter, between many contending notions of artistic practice; as a space in which knowledge systems, aesthetic systems and artistic systems

converge sometimes in harmony and sometimes in great disharmony’ (Enwezor 2008, np. Cited in Iskin 2017: 26). In this light, I suggest, the expansion of the canon plays two fundamental roles.

First, to echo art critic Geeta Kapur (reflecting on the specific instance of the biennials), canons, exhibitions, syllabi, competitions, festivals and other such mechanisms by which artworks are distributed at the interface between state and commerce – while ‘never beyond serving vested interests [including]...spectacle, cultural hegemony, market interests...’ remain ‘at the same time a means of creating professional conduits of communication...structures that ‘erect bridges between the state and private finance, between public spaces and elite enclaves, between artists and other practitioners’ (Kapur 2013: 182). These conduits, she argues, are all the more important to those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to engage with the international (or one might add, the national) art scene. Such conduits offer a means to the expansion of audience that, I argue, is so important as a means for artists to sustain their practice.

Second, the expansion of the canon serves, or should serve, as a reminder of the canon’s contingency. The canon, like identity, like space, place and nation cannot be fixed, but must be subject to a permanent process of revision if it is to reflect, in the words of philosopher Cornel West, the ‘current crisis in one’s society and culture’ (West 1987: np) and thereby hold any meaningful authority. The expansion of the canon should not be perceived as a way to ‘include’ in the sense of ‘tolerate’ or ‘permit’, but rather should form part of an expansive redefinition of citizenship that allows all citizens to say and feel ‘This is my home. I am not an outsider here. I do not have to beg or to apologize to be here. I belong here’ (Mbembe, no date).²³⁰ Under this

²³⁰ This reference is taken from a speech by Achille Mbembe that can be found here: [Microsoft Word - Decolonizing the University.docx \(wits.ac.za\)](#) (accessed 21. 11.21)

understanding 'the canon' can serve to further, rather than to hinder, the ongoing project of decolonisation – within Britain and beyond.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the challenges classical Indian dance forms have faced in being incorporated as part of the 'national cultural canon', which I argue is key to the legitimacy and consecration these forms dance forms need in order to establish a professional field within Britain. Comparing the story of the arrival to Britain of these dance forms with those of ballet and contemporary dance I argue that the most significant factor preventing their more wholesale inclusion in the 'national canon' is the fact that these dance forms, not only through the bodies of the majority of their practitioners, but also through their technique, vocabulary, codes and conventions, depart from the norms of whiteness. I suggest that the answer is not to bring classical Indian dance forms into the domains of 'whiteness', but rather to de-centre whiteness; to unsuture and de-link our thinking and our imaginations such that the white norm we have inherited from colonialism is put in its right place as simply one norm among many equally valid and equally valuable norms. Such de-centre-ing will allow for a transformed 'national cultural canon' allowing space for the growth of professional dance fields adhering to many different doxa – not attempting to shape themselves to the overarching rules of one. Such a recognition of a 'pluriversal' canon, always in the process of being made and remade, will grant each of us space to pursue our individual *eudaimonia* (or flourishing) with a true reflection of the 'diverse modes of life' of which 'our natures are capable'.

Conclusion

Part of the British DNA?



The author and Kalidasan Chandrasegaram in Akademi's, *Coming of Age*, Photo credit: Ali Zaidi

In 2000, Akademi produced *Coming of Age*, the first spectacle of its kind, through which classical Indian dance forms both claimed and redefined the space of the South Bank. For that performance, after years of, as Sundaram put it, 'quietly doing our stuff in the Purcell Room', it felt as if South Asian dance had finally found the self-confidence to announce its presence to the wider public (hence, '*Coming of Age*'). The concrete and glass of the Royal Festival Hall, built in 1951 for the Festival of Britain, in part as an 'anniversary monument to the [imperial] 1851 'Great Exhibition' (Littler 2006: 21), became on those two evenings in 2000, the backdrop for a symbol and expression of a new Britain - diverse and evolving, with, as then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook famously announced, chicken tikka masala as its national dish. At the top of the building, Mavin

Khoo launched the show, bare chested and bejewelled, in a deliberate evocation of one of the pioneers of South Asian dance in Britain, Ram Gopal. At the show's close, Gopal himself, still regal and commanding at 88, blessed the occasion with his presence, framed by a ring of lights which echoed both the flames around the dancing Nataraj, and the newly opened millennium wheel beyond. This was felt by Richard Blurton curator at the British Museum to be 'a defining moment'. For an Asian audience member it represented '...the reality of how far our community has come in this country...' (all quotes taken from Akademi's *Coming of Age* commemorative flyer, 2000), lending a sense, as Kaushik put it that 'South Asian dance is now part of the British DNA' (Kaushik in Sundaram, 2012). This performance and the optimism surrounding it took place at possibly the peak of 'Asian Cool' under a New Labour government committed equally to the goals of cultural diversity and creative industries (and seeing them both, in business terms, as good investments).²³¹ This study has considered how far Britain has come, and yet how much there remains to be done in terms of establishing the professional practice of classical Indian dance forms in Britain. How far are classical Indian dance forms really part of the 'British DNA'?

Starting with the energy and optimism of the BBC's inclusion of a 'South Asian' dance category in its Young Dancer competition – an inclusion that in itself demonstrates the importance of 'South Asian' dance forms to the world of dance in Britain and, from this perspective, the achievement of South Asian dance artists, choreographers and sector leaders in ensuring their influence and visibility, I discuss how this prominent indicator of success masks a hinterland of infrastructural precarity. Using Bourdieu's concept of 'field' to bring into focus the power dynamics attached to occupations and 'professions', I argue that an autonomous professional field for classical Indian dance forms in Britain, whereby the standards and conventions are endemic to the field, remains to be established. As yet, dance practitioners and cultural agents have fought to find a place for

²³¹ See Kedhar 2020, Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of South Asian dance during this period of New Labour and 'Cool Britannia.'

their dance forms within the field of Euro-American contemporary dance, resulting in inevitable tensions in the attempt to align themselves with a very different set of conventions and very different sets of expertise.

I suggest that while Bourdieu makes an important point about the cultural contingency of many understandings of ‘professional’, there nevertheless remains a place for the concept as one that denotes an occupation that is a source of livelihood and is marked by expertise and legitimacy (lending it symbolic capital). One possible way to invoke this concept without its historic Euro-American baggage, and in a way that might allow an emphasis on service for one of ‘mastery’ might be to replace the term ‘profession’ with that of ‘*virutti*’.²³² In terms of developing expertise, I argue that while the inclusion of the CIDF within the ISTD has been a great step forward and has been welcomed by many practitioners, there remains a significant gap in the provision of professional training for classical Indian dancers in Britain, as there is still nowhere offering immersive, full-time training beyond the days or weeks available as part of summer schools. Training remains largely limited to evening and weekend classes, with practitioners wishing for professional training having to arrange and devise their own training routes, usually through a combination of extra classes, attendance at Summer schools, time spent training in India and combining their training in classical Indian dance forms with training in contemporary dance.²³² The South Asian dance CAT, *Yuva Gati* is a significant programme representing both the only context in which state funding contributes to consistent training in classical Indian dance forms (kathak and bharatanatyam), and the only context in which training is given to a group of students with a professional career in dance in mind. The CATs are clearly intended as pre-vocational training, however, and training is still restricted to a very limited number of days. Several attempts to

²³² One unexpected and welcome by product of the otherwise devastating Covid-19 pandemic has been the rise of professional classes run over Zoom with leading artists based in Britain and elsewhere. The use of the internet has allowed for a critical mass of students to make such classes sustainable in a way that was not previously considered feasible. How far such classes will continue as the world returns to a more off-screen existence, and how far these on-screen classes match the calibre of training provided by direct contact remain open questions.

establish the vocational training in Britain dreamed of since the 1970s have failed due to lack of student numbers. I argue that the framing of the teaching of Indian classical dance forms in Britain as a means of maintaining links with cultural heritage has prioritised identity with an ancestral 'homeland' over artistic identity. This has restricted the potential constituents for the dance forms, both in terms of audience and practitioners, which has in turn led to diminished employment opportunities due to limited audience demand. The lack of clear employment routes has meant the lack of student numbers to make a vocational training course viable, thereby affecting standards of practice.

A vocational school alone, however, merely creates another problem where not accompanied by prospects for employment. On this subject, considering the overlap between 'livelihood' and 'learning', I show how the demand for the 'versatile' dancer impacts on the way in which classical Indian dancers are trained. In a professional environment that seeks 'versatility', I argue that the distinctive aesthetics and bodily *bexes* that characterise classical Indian dance forms are in danger of being lost in favour of the dominant dance vocabulary of Euro-American contemporary dance. While there is no inherent reason why classical Indian dancers trained in Britain should not embody the 'technical habitus' of classical Indian dance forms as fully as dancers trained in India or elsewhere, where there is not the demand for that particular habitus on stage, and where there is not the space that allows the cultivation of that specific habitus, training in Britain clearly remains a more difficult proposition. In this light, I argue, the demand for the 'versatility' of performer must be replaced by a cultivation of 'versatility' among audiences.

Finally, I consider the story of the professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms in Britain in the light of the comparative cases of Euro-American contemporary dance and ballet, both forms with a presence in Britain not so very much longer than that of classical Indian dance forms. I argue that while the historic stigma attached to performing dance as a profession, together with

different priorities within the sector have both impeded the development of an autonomous classical Indian dance field in Britain, the more significant obstacle has been an ‘orientation to whiteness’ which has not shifted despite an ostensible commitment to cultural diversity. Classical Indian dance practitioners are still expected to reflect the artistic narratives of Euro-American contemporary dance in their performance, and to shape their work to the ideals of (Euro-American) contemporary choreographers. In this light the moves towards ‘cultural diversity’ emerge as disappointingly superficial – classical Indian dance forms are welcomed, provided they conform to the codes and conventions of Euro-American contemporary dance. Just as Ahmed argues that in the white-orientated institution, ‘bodies that might not appear white still have to inhabit whiteness, if they are to get ‘in’ (2007: 158), so classical Indian dance forms must adapt their technical habitus to that of contemporary dance to attain legitimacy. Against this, I argue, a genuinely ‘diverse’ society demands an unseating of the presumed universality of the ‘white way of being’ (a legacy of colonialism) to make space for a society that embraces a pluriversal canon that encompasses multiple narratives and multiple conventions, aware that each represents a different way of approaching the same tangled and incalculable mystery of life, and that none has greater authority than another. Such multiple narratives, I suggest, are essential not only for classical Indian dance forms in Britain to flourish, but for each of us as individuals to attain our own flourishing (*eudaimonia*).

Returning to the questions that prompted this study, one question remains unresolved, which is ‘why professionalise?’ My response to this echoes the rather hackneyed L’Oréal slogan ‘because you’re worth it’. Professionalisation confers, as I have discussed, symbolic capital – and classical Indian dance forms merit such value as much as any other dance form. Additionally, such symbolic capital can lever greater economic capital – which in turn supplies dancers with the means to augment their cultural capital, both through being able to put more time into training (physical capital) and by having more time to develop their work. Classical Indian dance forms can, and

indeed are performed by dual career dancers to an extraordinarily high and creative standard. Such squeezing of the time and space to perform, however, should not be necessary. A recognition of professionalism should help to ensure that classical Indian dance forms are accorded the resources, both in terms of time and money, for their practice as a sole or main career. Professionalisation can be damaging where it necessitates the adoption of an artistic narrative, of standards and conventions that are outside an occupation's internal frame of reference. This is a problem, as I have shown, with the attempt to position classical Indian dance forms within the field of Euro-American contemporary dance. This problem derives however, not from professionalisation, so much as from failure to professionalise – or failure to develop an autonomous field assessed on its own terms. Beyond the characteristics of expertise, means of livelihood and legitimacy I suggest that there are no professional qualities that are absolute. Rather, as there are many fields, there are many professionalisms. From this perspective, the work towards and the responsibility for the professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, or towards a 'British Natyam', rest as much if not more on institutions outside the sector than on those within the sector itself. An understanding of the concept of 'many professionalisms' must rest on a de-centre-ing of whiteness and a transforming of the 'national cultural canon' that demands the will not only of the South Asian and the National dance agencies, not only of the Arts Council, but of the Department for Education. It demands that Britain, in Mbembe's words, 'take seriously its own decolonisation', accepting an 'ethics of consequences' that must lead to transformations of the understanding of history and nationality that lie at the heart of government.

This is a bold ask against a backdrop of a government that has both clearly stated that its priorities do not include the arts and has authorised a report produced by the Commission of Racial and Ethnic Disparities which objects to the use of the term 'white privilege' (Sewell et al. 2021: 36), that attempts to find the silver lining in slavery and that has suggested that focus be shifted away from attention on 'structural' or more 'systemic racism' to discussions with 'more objective

foundations'(ibid.). While the report concedes that 'different groups are distinguished in part by their different cultural patterns and expectations', it maintains that 'it is hardly shocking to suggest that some of those traditions can help individuals succeed more than others' (Sewell et al. 2021: 234) – without any apparent curiosity or misgivings as to why this might be the case.²³³ I make these suggestions nonetheless in the spirit of envisioning a different world, or in the words of Martin Luther King, the refusal to submit 'the "oughtness" of a new order to the "isness" of an old order' (King 1954: np); urging my words to dance out the 'possibility of a new human relation, a relation to the future of the world that was not available *then* but could be available now, at least as an idea ...' (Kelleher 2009: 53).

Returning to the young dancers of the *BBC Young Dancer* with whom this study started, an autonomous professional field for classical Indian dance forms will not resolve the balancing act that lies at the heart of professionalism – negotiating the dual contracts to one's artform and one's patron. The challenge to, as I raise in chapter 1, 'present dance that is accessible without being comfortable, that is legible without surrendering to a 'visionbite' stereotype, and that is commercially viable without being driven by a commercial end'; to tread the line between working for 'love' and working for 'money' remains the constant negotiation of any professional artist. The funding for arts projects provided by ACE is hugely important in helping artists to tread this line. From this perspective it is also interesting to consider the increasing attention being given to the proposal for Universal Basic Income, a non means tested unconditional allowance paid to each citizen in a certain area - an idea that has gained increasing support partly as a result of the need for widespread government income support as a result of Covid-19. For artists the guarantor of a

²³³ This report has been widely critiqued by MPs, unions and equality rights campaigners. The UN issued a particularly trenchant condemnation, arguing that the report seeks to 'rationalise' white supremacy <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27004&LangID=E> (accessed 9.6.2021).

living wage could mean the freedom to focus solely on their ‘contract’ with their artforms, with the possible implication that ‘professionalism’ might once again lose its economic imperative.

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that the erosion of conditions that allow for ‘professionalism’ in terms of occupation - both as a sole means of livelihood and a committed way of life (Harvie 2013; Kedhar 2020) - has been accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the disciplinarian strand of ‘organisational professionalism’ (Evetts 2013: 787). This has also served to substitute for a loyalty to one’s profession, a loyalty to the ‘organisation’. In this context, the professional value of working for ‘love’ can be used to undermine the professional’s need to work for ‘money’ or for their livelihood. Against this neoliberal takeover of the symbolic capital of professionalism, I suggest that the ‘profession’ (by which I also mean the craft, skill and expertise involved in the occupation professed) and the ‘professional’ (the expert who carries out this craft) are once again placed at the centre of both ‘professionalism’ and ‘professionalisation’, and I look to the time when classical Indian dance forms in Britain are truly so valued.

I am in the Foyle studio at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham. It’s a studio I know well, but today it feels different. In front of the short set of raked seating, there are rugs and cushions arranged on the floor, on which some audience members are already seated, as if in their front room at home. The performance starts, but the houselights are not entirely dimmed. The soft lighting covering both stage and seating emphasises a continuum between performer and audience, conjuring again the informal atmosphere of a living room. The performance is by the kathak master Pandit Rajendra Gangani presented by Sampad together with Sonia Sabri Company and kathak artist Seetal Kaur Dhadyalla. The air of informality is deliberate. The presenters are attempting to recreate the sense of a ‘baitbak’, a word meaning ‘parlour’ or ‘living room’ in Urdu, but also referring to particular kind of intimate performance in which, as Dhadyalla explains, ‘you feel the energy of the performers and allows them to feel your

energy' (Fieldnotes 20.6.2019). The performance that follows is not a display from an isolated stage but involves a constant exchange – between Gangani and the musicians, Gangani and the audience. As he dances, he narrates, he explains, he tells a story to highlight a point he is making. Between anecdotes he performs with a skill and command that is the result of a lifetime of training. He dances a short piece about Krishna stealing the butter from the gopis – and his abhinaya is so effective that he transports us into the room where the village woman is making butter. His evocation is so clear, that as my friend sitting next to me observes, she can practically 'see' the cupboard into which the gopi is placing her churning stick. At another point, he performs footwork, so intricate and controlled as to be able to depict at one moment a thunderstorm, at another a swarm of bees, at another a light shower of rain. The audience is utterly engaged – keeping the taal, uttering an involuntary 'Wah! Wah!'²³⁴ at moments of particular appreciation. Gangani talks to the audience, flitting between Hindi and English. The audience talks back, questions, admires. The evening is an interweaving of discussion, explanation, expert music and dance, and I feel caught up in Gangani's artistry, for a brief time a co-collaborator in creating the experience of kathak.

This performance, in its informality, in its unchoreographed to and fro between artist and audience has provided me with an experience qualitatively different to that of most of the other forty odd shows I have attended as part of my fieldwork – in which the exchange between audience and performer, where it exists, is usually confined to a discrete and carefully facilitated Q and A. There are points at which I feel lost – when the conversation slips into Hindi and I struggle to catch the odd word I can make sense of. In the grand scheme of things however, this is an enviably safe space in which to feel 'lost'. Nothing depends on it except perhaps a greater artistic appreciation of the performance. There is a part of me that notes my own frustrated incomprehension and wonders if the experience isn't good for me. It confronts me very immediately with my limitations and with a whole landscape of meaning that I have yet to discover. In this way, I suggest, this performance both discomfits and unsettles me, but also nudges me to look further and see more. It expands my 'horizon of expectations'.

²³⁴ Wah, wah... is an exclamation of pleasure or admiration.

Slowly, I begin to accept this discomfort as a gift. I start to glimpse the narrowness of what I know, and hence the incalculable excitement of what I don't. I have the same sense of vertigo as when I learn that there are 2 trillion galaxies in the universe. Gangani's ghunghroos tumble like stars, each one promising another way of knowing.

Appendix 1

Field work summary

Interviews

Dance artists

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Mira Balachandran-Gokul | 6 th February 2017 Southport |
| 2. Akshay Prakash | 13 th February 2017 London |
| 3. Prakash Yaddagudde | 13 th February 2017 London |
| 4. Seeta Patel | 22 nd February 2017 London |
| 5. Vidya Patel | 7 th March 2017 Birmingham |
| 6. Archana Ballal | 12 th April 2017 Dance Xchange, Birmingham |
| 7. Christopher Gurusamy | 12 th April 2017 Dance Xchange, Birmingham |
| 8. Anusha Subramanyam, | 31 st May 2017 Dance Xchange, Birmingham |
| 9. Katie Ryan), | 30 th September 2017 Oxford |
| 10. Mavin Khoo | 9 th November 2017 Sadlers Wells London |
| 11. Sujata Banerjee | 8 th December 2017 Meeting House London |
| 12. Akram Kham | 31 st January 2018 AK Ballet Boyz Studio London |
| 13. Stella Subbiah | 7 th February 2018 The Place, London |
| 14. Shobana Jeyasingh | 9 th February 2018 Skype |
| 15. Aishani Ghosh | 3 rd March 2018 Birmingham |
| 16. Pushkala Gopal | 6 th March 2018 Zoom |
| 17. Uma Venkataraman | 6 th March 2018 Skype |
| 18. Sonia Sabri | 16 March 2018 Mac, Birmingham |
| 19. Amina Khayyam | 26 th March 2018 Laban, London |
| 20. Chitra Sundaram | 20 th April 2018 London |
| 21. Nina Rajarani | 24 th April 2018 Harrow Arts Centre |
| 22. Shane Shambhu | 4 th June 2019, John Lewis, Birmingham |
| 23. Shivaangee Agrawal | 12 th July 2019, Asia House, London |
| 24. Divya Kasturi | 23 rd May 2020, Phone call |
| 25. Shivaangee Agrawal | 11 th June 2020, Phone call |

South Asian Arts/Dance Organisations

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Keranjeet Kaur-Virdee, Director SAA-UK, Leeds | 17 th February 2017, Leeds |
| 2. Mira Kaushik, Director, Akademi – Interview 1 | 22 nd February 2017, Akademi, London |
| 3. Mira Kaushik, Director, Akademi – Interview 2 | 3 rd March 2017, Phone call |
| 4. Nina Head, Akademi | 11 th April 2017, London |
| 5. Piali Ray, Director, Sampad – Interview 1 | 2 nd June 2017, Sampad, Birmingham |
| 6. Nilima Devi, CICD | 13 th June 2017 CICD, Leicester |
| 7. Mira Kaushik – Interview 3 | 14 th June 2017 Akademi, London |
| 8. Prashanth Nayak, Director Milapfest | 23 rd August 2017 Milapfest, Liverpool |
| 9. Bisakha Sarker | 23 rd August 2017 Liverpool |
| 10. Anita Srivastava (New Dimensions) | 21 st September 2017 Peterborough |
| 11. Sanjeevini Dutta | 12 th October 2017 Friends' Meeting House |
| 12. Alex Croft | 23 rd October 2017 Kala Sangam, Bradford |
| 13. Piali Ray – Interview 2 | 25 th November 2017 Sampad, Birmingham |
| 14. Dr Nandakumara | 8 th December 2017 Bhavan, London |
| 15. Hardial Rai | 18 th February 2021, Zoom |

Other

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Naseem Khan | 13 th February 2017, London |
| 2. Jane Hackett | 9 th March 2017, Skype |
| 3. Tara Rajkumar | 11 th April 2017, Skype |
| 4. Helen Laws, One Dance UK | 6 th June 2017, Skype |
| 5. Lynn Marea | 28 th November 2017, London |
| 6. Alex Henwood and Clare Lewis, | 16 th Jan 2018, Dance Xchange, Birmingham |
| 7. Ginny Brown, ISTD | 12 th February 2018 ISTD, London |
| 8. Monique Deletant, CEO Dance Hub, Birmingham | 30 th May 2019, John Lewis, Birmingham |

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 9. Jane Ralls | 18 th February 2018, Phone call |
| 10. Veronica Lewis | 17 th October, Friend's House, London (Interview conducted for Dance Hub Feasibility study and used by kind permission) |
| 11. Sheila Cove | 26 th October 2019 Pathfinder Village |
| 12. Jan De Schynkel | 25 th November 2019, Arts Council, London |

Performances attended

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. Akram Khan's <i>Giselle</i> , ENB, The Mayflower theatre, Southampton | 26 th October 2016 |
| 2. <i>BBC Young Dancer</i> , South Asian Category Final, The Lowry, Manchester | 23 rd January 2017 |
| 3. <i>Kadiragama Kuravanji</i> , The Bhavan Centre, London | 12 th February 2017 |
| 4. Amina Khayyam Dance Company, <i>A Thousand Faces</i> , mac, Birmingham | 2 nd March 2017 |
| 5. Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, <i>Material Men</i> , The Patrick Centre, Birmingham | 27 th March 2017 |
| 6. Shane Shambhu, <i>Confessions of a Cockney Temple Dancer</i> , Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton | 5 th April 2017 |
| 7. <i>BBC Young Dancer Final</i> – Sadler's Wells Theatre, London | 22 nd April 2017 |
| 8. Seeta Patel, <i>Not Today's Yesterday</i> , Warwick Arts Centre | 3 rd May 2017 |
| 9. Richard Alston, <i>An Italian in Madrid</i> , Oxford Playhouse | 13 th May 2017 |
| 10. Akademi, <i>Paradiso</i> , South Bank Centre, London | 24 th May 2017 |
| 11. Jaivant Patel Dance Company <i>Samarpan</i> Wolverhampton Arena Theatre | 24 th June 2017 |
| 12. Akshay Prakash, <i>Shivoham</i> , Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan | 16 th July 2017 |
| 13. Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Co. <i>Bayadere – the 9th Life</i> , Sadler's Wells | 17 th October 2017 |
| 14. <i>Darbar – Akram Khan</i> , Sadler's Wells | 9 th November 2017 |
| 15. <i>Darbar – Mavin Khoo and Aditi Mangaldas</i> Sadler's Wells | 11 th November 2017 |
| 16. <i>Darbar – Talk with Akram Khan</i> , | 11 th November 2017 |
| 17. <i>Darbar – Mavin Khoo</i> , Live coaching | 12 th November 2017 |
| 18. <i>Darbar – Seeta Patel, Something Now, Something Then</i> , Lilian Bayliss, Sadler's Wells, | 12 th November 2017 |
| 19. Nina Rajarani Dance School showcase <i>Vichitra</i> , Harrow Arts Centre | 26 th November 2017 |
| 20. Sonia Sabri – <i>Virago</i> , Old Rep, Birmingham | 15 th Feb 2018 |
| 21. Aakash Odedra Company, <i>#JeSuis</i> Patrick Studio, Hippodrome, Birmingham | 16 th Feb 2018 |
| 22. Akademi, <i>The Troth</i> , The Curve, Leicester | 21 February 2018 |
| 23. Sonia Sabri Co. <i>Dastaan with Sarvar Sabri</i> , mac Birmingham | 21 March 2018 |
| 24. <i>Uyir</i> – Stella Subbiah and company PATS Uni of Surrey | 19 th April 2018 |
| 25. Vidya Patel and Connor Scott, <i>About the Elephant</i> , Mac Birmingham | 24 th April 2018 |
| 26. Anaya Bolar, <i>EKA</i> , Mac Birmingham | 24 th September 2018 |
| 27. Seeta Patel Company <i>Not Today's Yesterday</i> , Patrick Studio, Birmingham Hippodrome | 23 rd Oct 2018 |
| 28. Kamala Devam Dance Company, <i>Ankusha and Other Mysteries</i> Foyle Studio, mac Birmingham, 4 th Nov 2018 | |
| 29. Gary Clarke Co. <i>This is an Island?</i> (featuring Vidya Patel), Birmingham School of Art | 1 st Dec 2018 |
| 30. Aakash Odedra <i>Echoes and I Imagine</i> , Patrick Studio, Birmingham | 31 st Jan 2019 |
| 31. Sonia Sabri Co. <i>Same, Same But Different</i> , Patrick Studio, Birmingham | 21 st Feb 2019 |
| 32. <i>BBC Young Dancer South Asian Dance Final</i> , The Lowry, Manchester | 6 th March 2019 |
| 33. <i>Altered Skin Confessions of a Cockney Temple Dancer</i> , Patrick Studio, Birmingham | 28 th March 2019 |
| 34. <i>ReRooted Dance Collective</i> , The Bhavan Centre | 5 th April 2019 |
| 35. Seeta Patel Dance Co, <i>Rite of Spring</i> , Patrick Studio, Birmingham | 14 th May 2019 |
| 36. <i>BBC Young Dancer Final</i> , Birmingham Hippodrome | 18 th May 2019 |
| 37. Jaivant Patel Dance Co <i>Samarpan, Mahotsav</i> , Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton | 14 th June 2019 |
| 38. Sampad and Sonia Sabri Co. <i>An evening of Kathak</i> , Mac, Birmingham | 20 th June 2019 |
| 39. Akademi, <i>Navadal</i> , Rising stars of SA dance, Purcell Room, London | 20 th July 2019 |
| 40. Kirsten Newell <i>Hebridean Treasure</i> , Edinburgh Festival | 16 th August 2019 |
| 41. <i>Uyir Udal</i> , Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, London | 28 th September 2019 |
| 42. <i>Home Brewed</i> Shane Shambhu, featuring Vidya Patel, The Old Crown Pub, Brum | 5 th October 2019 |
| 43. ReRooted Dance Co. <i>Geometer</i> , Bloomsbury Festival, London | 19 th October 2019 |
| 44. Rukmini Vijayakumar, <i>Sangamam</i> , Mac Arts Centre, Birmingham | 13 th November 2019 |
| 45. Jaivant Patel Dance <i>Yaatra</i> , Mac Arts Centre, Birmingham | 13 th November 2019 |
| 46. An Evening with Nahid Siddiqui, Mac Arts Centre, Birmingham | 17 th November, 2019 |
| 47. Mavin Khoo and The Temple of Fine Arts, Sadler's Wells, London | 25 th November, 2019 |
| 48. Sona Lisa Dance Company: <i>Breaking Ground</i> , Foyle Studio, Mac Birmingham | 30 th November, 2019 |
| 49. Sampad, <i>Asian Spring</i> , Town Hall, Birmingham | 1 st March 2020 |

Other events attended

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. Navadisha Conference 2016, mac Birmingham | 20 – 22 nd May 2016 |
| 2. Training Day for working with Older Dancers, Rambert (attended on behalf of Akademi) | 22 nd Nov 2016 |

3. SADA Networking Day, Leeds	17 th February 2017
4. CAT, Yuva Gati CPD Day, Dance Xchange, Birmingham	31 st March 2017
5. Yuva Gati Day (Observing) Dance Xchange, Birmingham	12 th April 2017
6. Seeta Patel Dance Co. Rehearsal, London	25 th May 2017
7. SADA Networking Day, London	29 th June 2017
8. Dance Hub SAD sector meeting mac, Birmingham	23 rd Jan 2018
9. Class for Uyir with Stella Subbiah London Tamil School	6 th February 2018
10. Yuva Gati class – focus group, Dance Xchange, Brum	17 th Feb 2018
11. Class with Pushkala Gopal, London	27 th March 2018
12. Yuva Gati CPD Day, Dance Xchange, Birmingham	29 th March 2018
13. SAD rep company discussion meeting Culture Central, Birmingham	4 th December 2018
14. Seeta Patel Dance Dialogue rehearsal, Hull	20 th Feb 2019
15. YuvaGati CPD Day, Dance Xchange, Birmingham	11 th April 2019
16. Class with Mira Balchandran Gokul	10 th June 2019
17. Akademi Dance Dialogues, Swarnamalaya Ghosh with Chitra Sundaram, Asia House	25 th June 2019
18. Akademi Dance Dialogues, Rukmini Vijayakumar with Vena Rampal, Asia House	12 th July 2019
19. Akademi Workshop with Rukmini Vijayakumar, Danceworks, London	13 th July 2019
20. Navadal – National South Asian Youth Dance Competition, South Bank Centre,	20 th July 2019
21. South Asian Dance and Music Round Table ACE offices, Birmingham	26 th February 2020

During Covid 19, a huge variety of performances, talks and events were hosted on-line. I list a selection of the events I attended virtually below.

1. 24th April – 24th May 2020: Manch UK, meet the Artist series, a range of mainly British based classical Indian dancers talking about their lives and work.
2. 18th June 2020: ReRooted in Conversation on Manch UK.
3. 25th June 2020: Conversation with Seeta Patel, organised by Dance Grist.
4. 14th – 17th July 2020: Sampad and Dance Hub Birmingham, South Asian Dance Hub Residency (Anaya Bolar, Lakshmi Srinivasan, Sonia Chandaria Tillu, Vidya Patel).
5. 30th July 2020: Can We Talk, Swarnamalaya? Avanthi Meduri in conversation with Swarnamalya Ganesh, From the Attic, Talking Dance series.
6. 22nd November 2020: CAT Yuva Gati Online Conference.
7. 5th December 2021, Midday Mantra with Katie Ryan and Lakshmi Srinivasan.
8. 14th December 2020: Akram Khan in conversation with Nish Kumar, Dance Umbrella.
9. 19 January 2021: Seeta Patel Dance Company – *A Very British Museum*.
10. March 2021: Dancing Nation (3 parts) BBC 3.
11. 19/20 March 2021: Akademi Dance Film Festival.
12. 10/11 April 2021: UNNATI, workshop with Sharmila Biswas.
13. 30 April 2021: Nehru Centre, Pushkala Gopal in conversation with Ann R. David.
14. 4 June 2021: CAT Yuva Gati: *The Migrated Knowledge* and *Behind Closed Doors*.
15. 11 June 2021: CAT Yuva Gati: *The Transient Source* and *The Other Choreography*.

Appendix 2

List of judges and mentors engaged for the South Asian dance category finals, BBC Young Dancer, together with list of judges for the Grand Finals.

Full profiles of these mentors and judges can be found here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/1Nv0NN8yTqX8ntCKWWWNvk4/judges> (accessed 14.5.2021).

BBC Young Dancer 2015

Judges

Mira Balchandran Gokul -bharatanatyam dancer, teacher and choreographer, co-artistic director, Sankalpam

Pratap Pawar – leading exponent and guru of kathak dance (students include Akram Khan)

With the addition of Adjudicator across all categories: Kenneth Tharp, choreographer, director and former chief executive of The Place

Mentors

Seeta Patel - bharatanatyam dancer, teacher and choreographer, founder Seeta Patel Dance

Aakash Odedra – kathak dancer and choreographer, founder Aakash Odedra Dance Company

Grand Final Judges

Matthew Bourne – artistic director of New Adventures

Mavin Khoo – bharatanatyam choreographer, dancer and (then) artistic director of ZFin Malta dance ensemble

Wayne McGregor - founder Studio Wayne McGregor and resident choreographer at the Royal Ballet

Tamara Rojo – artistic director of English National Ballet

Kenrick Sandy – dancer and choreographer

Alistair Spalding – Chief Executive and artistic director of Sadler’s Wells

BBC Young Dancer 2017

Judges

Kajal Sharma – teacher and leading exponent of kathak

Chitra Sundaram - dance/theatre choreographer, performer and educator

With the addition of Adjudicator across all categories: Shobana Jeyasingh, founder Shobana Jeyasingh Dance

Mentors

Mira Balchandran Gokul – bharatanatyam dancer, teacher and choreographer, co-founder, Sankalpam Dance

Sonia Sabri – kathak dancer, teacher and choreographer, co-founder Sonia Sabri Company

Grand Final Judges

Kevin O'Hare - director of The Royal Ballet

Jasmin Vardimon - choreographer and artistic director of the Jasmin Vardimon Company

Marc Brew - artistic director and choreographer

Kate Prince - choreographer and director of ZooNation
Kenneth Tharp - choreographer, director and former chief executive of The Place
Nahid Siddiqui - one of the world's finest Kathak dancers and choreographers.

BBC Young Dancer 2019

Judges

Gauri Sharma Tripathi – kathak dancer, teacher and choreographer, founder, Ankh dance
Seeta Patel – bharatanatyam dancer, teacher and choreographer, founder Seeta Patel Dance
With the addition of Adjudicator across all categories: Jonzi D

Mentors

Geetha Sridhar – bharatanatyam dancer, tutor, performer and choreographer
Urja Desai Thakore – Kathak dancer, teacher and choreographer, founder Pagra Dance UK

Grand Final Judges

Emma Gladstone - artistic director and chief executive of Dance Umbrella
Wayne McGregor - founder Studio Wayne McGregor and resident choreographer at the Royal Ballet
Shobana Jeyasingh – founder Shobana Jeyasingh Dance
B-boy Junior Bosila Banya dancer, teacher and member of Wanted Posse crew
Chitra Sundaram- bharatanatyam dance/theatre choreographer, performer and educator
Christopher Hampson – artistic director and chief executive Scottish Ballet.

Appendix 3

‘Chart’-ing the courses teaching South Asian dance in Britain

Courses are only included where classical Indian dance forms are taught consistently, not as a one-off, though Bisakha Sarker rightly makes the point that these longer courses have only been made possible on the foundations provided by the many hundreds of one-off classes taught in schools and colleges across Britain over the years – ‘it takes so long to prepare the ground’ (Sarker, phone conversation June 2021). Of the courses listed below only the short-lived dance degree at De Montfort University and later at LCDS can be considered to have offered any degree of vocational training in classical Indian dance forms.

Stacey Prickett notes that the presence of South Asian dance in British higher education started much earlier than this with the inclusion of classical Indian dance forms performed by artists such as Uday Shankar and Anjali (Ann Marie Gaston) in teaching at Dartington Hall (Prickett 2009).

These courses have been significant not only in terms of the education in different dance techniques that they have provided, but also in helping to introduce practitioners of Indian dance disciplines to the wider world of British dance. Sarker relates a story about how she once attended a conference of mainly Euro-American contemporary dancers. During the Q and A session she was asked to introduce herself at which point Wayne McGregor (who was one of the panellists) interjected ‘Don’t you know that’s Bisakha Sarker, I think she needs no introduction! Sarker had taught McGregor a class at Bretton Halls – a brief interaction that led to an on-going relationship.

Dates	Institution	Course
‘mid to late eighties’	Laban Centre	Modules on the Community Dance MA launched by Peter Brinson Tutor: Pushkala Gopal
2/3 years in ‘late eighties’	University of Surrey	Part of the Dance BA, co-ordinated by Alwyn Marriage Introduction to Indian Dance with overview lectures and practicals in Bharatanatyam Tutor: Pushkala Gopal
1992 - 1993	De Montfort University (formerly Leicester polytechnic).	South Asian Dance combined honours degree. The course grew out of ‘detailed and lengthy consultation work between East Midlands Arts, ADiTi and Mike Huxley, Head of Dance at the polytechnic’ (David 2003: 7) There was one graduate from this course: Priti Raithathah, who was forced to finish her course with contemporary dance modules due to a lack of tutors
1993 - 2002	Middlesex University	15- week module in South Asian dance as part of BA (Hons) in Dance. Replaced in 2002 by a non-South Asian dance specific module entitled ‘Cultural Diversity n Dance’ (David 2003: 7) Tutors: Pushkala Gopal
1995 - 2000	Bretton Halls in partnership with ADiTi and Middlesex University	Certificate for South Asian dance artists working in schools Course graduates include Nilima Devi and Priti Raithathah (David 2003: 7)
1995- 2022* *this is when the last enrolled cohort will graduate	University of Surrey	BA in Dance and Culture (in which training in first kathak and later bharatanatyam was integral) Tutors have included: Nahid Siddiqui, Alpana Sengupta, Alison Turner, Amina Khayyam (kathak). In 2014/5 Stella Uppal Subbiah together with Sabine Sorgel revalidated the syllabus incorporating bharatanatyam, rather than kathak. Subbiah taught this course until 2018/19. Kamala Devam took over the course from 2019 to date.
2002—present 2003 excepting 2002 Autumn (2002-03 academic year term)	Goldsmiths College, University of London Pilot Programme BA level	Chitra Sundaram & Pushkala Gopal: A pilot programme of workshops and a simple repertoire taught-piece in Bharatanatyam for Drama Dept BA Year 1 students. 10 weekly sessions per tutor, total 20 hours.

2004-2014	BA – Drama Year 1: 'Space/Body/Spectator'	Chitra Sundaram 'Bharatanatyam' module—contemporaneous options with Butoh and Contemporary Performance modules—as exposure to varied praxis. Bharatanatyam-based training offered holistically yet highlighting the relationship and ethos of BN w.r.t. the 'body', 'space' and 'spectator' through exercises. No repertoire. Each a self-contained week except the last. Weekly, 4 weeks total 12 hours for about 20-25 students. Mandatory modules – everyone got a taste of all three modules; no prerequisites.
2004-present	MA - 'MA Performance Making' Course title changes: --'MA Performance Making' --'MA Performance-Making: Performance Methodologies' --'MA Performance-Making: Scenography' Module title changes: --'Bharatanatyam' --'South Asian Dance-Theatre Methodologies' --'Abhinaya' Module Changes reflect shift in desired module outcomes and my emphasis on what I wanted to progressively deliver – especially, technically not BN dancers – and increasingly geared to Rasa-theory based actor training and dramaturgy.	Chitra Sundaram Module offered alongside Butoh and Contemporary Dance (previously Contact Improvisation). Students choose* and remain in the module the entire time. No prerequisites. Again, tailored, progressive focused explorations and exercises, some continuity but no single complete repertoire piece. Guest artists invited by me to present during class Manorama Prasad, RR Prathap, Sujata Banerjee, Stella Subbiah, and Geetha Sridhar. Initially 21 hours over 7 weeks Then 15 hours over 5 weeks Plus some hours delivered as workshops and Performance Research Forum evenings. Invited artists included Manorama Prasad, RR Prathap, Shane Shambhu, Anita Ratnam, and Prof Richard Schechner. *Choice is made after the modules are each 'tasted' in an introductory session for all students enrolled in MA Performance Making.
2017 – to date	MA World Theatres	Full term theoretical module on Asian Theatre full term where students also explore Rasa Theory, some movement, and watch South Asian dance – among other theatres
2004 – 2009	London Contemporary Dance School	BA in Contemporary dance with South Asian dance strand (offered in kathak and bharatanatyam). The syllabus was devised by Gauri Sharma Tripathi (kathak) and Stella Uppal Subbiah in partnership with Akademi. (bharatanatyam) Tutors included Stella Uppal Subbiah, Geetha Sridhar (bharatanatyam); Gauri Sharma Tripathi (kathak). Graduates include Archana Ballal, Marcella Cappellati, Thalia-mari Papadopoulou (first batch); Katie Ryan, Vipul Bhatti, Shreya Kumar (second batch); Satyajit Raja Verma, (third batch)
2005 – 2016	University of Roehampton	MA in South Asian Dance Graduates include Urja Desai Thakore, Divya Kasturi Stella Uppal Subbiah was an Erasmus Scholar at Roehampton for the Erasmus Mundus Choreomundus MA students. Hari Krishnan has also taught for the Erasmus MA.
2006 – to date	Kingston University	Bharatanatyam, Odissi (and for one year, sattriya) taught as part of a BA in Dance Tutors have included Menaka Bora, Geetha Sridhar (bharatanatyam), Elena Catalano (odissi)
2010- to date	University of East London	Bharatanatyam and kalaripayattu taught as part of 2 nd years curriculum in Dance: Urban Practice BA degree programme Set up and taught by Dr. Jyoti Argade, then by Veena Basavarajiah (2013), Ankur Bahl and Kamala Devam from 2014-to date (artists covering Kamala's classes include Seeta Patel, Ankur Bahl, Shane Shambhu) Seeta Patel took over for Kamala's maternity leave during 2020. The module is only offered in the Autumn term.

2009 – 2019	University of Chichester	Bharatanatyam taught as a course component to Musical Theatre students. Tutor: Geetha Sridhar.
2015 - 2019	Hope University, Liverpool	Various classes and courses including: Technique classes, Distillation of Movement, Facial expressions and gestural economy. Post colonialism and Bharatanatyam, Influence of World migration on Dance or Movement Vocabulary. Courses facilitated by Rachel Sweeney and Declan Patrick. (Then Senior Lecturers at the Dance Department) Classes took place once a week. Tutor: Swati Raut
2015 - to date	E15	Aspects of Bharatanatyam taught as part of the course 'non-Western character acting' Tutor: Shane Shambhu

In addition, Swati Raut in Liverpool taught the following regular classes to A-Level students.

2007-2009	Ashton Sixth Form College	Curriculum enrichment for the Dance Students, once a week
2009- 2014	Prestons College	Introductory Bharatanatyam to Dance Students (A Level) (once a week). These were facilitated by Heather Burns (Head of Dance) and later by Andrew Hindley who took over as head of Dance.

I would like to thank Elena Catalano, Kamala Devam, Pushkala Gopal, Amina Khayyam, Swati Raut, Katie Ryan, Bisakha Sarker, Shane Shambhu, Geetha Sridhar, Stella Uppal Subbiah and Chitra Sundaram for all their help in compiling this chart.

Appendix 4

Agencies that have formed or continue to form part of the South Asian Dance Alliance, UK.

(Note: Akademi is the only organisation with the sole remit of promoting dance, not alongside other art forms. All organisations have been/ are in receipt of ACE funding, but not all are NPOs.).

Organisation	Location	Started	First director	Present Director	Current aims	Featured projects/ specified areas of work	Primary art form as listed for ACE funding	ACE investment in sterling	
								2015 – 18	2018 - 2022
<p>Akademi</p> <p>Started as National Academy of Indian Dance</p> <p>Name changed to the Academy of Indian Dance in 1988</p> <p>Name changed to Akademi, South Asian Dance in the UK in 1997</p>	London	1979	<p>Tara Rajkumar (1979 – 1982)</p> <p>Bharti Kansara and John Chapman (1982 – 1985)</p> <p>Pushkala Gopal and Naseem Khan (1985 – 1988)</p> <p>Mira Misra Kaushik (1989 – 2019)</p>	<p>Subathra Subramaniam (Artistic Director) and Kirsten Burrows (Executive Director)</p>	<p>Akademi works to encourage excellence in the practice and appreciation of South Asian dance within a contemporary artistic social and educational context in the UK.</p>	<p>Live performance in unusual places</p> <p>‘Through production of ambitious, pioneering dance performances for non-conventional and outdoor spaces, we create opportunities for upcoming and mid-career artists’</p> <p>Talent development</p> <p>Education and community</p> <p>Critical debate</p>	Dance	645,000	860,000

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (has own space, studios and theatre. Gained these premises in 1978) Started to receive ACE funding in 1996/7	London	1972	Mathoor Krishnamurthi (1972 – 1995)	Mattur Nandakumara (1995 – to date)	Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's fundamental purpose is to preserve for the posterity the unsurpassed and indisputable beauty of Indian Culture, art and heritage	Courses, lectures, art gallery. 'Indian dance, music, yoga, art, instrumental courses, events, performances.'	Music	386,997	515,996
Chaturangan (Set up as an unincorporated body, 2002) – emerged out of Chaturang set up 1999 directed/ coordinated by Piali Ray NOT NPO	Liverpool	2002	Bisakha Sarker	Bisakha Sarker	Chaturangan believes culturally diverse dance to be an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of 21st century British culture. Chaturangan's initiatives support the development of South Asian dance in particular and other dance forms in general.	Health and well-being initiatives with particular focus on older people, community and educational projects, cross-arts, dance-theatre productions for touring, specially developed resources to support ongoing activities, international conferences on issues of major contemporary concern	N/A	N/A	N/A
Centre for Indian Classical Dance (Own centre with archive and rehearsal studio) Gained charitable status in 1997 NOT NPO	Leicester	1981	Nilima Devi	Nilima Devi	There are now numerous different dance classes in Leicester and Leicestershire every week, taught by several dance tutors. This has meant a change in the role of CICD. Where it once managed the grassroots level of teaching, it now accommodates advanced training for committed and gifted students who wish to take dance exams or prepare for performance work.	The Centre provides a six-year Diploma Course in Kathak. Teaching Outreach Production Training for advanced students	N/A	N/A	N/A
Gem Arts Gem is part of the wider organization:	Newcastle	2001	Vikas Kumar	Vikas Kumar	Our Vision: We believe the arts enrich the lives of individuals and communities through celebrating our shared cultural diversity – Raising aspirations, building stronger	We profile and programme new and exciting culturally diverse arts, by creating and developing high quality	Combined Arts	360,000	480,000

Gateshead Visible Ethnic Minorities Support Group, which was set up in 1989.					communities and breaking down barriers. Our Mission: To increase equality of opportunity for everyone to engage with culturally diverse arts - as producers, participants and audiences.	concerts, events, festivals, workshops and commissions with regional, national and international artists across all art forms.			
Kadam (Manages Pulse) NOT NPO	Luton	1995	Sanjeevini Dutta and Sujata Banerjee (Banerjee stepped down in 2000)	Sanjeevini Dutta	To keep Asian dance and music relevant and refreshed for today's audiences.	Manages the sector resource www.pulseconnects.com Keeping the arts communities informed, connected and energised. Highlighting hot spots of creativity and cutting-edge practise, making these ancient art forms ever relevant and refreshed.	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kala Sangam (Owns Grade II listed building, theatre space and rehearsal space)	Bradford (1st Leeds in 1993. Moved to Bradford 1996. Gained its own buildings in 2007. Refurbished 'Ganges Hall' in 2011)	1993	Drs Shripathi and Geetha Upadhyaya Geetha Upadhyaya was director/ artistic director between 1993 and 2017	Alex Croft (2017 – to date)	Kala Sangam is an intercultural arts hub which aims to reflect the diversity of contemporary Britain through the work we present, the artists we support and the communities we engage. Specialising in South Asian arts and culture, most of our work takes place in our Arts Centre in the heart of with our outreach activities extending regionally and nationally. Kala Sangam aims to bring people and communities together to create and experience high-quality diverse art, to increase understanding and awareness of different cultures, and to provide talent development pathways for young people and emerging artists into a career in the arts.	Classes Education and community outreach Programme of shows	Combined Arts	300,000	400,000
Milapfest Based since 2010 in Liverpool Hope University	Liverpool	1990 (as Milap, building on informal	Prashanth Nayak	Alok Nayak (2019 – to date)	A number of gaps existed in performance and education within South Asian/Indian arts provision that needed to be tackled. This led to a definite alteration in the direction that the organisation was taking.	Performances Education and Outreach Artist Development	Combined Arts	1,259,982	1,451,632

Campus with studio and theatre space, that Milapfest Can use. Started as Milap. 1993: Milap Festival Trust became a registered charity and NPO		activity from 1985)			In 1991 we established a new Concert Series called Music for the Mind & Soul. The Concert Series at Liverpool are free for the audience and have the added attraction of the availability of an Indian meal just before the concert begins.				
Sampad (Based in mac – does not have its own building)	Birmingham	1991	Piali Ray	Piali Ray	Sampad's mission is to connect people and communities with British Asian arts and heritage and play a pro-active role in the creative economy.	Events Projects Learning and Outreach Continuous Professional Development	Combined Arts	731,718	975,624
SAA – UK (Started as Leeds Centre for Indian Music and Dance – LCIMD, became SAA-UK in 2002 Became NPO (then RFO) in 2000/2001	Leeds	1997	Keranjeet Kaur Virdee	Keranjeet Kaur Virdee	<i>Preserving the traditional, facilitating the contemporary</i> SAA-UK's mission is to enrich people's lives through engagement and participation in traditional and contemporary South Asian music and dance. Training and developing arts and cultural leaders, supports up and coming artists to pursue successful careers and transforming lives, overcoming boundaries through arts.	Classes Summer schools School workshops Developing relationships with artists Programming performances	Music	341,298	724,000

It is important to note here the existence of the organization ADiTi (1989 – 2001). This organization was launched as the National Organisation for South Asian Dancers. In 1990 it became the National Organisation for South Asian Dance. It was founded in Bradford and moved to London in 1996. Its founding director was Abha Adams and closing director was Shanti Nagarajah (other directors included Shreela Ghosh and Nasreen Rehman). It offered an information service, advocacy work and networking/ CPD opportunities. It also produced a magazine – ADiTi news, which became ExtraDiTion. This magazine was taken over by Kadam and became Pulse (now an e-resource).

Appendix 5

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference DAN 16/ 027 in the Department of Dance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 09.11.2016.

Sample Consent Form



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

(INTERVIEWS)

Title of Research Project: Institutions, Income and Integrity
South Asian Dance Agencies and the Professionalisation of Classical Indian Dance in Britain

Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:

This project considers the professionalisation of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, and in particular the role the South Asian dance agencies have played in promoting this. As part of the research, I will be interviewing between 40 and 50 artists and administrators from the sector, asking about their experiences and views in relation to the professionalisation of the forms and the role of the agencies within this. Interviews will be audio recorded except where participants request otherwise and should not last longer than 1 and a half hours. Interviews will take place at a mutually agreed place, which would not normally include a private residence. The interviews will take place between 2017 and 2019 and the PhD should be available in 2020 or 2021. **Please note that selected interviewees may be asked for a second interview towards the close of the project.**

Investigator Contact Details:

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Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. **I understand that all information will be kept anonymous, unless I have authorised use of my name by checking the tickbox below.** I understand that the information I provide will be correctly attributed. I also understand that any information I provide where I wish to remain anonymous will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that in these cases my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings. I understand that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.



I consent to the use of my name in connection with the interviews

Name

Signature

Date

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

Director of Studies Contact Details:	Head of Department Contact Details
<p>Name: Professor Ann R. David</p> <p>Reader in Dance Studies Froebel College University of Roehampton Roehampton Lane SW15 5PJ</p> <p>A.david@roehampton.ac.uk</p> <p>Email: a.david@roehampton.ac.uk</p> <p>Telephone: La 117 tel: 020 8392 3658</p>	<p>Dr Sara Houston (Deputy Head) Dance, Drama, Film School of Arts Froebel College University of Roehampton Roehampton Lane SW15 5PJ</p> <p>Email: Sara.Houston@roehampton.ac.uk</p> <p>Telephone: 0208392 3658</p>

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