

# Notes

## Introduction

1. I would like to sketch a very basic outline of the reconstruction projects here to provide some context for readers. Two major events became the axes of Indian cultural nationalism in southern India: the Anti-Nautch Campaign of the late nineteenth century in Bombay and South India, unleashed by Hindu reformists on the temple dancers due to their association with prostitution and child marriage, and the revival efforts of Madras High Court advocate E.V. Krishna Iyer who famously donned a *devadasi* costume and gave a public *sadir* dance recital in 1926 to resurrect the dance from near extinction. By 1936, the revivalists had won the battle, and fortunately succeeded in bringing the *sadir* back to life, but in a newly reconstructed form called 'Bharatanatyam'. In this reconstruction project, the chief contributors apart from Iyer were the women pioneers Rukmini Devi Arundale and Balasaraswati. See Meduri (2005) and O'Shea (2007). In the southern Indian state of Kerala, as part of the cultural nationalist movement of the 1930s, the Malayalam poet Vallathol played a significant role in reviving the Kathakali dance-drama tradition from 1924 onwards, and founded the Kerala Kala Mandalam in 1937 in Cheruthurthi to provide a space for masters and disciples to work together on both pre-existing as well as newly devised scripts for performance. See Vatsyayan (1974: 33–48) and Zarilli (1999). Travelling north, we encounter another revival project in the form of Kathak, an Indian classical dance genre that most pointedly marks a hybrid space for itself. A combination of Muslim Mughal court dancing (primarily in the cities of Delhi, Agra and Lucknow) and the religious Vaishnav Bhakti (Hindu) aesthetic of Rajasthan, Kathak's evolution as a distinctive genre of narrative performance from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century was marred during the height of colonial rule by its association with prostitution. Like the *devadasis* in southern India, the *tawaiifs* of the north became known to British travellers as the 'nautch girls', associated with easy virtue and moral depravity rather than artistic skill, and it was only during the late 1930s that Kathak reversed its downward fall to stake its claim as a serious performing art form. See Vatsyayan (1974: 84–95), Khokar (1984) and Chakravorty (2008). Odissi, originating from the eastern regional state of Orissa, even though linked by scholars to a cultural period pre-dating the composition of *Natyasastra* in the 2nd century BC, was only canonised as a classical dance form in the 1950s, after Indian independence. The tradition of ritual dancing in the temples by *maharis*, the eastern Indian equivalent of southern *devadasis*, had brought similar

- charges of ignominy from the social reformists. See Marglin (1985) and Lopez y Royo (2007). Mohiniattam, a dance form performed by women from Kerala, and Kuchipudi, performed by both male and female performers from Andhra Pradesh, were established as classical dance forms in the early 1950s (Khokar, 1984). Finally, Manipuri, perhaps the only dance form that escaped the charge of moral depravity owing to its birthplace, the Manipur valley in the northeastern part of India, where the clamour of colonial cultural policy did not easily invade the lives of the dancers, was deemed a classical dance form in the 1950s (Vatsyayan, 1974: 68–83). See also Chaki Sircar (1984).
2. I should point out and acknowledge here the similar challenges that have been advanced by scholars such as Ananya Chatterjea, who has emphatically declared a space for the 'local post-modern' in her book *Butting Out* (2004a), which examines the choreographic works of the African American dancer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Indian dancer Chandralekha.
  3. The Sangeet Natak Akademi was set up in 1953 in New Delhi as a central government initiative and has recognised modern dance as one of the Indian performing art genres worthy of support since the 1980s. It regularly provides funding to support individual Indian classical and modern dancers and companies. However, we should note that it took nearly thirty years for the state to recognise the modernity of its dance forms.
  4. Bharat Sharma is a dancer, choreographer and writer, and also founder of the Bhoorang dance company in Bangalore. He is currently artistic director of the dance company established by his late father, Narendra Sharma, Bhoomika Creative Arts Centre in New Delhi. I was one of the participants in his pilot dance education project, along with two members of the Dancers' Guild, Kolkata, Samudra Dance Company from Thiruvananthapuram and Bhoorang (led by Bharat Sharma and Tripura Kashyap).
  5. I should clarify here that the terms 'dance-maker' and 'choreographer' have been used interchangeably in this book. However, I am aware that the term 'choreographer' only arrived in India in the 1980s, particularly through the works of Chandralekha and the subsequent generation of dancers, and it is perhaps problematic to apply it to those Indian dance artists, classical or modern, in the early twentieth century who would not have described themselves in that way. However, O'Shea's definition of choreography (2007: 11) as an act which involves 'explicit decision-making about performance, training and presentation', whether it is in classical, modern or contemporary dance, is what I have in mind when using the terms 'choreography' and 'choreographer' in my discussion of dance works and dance-makers here in this book.
  6. See for instance, amongst many others, Kapila Vatsyayan (1974), Amrit Srinivasan (1985), Pushpa Sundar (1995), Avanthi Meduri (1996; 2000).
  7. Cultural historian Kapila Vatsyayan has also emphasised the fact that not only are classical and contemporary Indian dance not mutually exclusive but experimentation occurs across the board. See Vatsyayan's article

- 'Modern Dance: The Contribution of Uday Shankar and His Associates' in Kothari (2003: 20–30).
8. Social realism, a distinct style of representation emerging particularly from the socialist context of Soviet Russia in the 1930s, rejected the idealism of nineteenth-century Romantic art and literature and instead attempted to mirror the often disturbing reality of the common person, especially the plight of the proletariat. This is evidenced in both Shankar's *Kalpana* (1948, see Chapter 2) and Bardhan's IPTA works (see Chapter 3). Abstract Expressionism in American art, following close on the heels of twentieth-century art movements such as Expressionism and Cubism in Europe, often dealt with the abstract representation and visualisation of the unconscious or the inner emotional states of human beings. The influence of Euro-American artistic movements on the Bengal school of art in the twentieth century has been discussed by art historians such as Partha Mitter and Tapati Guha-Thakurta, and is discussed in this chapter.
  9. Chandralekha has famously said: 'Besides several negative features in the prevailing dance situation like spectacular mindlessness, archaic social values, faked religiosity, idealization leading to mortification of the form, numbing sentimentality, literalism, verbalism, dependence on sahitya, on word, mystification and dollification, perpetuation of anti-women values, cynicism within the solo dance situation and its senseless competitiveness, there are also more serious questions: why have classical Indian dances become so insular and unresponsive to the dramatic social, historical, scientific, human changes that have occurred in the world around us ...?' (2003: 54). Details on the life and choreographic oeuvre of Chandralekha are available in her biography by Rustom Bharucha (1995) and in Ananya Chatterjea (2004a).
  10. Chapter 4 of this book refers to the debate between two choreographers, Chandralekha and Manjusri Chaki Sircar, at the 'East-West Dance Encounter' in 1985, suggesting that feminist notions of agency through the dancing body took very different forms in India. I am fully aware that by including choreographers such as the Sircars in a book titled *Indian Modern Dance*, I once again run the risk of splitting up Indian modern dance from contemporary dance in the readers' eyes, which should not be the case. My intention here is not to suggest that Chandralekha inaugurated contemporary (or postmodern dance) in India whilst choreographers like the Sircars operated within an older modern dance genre. The Sircars defined themselves as contemporary dance-makers in their lifetimes. I should alert readers to the fact that 'modern' and 'contemporary' are terms often used interchangeably in Indian dance contexts, and that choreographers such as the Sircars can stake a claim to either label, since they placed themselves very clearly vis-à-vis earlier modern dance narratives, whilst operating within a contemporary dance-making landscape.
  11. The *Swadeshi* nationalist movement, according to Chowdhury and many other historians, had failed to draw Muslims into the political agitation with its Hindu-dominated rhetoric.

12. See Sukanta Chaudhuri (2004); Subrata Dasgupta (2007); and David Kopf (1969).
13. In taking this position, I echo the line of thought taken by historians Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal who have emphasised the importance of being critical of the homogenising and hegemonising tendencies of centralised colonial and postcolonial nation-states, without sliding into mindless anti-statism. See Bose and Jalal (1998).
14. One of the most important texts in the field of postcolonial studies, and indeed the touchstone of subsequent critiques of orientalist discourse, is Edward Said's *Orientalism*, in which the author in no uncertain terms talks about imperialism's 'monstrous chain of command', which managed and even produced the 'Orient' (1995: 45).
15. Leonard Knight Elmhirst (1893–1974) helped Tagore start Sriniketan, an institution for rural reconstruction (adjacent to Shantiniketan) in 1921 and later founded the Dartington Hall Trust in Devon, UK, along with his wife Dorothy Straight Elmhirst. For a detailed study of Dartington Hall and its history, particularly its performing arts profile, see Lorraine Nicholas (2007).
16. I would like to provide a brief note here on the use of both variants – 'Kolkata' and 'Calcutta' – in this book. The city of Calcutta was renamed as 'Kolkata', following its Bengali vernacular pronunciation, in the year 2001. Where I refer to the city from 2001 to the present day in this book, I use the current name and spelling for the city, that is, 'Kolkata'. When referring to a period before 2001, for example, in the discussion of the city's cultural climate in the 1950s in Chapter 4, I have deliberately used the old spelling of 'Calcutta' to maintain historical accuracy. The same applies to my use of the old spellings of Bombay (Mumbai) and Madras (Chennai).

## 1 Rabindranath Tagore and Eclecticism in Twentieth-Century Indian Dance

1. For a detailed introduction to the Tagore family background, see Dutta and Robinson (1995: 17–34). For English translations of selected Tagore poems and short stories, see Radice (1994a; 1994b).
2. It is well known that the poet Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), who died in the front lines of the First World War, had the following lines from Tagore's poem in his pocketbook: 'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.'
3. *Swadesh* means 'our country' in Sanskrit/Bengali.
4. Mention must be made here of crucial books, articles and essays written in the Bengali language by Shantidev Ghose (1953; 1978; 1983; 1999), Protima Devi (1949), Gayatri Chattopadhyay (2001) and Rudraprasad Chakraborty (1995); a few articles in English by Manjusri Chaki Sircar (1988; 1995) and Rina Singha and Reginald Massey (1967); and Krishna Dutta's essay 'Tagore's Dance Dramas' (1986). Also, Sudipta Kaviraj (2006)

has provided a brief but insightful analysis of Tagore's dance dramas, *Sapmocan* and *Shyama*, and the play *Rakta Karabi* in his discussion of emotional modernity.

5. This is substantiated in Kalidas Nag's 1943 article 'Nriyākala O Rabindranath'.
6. There is some confusion about Tagore's involvement in this play since Tagore states that he had never acted in the play. See Rudraprasad Chakraborty (1995).
7. For a detailed and rather humorous account of Tagore's dance experience in England, see 'Letters from Europe', translated by William Radice (Dutta and Robinson 1991: 43).
8. Protima Devi, Tagore's daughter-in-law and wife of Rathindranath Tagore, played an active role in the development of theatre and dance productions in Shantiniketan during Tagore's time. Her book *Nritya* (1949) is an invaluable primary research source, which discusses Tagore's ideas on dance.
9. As stated in Anandhi (2000), a resolution was passed unanimously in the Madras legislature in 1927 to abolish the *devadasi* system. During the same period, conservative members of the Madras Congress such as S. Satyamurthy were organising meetings with *devadasis* to oppose the abolition.
10. Manipuri dance also has a very important pre-Hindu ritualistic component, as indicated by the ritual performances of the Meitei and Meibei dancers. See Sircar (1984).
11. More recently, the Visva Bharati Publications department has published English translations of the *Letters from Java*, edited by Supriya Roy (2010). I have, however, used the earlier 1928 translations gathered during my fieldwork in Shantiniketan, located at Rabindra Bhavan Archives.
12. Kathak dancer Asha Ojha played the male title role of Uttiya in Tagore's production *Parishadh* (1938), which was renamed and re-staged as *Shyama* in 1939 (Ghose 1983).
13. The following syllabus drafts from 1936 (Ghose, 1978: 57–9) and 1941 (ibid: 67–8) offer a clear idea of the pedagogic thrust in the subject area of dance at Visva Bharati University. The differences between the two versions are interesting to note: the 1936 syllabus is not constructed around the gender of the student, whereas the 1941 revision clearly is. Moreover, the 1941 syllabus clearly suggests that the training comprised of teaching pieces from dance repertoires ranging from mythological narratives (*Suvadra-Arjun*, *Putanam*, *Shri Krishna Dance* and so on) to pure dance sequences (*Kalasams*, *Toream*, *Chali* and so on), therefore providing to the students a wide choice of movement vocabulary and a range of material that could be used, when necessary, in an entirely different context – Tagore's poetry/dance dramas.

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## 1936 SYLLABUS AND COURSE

The Sangit Bhavan aims at providing instruction in all the three branches of Indian Music i.e. *Gita* (vocal music), *Vadya* (instrumental music) and *Nritya* (dancing). [...]

### 3. Indian Dancing

The course is for four years.

- 1st year: Elementary classes in Manipuri dancing  
Elementary classes in South Indian dancing
- 2nd year: Manipuri 'Tala' dances  
South Indian 'Tala' dances  
Training in 'Bole' and symbolic 'Mudra'
- 3rd year: South Indian Kathakali and Ceylonese dance  
Rendering of Bengali songs to dances  
Study of poses from old paintings and frescoes
- 4th year: Mimicry and Expression. Composition  
Dramatic Interpretation

## 1941 KATHA-KALI DANCE SYLLABUS

### For Boys

- 1st Year: Ten Exercises and seven steps. (1) Toream (2) Purapar (3) Kalasams – 6.
- 2nd Year: Fifteen exercises and twelve steps. Dance. (1) Peacock dance (2) Hunter's dance (3) Harvest dance.  
Kalasams – 15; Asta Kalasams – and 200 mudras.
- 3rd Year: Dance. (1) Tandav (2) Ekalabya (3) Kamadeva (4) Suvadra-Arjun (5) Flower Dance.
- 4th Year: Dramatic Plots  
700 mudras and all the exercises. Student's own composition.

## KATHA-KALI DANCE SYLLABUS

### For Girls

- 1st Year: Ten exercises and seven steps. Three dances (1) Flower dance (2) Nrityanjali (3) Toream.
- 2nd Year: Fifteen exercises and twelve steps. Three dances (1) Purapar (2) Hunter's dance (3) Harvest dance. About 200 mudras.
- 3rd Year: More exercises and steps. Dances (1) Peacock dance (2) Kalasams-15 (3) Asta Kalasams in Jhaptal (4) Vastra-haran. Three hundred mudras with steps. Expressions with eyes and few dramatic plots.
- 4th Year: (1) Kalasams - 15 (2) Putanam (3) Suvadra-Arjun (4) Sati-Shiva (5) Vasanta dance.  
Three of the main expressions – (1) Sringara (2) Vira (3) Karuna (4) Adbhut (5) Hasya (6) Bhayanak (7) Bibhatsa (8) Rudra and (9) Santo. All the 700 mudras.  
Regular practice of exercises will be compulsory.

## MANIPURI DANCE SYLLABUS

- 1st Year: Dances of 1st Chali, 2nd Chali, 3rd Chali, 4th Chali. Dance of Lalita in Dadra and Trital. Dance of Bishakha in Dadra and Trital.
- 2nd Year: Dance of Lalita in three different Bols and Chautal. Dance of Bishakha in three different Bols of Chotto-Dashkushi and four different Bols of Chautal.
- 3rd Year: Shree Krishna Dance in Dadra and Trital. Shree Radha Dance in Dadra and Trital. Bhangi dance in Loph, Dadra and Jat.
- 4th Year: Khurambapareng in Loph, Dadra and Jat. Shree Krishna Dance in Chautal, Chotto Dashkushi, Shree Radha Dance in Chautal, Chotto Dashkushi. Dance of eight Sakhis in Panchamsawari and Teora.
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14. St Denis apparently declined the offer, but in 1930 she performed to Tagore's poem in a charity fundraiser for Visva Bharati University in New York City.

## 2 Uday Shankar and the Performance of Alterity in Indian Dance

1. From the Rabindra Bhavan Archives, Shantiniketan. The letter has the Bengali calendar date 29 *Ashar*, 1340.
2. Of the acknowledgements of Shankar's contribution to modern dance, see Kapila Vatsyayan's 'Modern Dance: The Contribution of Uday Shankar and His Associates' (2003: 30–1). French dance scholar Anne Decoret's book examines the phenomenon of exotic dance in France in the late nineteenth and early half of the twentieth century, and includes a study of Shankar's works along with (what were then considered as) exotic dances like Flamenco, Tango and dances from Indonesia and Africa. See Decoret-Ahiha (2004: 198–203). Brenscheidt (2011) offers a very interesting and analytical study of Shankar's reception in Europe in his early career (1930s).
3. As Erdman (1996a) has pointed out, Shankar was perceived as an oriental dancer in India during his first tour, and since to Indians 'oriental dance' was understood as dance from Europe composed to oriental themes (such as the dances of American choreographers Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn) Shankar was not considered to be an authentic Indian dancer.
4. Catherine Hall (1998) provides a fine critique of cultural memories of Empire in her essay 'Turning a Blind Eye: Memories of Empire'. Hall questions what happens after the dissolution of Empire and the shift of the global map, and explains how imperial identity and Empire continue to pervade contemporary culture. I use the terms 'performing Empire' and 'performing otherness' in this chapter to read Shankar's complex performance of multiple identities.
5. Correspondence between Shankar and the Elmhirsts, the details of trust deeds and paperwork relating to the administration and finance of the Uday

Shankar India Culture Centre (USICC) are maintained in The Dartington Trust Archives Files (DHTA) LKE India 19/A-D, LKE India 196/A: 1947–1949, LKE India 196/B: 1950–69, LKE India/E ‘USIC Centre News’. Details on this period of Shankar’s life are also found in Amala Shankar’s reminiscences in Bisakha Ray’s (1991) ‘Shankarnama’, a series of articles published in 26 parts in the Bengali magazine *Sananda*; also see Khokar (1983).

6. The common ground shared by Shantiniketan and Dartington has been briefly addressed in the past by writers such as Cox (1977), former principal of Dartington College of Arts and by Dutta and Robinson (1991). Nicholas (2007) also addresses the relationship between Dartington and Shantiniketan. Almora’s other international links with arts institutions have been further noted by Joan Erdman (1996b), who has provided a very detailed account of Shankar’s student Zohra Sehgal’s training in Mary Wigman’s school in Dresden and its influence on Uday Shankar’s curriculum at USICC in *Stages: The Art and Adventures of Zohra Segal*.
7. See Khokar (1983: 42). *Mirror of Gesture* was art historian Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy’s English translation of *Abhinaya Darpana*, which made Shankar realise that Shiva Nataraja was not only a pose, rather ‘the centre of hundreds of movements that moved from one to another and finished with that pose’ (Shankar quoted in Khokar 1983: 42). Coomaraswamy’s translation, titled *The Mirror of Gesture, Being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara*, was first published in 1918.
8. Dartington Trust Archives: DHTA, File LKE India 19/B: 1940–42.
9. It must be added here that one of Almora’s great successes was the staging of Shankar’s *Ramleela*, which drew a spectator count of over 6,000. It was based on the *Ramayana*, hence a mythology-inspired work, but here too he introduced a startling innovative approach rarely seen in Indian dance performance by using a giant white screen and choreographing Javanese shadow-play inspired segments for the dance.
10. By the end of the 1940s, educational institutions such as Tagore’s Shantiniketan in West Bengal and Rukmini Devi Arundale’s Kalakshetra in Tamil Nadu were awarding diplomas to dance, music and art students.
11. Scientist Boshi Sen and his wife Gertrude Emerson’s letters to the Elmhursts complaining of Shankar’s inconsistent plans are evidence of his unpopularity with the Almora Centre board of advisers. Courtesy: Dartington Hall Trust Archives, file LKE India 196/A-1947-49.
12. Using *Kalpana* as a primary source material for historical analysis in this research project proved to be problematic. *Kalpana* was at the centre of a prolonged court battle, as Shankar gave the rights of the film not to his family, but to his last partner in the final years of his life. The difficulty, therefore, lay in accessing an uncut, original version of the film. The following analysis of the film is based on a copy of the original viewed at the Sangeet Natak Akademi library in New Delhi in 2005. A recent digitally restored version of the film (the restoration project was undertaken by Martin Scorsese’s World Cinema Foundation in 2012) is available at the National Film Archives of India.

13. There is a disparity in these numbers between Amala Shankar's account in Bishakha Ray's article 'Shankarnama' for the Bengali magazine *Sananda*, 27 June (1991: 78–9) and Khokar's figures (1983: 115).
14. See Gupta (2006). See also the discussion of Abanindranath Tagore's painting of Bharat Mata in Mitter (1995).
15. Dartington Trust Archive, Shankar Papers: DHTA, LKR India 196/A: 1947–49; 'Uday Shankar's Challenge to Film Industry', in *FilmIndia*, March 1948.
16. The Partition of India occurred at the same time as India gained Independence from British rule in 1947. The Muslim majority region of western India called Punjab became the newly created nation state of Pakistan. The Muslim majority region of eastern India called Bengal also became part of Pakistan, and was called East Pakistan. In 1971, following a war of independence against Pakistan, East Pakistan became the new nation-state of Bangladesh.

### 3 Shanti Bardhan and Dance as Protest

1. Tippera dance originates from the Tippera Hills, which form a part of the present-day northeast Indian state of Tripura. There are several dance forms practiced by the tribes of this regions; for instance the *Goria* dance, the *Hojagiri* by the Reang clan and the *Bihu* of the Chakmas. It is not exactly clear from records which of these dance forms Bardhan trained in.
2. Much of this biographical information is gleaned from an in-person interview with Gul Bardhan in Bhopal-Madhya Pradesh, India, 21 February 2006. Biographical information on Bardhan can also be found in articles published in Bardhan (1992); see, for instance, Mohan Khokar's article on Shanti Bardhan, first published in the *Illustrated Weekly* on 21 September 1969 (Bardhan 1992: 181–5).
3. *Bhajans*: Andhra Pradesh folk dance usually with devotional content; *Kolata*: folk dance with sticks practised both in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. *Burakatha*: popular narrative entertainment in Andhra Pradesh blending theatre, music and dance and accompanied by the *burra*, a tambura worn by the storyteller.
4. As theatre historian Samik Bandyopadhyay suggests, the first staging of *Nabanna* resulted in a run of thirty-five performances at theatres and public gatherings in Bengal, 'often to audiences of seven thousand or more' (1971: 239).
5. Her brother Benoy Roy was an IPTA activist and singer.
6. A direct translation of the phrase is 'Bengal is hungry – Bengali is hungry, father, Bengal is hungry.' The word 'bapu' translates as 'father' but here it is a reference to Gandhi who was popularly called Bapu or 'father of the nation' by many Indians.
7. It is purported that during one of its performances in Bombay, attended by stalwarts from the film industry, the actor-director Prithviraj Kapoor was so moved by the production that he got up on stage, announced 'I must do something for hungry Bengal' and with his cap in hand, begged for donations from the gathered audience. On that single night,

- Kapoor and his colleagues raised Indian Rupees 20,000 (approximately £250 in today's currency, a considerable sum in 1940s India) for famine victims in Bengal (Roy Chowdhury 1999: 13–14).
8. Original newspaper reviews have been sourced from the Bardhans' Little Ballet Troupe archives in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.
  9. This was mentioned by Gul Bardhan in the interview cited above at note 2, although the details of the legal battle are unclear.
  10. The *tukda* and the *toda* are technical terms from the Jaipur school of the north Indian classical Kathak dance form, indicating precise relationships between the footwork and rhythmic patterns.
  11. Das's book *Dyash Theke Deshe (From East to West Bengal, 2010)* recounts her family's migration from East Bengal to West Bengal before the Partition years, and her involvement with the IPTA in Calcutta as a singer (although she also watched dance rehearsals, and once performed with the dancer Panu Pal in Bardhan's *Dance of Death*).

#### 4 Manjusri Chaki Sircar and Feminist New Dance

1. Apart from Kothari, published articles such as those by Indian scholars Venkataraman and Pattabhi Raman (1994) have also been attentive to Chaki Sircar's contribution to dance. Historians from Bengal such as Gayatri Chattopadhyay (2001) and Aishika Chakraborty (2006; 2010) have offered useful overviews of Chaki Sircar's work, while Trevor Montague Wade in her (2001) dissertation locates Chaki Sircar's choreography within a specifically Hindu context. Also, Alessandra Lopez y Royo in her (2003) article on Ranjabati Sircar offers a very interesting analysis of her final choreographic work, which I shall return to in Chapter 5. Esha Niyogi De (2011) perhaps offers the most rigorous and in-depth analysis of Chaki Sircar's feminism; her work is referenced below in this chapter.
2. Poetry reading, music and dance at informal gatherings on full-moon or *puṇnima* nights were a regular feature of Chaki Sircar's life in Calcutta in the 1980s. Known as *Puṇnima Sammelan* (full-moon gatherings), these evenings would include readings and performances by Chaki Sircar's students, friends and colleagues.
3. Sadhana Bose (1914–73) was a dancer and actress who performed for the Bengali stage and cinema. Her modern theatre dance compositions include *Birth of Freedom*, *Bhookh* and *Ajanta* (dates unknown). Historian Gayatri Chattopadhyay (2002: 345; 2001: 88–93) situates Bose's works between Uday Shankar and IPTA.
4. See Chapter 2, note 16 above. Following the India-Pakistan partition in 1947 the Muslim majority East Bengal became a part of Pakistan, and came to be known as East Pakistan. Between March and December 1971, the liberation war, '*Mukti Juddho*' in Bengali, broke out in East Pakistan, leading to its independence from Pakistan and the creation of the autonomous nation-state of Bangladesh.
5. One of Tagore's most allegorical and political (pro-socialist) plays, *Rakta Karabi*, was written in 1926 but never performed during the poet's lifetime,

- apparently due to the unavailability of a suitable female performer to play the part of the central protagonist Nandini. For an English translation of this play, see *Red Oleanders* in Lal (2001) *Rabindranath Tagore: Three Plays*.
6. Martha Graham's company toured South Asia, South East Asia and the Middle East under the International Exchange Programme in 1955–56, which is described as a phase of heightened American cultural diplomacy in the Cold War period. See Prevots (1998).
  7. Trans. *Nrityera Taley Taley (Through the Rhythm of Dance)*, *Jetey Jetey Ekela Pathey (On my Solitary Journey)*, *Kotha Je Udhao (Where has my Mind Vanished)*, *Jharnar Baridhara (Torrents of Rain)*, *Neel Digantey (In the Blue Horizon)*, *Ohey Shundara Mari Mari (O Beautiful One)*. Although there are no contemporary recordings of these choreographies, Chaki Sircar later choreographed several of these songs for Dancers' Guild members, many of which are available on video at Dancers' Guild, Kolkata.
  8. Ramsay Burt (2004) makes a similar claim, stating that contemporary dance in Britain may be seen more as a continuation of the modern rather than the postmodern aesthetic. Sally Banes (1987) also discusses the different phases of postmodern choreography and maintains that 'analytic' postmodern American dance of the 1970s displayed modernist preoccupations and was linked to modernist visual art through the use of minimalist sculpture. Banes describes 1980s 'new dance' as belonging to the 'rebirth of content' phase of postmodern dance.
  9. According to Chaki Sircar's autobiography, she was severely criticised for her use of narrative and her reworking of Tagore's dance drama by a number of her contemporaries at the East-West Dance Encounter: Chandralekha, also a feminist choreographer, Kathak, a choreographer, Kumudini Lakhia and George Lechner of the Max Mueller Goethe Institute.
  10. Priya Srinivasan (2003) has argued that Graham borrowed from Asian practices such as yoga to develop her technique, but did not always acknowledge her sources. According to Srinivasan, Graham discarded Ruth St Denis's overt mimicry of the Orient in favour of a more subtle, concealed appropriation, which became 'the new face of Orientalism couched in the rhetoric of modernity' (Srinivasan 2003: 121).
  11. Her research findings were published in the 1988 book (co-written with P. Rohner) *Women and Children in a Bengali Village*.
  12. I am indebted to Jhuma Basak, one of the Dancers' Guild's lead performers and teachers in the 1980s, for sharing her memories and providing information on these early experiments. Unfortunately, the full names of the male performers are not known to Basak (interviewed on 24 April 2005 in Kolkata, India).
  13. For an overview of the women's movement in India, see Radha Kumar's excellent essay 'From Chipko to Sati: The Contemporary Indian Women's Movement' (1999).
  14. See Tagore (1945) *Rabindra Racanavali*, Vol. 23, pp.135–53 for the prose play and Vol. 25, 161–84 for the dance drama.

15. De (2011) has critiqued the insertion of the saffron-robed ascetic in the production's national television recording. De's reading is that in so doing 'Doordarshan television's multiculturalism capitalises on unifying the spectator's gaze with the misogynist Hindu nationalist's fetish for the saffron-clothed male' (162); however, it must be noted here that both Manjusri and Ranjabati were against this insertion, and described the choreographic change (and the superimposition of the monk's image on Ranjabati's palms in the mirror scene) as a 'gimmick' with which both were frustrated.
16. Some commentators – among them C.V. Chandrashekhara – criticised Chaki Sircar for making her women dancers roll on the floor and raise their legs in a manner that is nowhere to be found in Indian classical dance presentation. See Kothari (1994).
17. Bishnoi, a compound word meaning twenty-nine (*bish* = twenty, *noi* = nine), is a living community in rural north-west India who live by twenty-nine rules, many of which relate to the protection of trees and animals.

## 5 Ranjabati Sircar and the Politics of Identity in Indian Dance

1. 'Di' is short for 'didi', which in the Indian Bengali/Hindi language means 'older sister'.
2. The residency was supported by the Ford Foundation in New Delhi, India. In some ways I attempted to trace and make sense of Sircar's own journey to the American Dance Festival in 1990.
3. See Devi (1949: 34). Chaki Sircar talks about this inspiration, and her allegiance to Tagore in formulating *Navanritya* in rigorous detail in her (1988) article 'Tagore's Dance-Drama in Contemporary Dance Idiom'.
4. Wade (2001: 219–20) has also described the eight groups of movements; my description of certain terms is slightly different from hers.
5. Jhuma Basak was one of the first dancers to work with the Sircars as a Dancer's Guild member and principal performer. She suggests that the Sircars' concern with structuring and codifying movements after the first few years of experimentation perhaps was an attempt to legitimise the *Navanritya* body vis-à-vis the classical dance body.
6. In *Pure Lust*, Daly is suspicious of androgyny as a liberation strategy, citing the example of the 1982 film *Tootsie* in which Dustin Hoffman declares at the end that he is Dorothy, the woman he had been posing as. Daly reads this as a message of 'cannibalistic androgynous maleness. Little Dustin, whom Julie had loved and rejected because she believed he was a woman, incorporates the best of womanhood – like Dionysius and Jesus before him' (1984: 203). While Daly's reading is fascinating, I am proposing that a reversal of this process of subsuming/consuming is perhaps possible, as can be noticed in the Sircars' androgynous dance training.
7. Sircar (in Chakraborty 2008: 49).

8. Even though it is unclear which photographs are being referred to here, Doris M. Srinivasan substantiates Sircar's point in an essay titled 'Royalty's Courtesans and God's Mortal Wives: Keepers of Culture in Pre Colonial India'. Here, Srinivasan states that photographs of *devadasis* taken around 1856 'represent them garbed as erotic curiosities with trapped, vacuous stares facing a heartless lens. These photographs capture the cultivated courtesan in the process of becoming objectified. Not only do the new rulers of India reduce her to the category of prostitute, but local reformers also work to ostracise her and boycott her artistic appearances' (2006: 176).
9. Amrit Srinivasan's (1985) and Matthew Harp Allen's (1997) research was seminal in terms of drawing the reader's attention to the Indian nationalist revival and reform movement which cleansed and reconstructed the classical dance Bharatanatyam. Their views have been countered in recent years by Avanthi Meduri, who states that the disempowerment of the *devadasis* occurred not because of 'Sankritization' (that is, on a dependence on Sanskrit textual sources) in the revival project but due to a split between *tala* (percussive) and *bhava* (expressive) components in Bharatanatyam dance form (see Avanthi Meduri 2005).
10. For a comprehensive list of Sircar's works, see Chakraborty (2008).
11. Biplab Dasgupta (2005: 104) has suggested that '[a]gricultural practices and crop calendars, written down in the form of a collection of poems, such as Khanar Bachan, suggested not only cropping practices, but also advised what to do if, due to climactic or other changes, the crop calendar needed to be revised. Khanar Bachan was handed down from one generation to the next. Khana, the author of these poems, was a woman, and these poems were in use by word of mouth. They reflected a rich and deep understanding of rural ecology, soil and weather conditions, and its impact on different fruits, vegetables and crops.' The relationship between woman and nature/natural cycle can once again be noticed here, but Khana's wisdom was not simply limited to an essentialised female intuitive knowledge of the natural world, but was the outcome of analytical study of climate patterns through the lenses of mathematics and astronomy.
12. For a detailed mapping of South Asian dance in Britain, its community and professional practice, see Grau et al. (2001) SADiB report, funded by the Leverhulme Trust.
13. See Lopez y Royo (2003) for a fuller analysis of this choreographic work.
14. I was among the eight soloists in this production, along with Jonaki Sarkar, Aishika Chakraborty, Arunima Ghosh, Sadhana Hazra, Sanghamitra Sengupta, Sohini Das and Koel Pal. Video documentation of the work is available at the Dancers' Guild.
15. Sircar performed her solo before the Dancers' Guild's production *Kon Nutaneri Dak* in the same evening shows. I was a performing member of the company then, and was amongst the many dancers of the Guild who waited for her to return to Calcutta from Mumbai – which she never did.

## 6 Conclusions

1. Bharucha has said that in the 'institutionalised sectors of cultural practice [...], there was a vacuous retrieval of the past through an "invention of tradition", whereby a "back to the roots" anti-modern/anti-realist/anti-western policy was crudely, yet tenaciously propagated by the state and its accomplices. These proponents of an authentic "Indianness" were, for the most part, neither native visionaries nor ideologues, but cultural bureaucrats who exemplified the "intellectual laziness" that marks the defunct state of the national bourgeoisie' (1993: 33–4). Moreover, Sarkar Muni has suggested that for dancers in pre- and post-Independence India, 'it was safe to be either a folk artiste or a classical dancer and remain within the well-defined structure of patronage. In the effort to categorise the dances into two safe slots, the bureaucracy ignored, either by design or by sheer lack of recognising power and knowledge, the new stream of dance that was happening, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century which was outside the definition of either of the two recognised categories' (2010b: 216).
2. See for instance Priya Srinivasan (2012: 23) who reads the inception of modern dance in North America as a 'collective endeavour' by white American women and the unrecognised labour of Asian dancers who inspired St Denis.
3. Although remarkable for her ability to notice how power operates on bodies in visible and invisible ways, there was little acknowledgement in Grosz's work of how the body as a lived entity and experience is capable of producing its own terms of engagement with structures of power, and therefore of creating new structures or languages. It is interesting, and indeed satisfying, to notice that Grosz's more recent work accepts her previous failure 'to adequately address how living matter, corporeality, allows itself cultural location, gives itself up to cultural inscription, provides a "surface" for cultural writing – that is, how the biological induces the cultural rather than inhibits it, how biological complexity impels the complications and variability of culture itself' (2004: 4).
4. One should particularly look at the work of Ananya Chatterjea, especially her (2004) book *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies Through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha*. Here, Chatterjea repeatedly alerts her readers to 'the tyranny of the West, its aesthetic imperative' (p. xiii) on cultural production and emphasises 'context and cultural specificity in analysis and interpretation of choreography' (p. xiv).
5. See Ketu Katrak (2011) for an overview of many of these dancers' works.

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## **Telephone interviews**

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# Index

- Abbas, K.A., 86, 93  
*abhinaya*, 98  
*Abhinaya Darpana*, 166, 185n7  
abstract expressionism, 8, 14, 180n8  
*Achalayatan* (play), 27  
activism, 108  
    artists, 88, 107, 177, 186n5  
    collectives, 103  
    social, 8  
agency  
    collective, 93, 109, 132  
    postcolonial, 2, 23  
    subaltern, 133  
    women's/female, 25, 31, 39, 103, 108, 115, 119, 128, 137, 151, 180n10  
agent, 22, 48, 118, 120  
Ahmed, Sara, 169–70, 172  
Albright, Ann Cooper, 16  
All India Women's Conference (AIWC), 12  
Allied Forces, 82  
Almora centre, 12, 20, 59–62, 79, 80, 81, 88, 90, 102, 112, 171, 175, 185n11  
alterity, performance of, 51, 57, 59–62, 78  
Anand, Mulk Raj, 93  
Ananda (Buddhist monk), 42–3, 45, 129  
    and Shankar, 71  
*Anandabazar Patrika* (newspaper), 29  
Annadiprasad, 88, 112  
Anti-Fascist Writers and Artists Association, 83  
*apsara*, 145  
*Aranya Amrita* (*The Evergreen Forest*, dance work), 109, 132–5  
Arjuna, 39–41, 45  
  
art  
    modernist, 188, n8  
    movements, 14, 112, 180n8  
    visual arts, 7, 13, 14, 17  
Art Film Syndicate of Bengal, 32  
Arundale, Rukmini Devi, 6, 166, 178n1, 185n10  
Asian Relations Conference, 94  
Azmi, Kaifi, 86  
  
Bagchi, Jasodhara, 125  
Bahurupi (theatre group), 112  
*bai naach*, 25, 35  
Baij, Ramkinkar, 14  
Balasaraswati, 63, 117, 166, 178n1  
Balinese dance, 33–8  
Ballets Russes, 97  
Bandyopadhyay, Samik, 83, 94, 186n4  
Bangiya Nari Samaj, 47  
Bangladesh  
    Bengali communities, 21: Comilla, 80; Dhaka and provinces, 30; Pabna, 109; Sylhet, 28  
    migration from 113  
    Partition, 186n16, 187n4  
Bardhan, Gul, 92, 96–7, 99, 104–5, 107, 175–6, 186n2  
Bardhan, Shanti, 1, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 79–107, 134, 167, 168, 171, 172, 173, 175, 176, 180n8, 186n1n2, 187n8n11  
Barr, Margaret, 59, 101–2  
Baryshnikov, Mikhail, 117  
Basak, Jhuma, 120, 136, 144, 188n12, 189n5  
*Basanta* (*Spring*, play), 28–9  
Bausch, Pina, 147  
Benaras, 72–3

- Bengal, 10–11  
 cinema, 112–13  
 dance drama, 12, 17, 20, 21–49,  
 108–37, 147–8, 167, 168, 173–5,  
 181n4, 182n13, 188n9, 188n14  
 identity/culture, 10–11, 12–15,  
 21–49, 108–37  
 literature/literary works, 10, 13,  
 24, 110, 112, 143  
 Renaissance, 13, 24, 26  
 school of modern art, 10  
 vernacular/language, 10, 19, 181n16  
 women, 10, 12, 26, 29, 48, 110–11,  
 124, 136
- Benham, Mar, 157
- Bethune School, 27
- Bhabha, Homi, 18, 19, 58, 168
- bhadramahila*, 26
- Bhajans*, 86, 186n3
- Bharat Mata* (Mother India), 11, 14,  
 75, 186n14
- Bharatanatyam, 5, 6, 8, 31, 36, 44,  
 55, 56, 62, 63, 112, 121, 122,  
 123, 130, 132, 141, 142, 143,  
 144, 145, 148, 149, 150, 155,  
 162, 163, 176, 178n1, 191n9
- Bharucha, Rustom, 2, 79–80, 94,  
 108, 166, 180n9, 190n1
- Bhattacharya, Bijan, 83, 87, 93
- Bhattacharya, Satyajiban, 88
- bhava nritya*, 114
- Bhookha Hai Bengal (Hungry Bengal/Voice  
 of Bengal)*, dance work, 81, 88–9
- Bijoli* (newspaper), 29
- Bishnoi, 133, 189n17
- Biswas, Debabrata, 113–14, 140
- Bollywood, 3
- 'Bong', 12–13
- borders  
 definition, 18–19  
 international, 17, 22, 102, 119  
 national/regional, 4, 15, 93, 115,  
 171, 172, 173, 177
- Bose, Gauri, 31–2
- Bose, Nandalal, 14, 31
- Bose, Sadhana, 110, 187n3
- Bose, Shanti, 175
- Bose, Subhas Chandra, 44
- Bose, Sugata, 11, 33, 181n13
- Brah, Avtar, 18
- Brahmo Samaj, 22
- Brij Lila* (dance work), 97
- Brikhoropon* (tree-planting  
 ceremony), 30
- Broadway, 55
- brotochaari*, 25
- Brown, Trisha, 117, 142
- Buddha, 31, 43–5
- Buddhism, 31  
 Buddhist nun, 31  
 monk, 32, 43, 129  
 mythology, 38  
 text, 42, 44, 168  
 legends, 43, 168
- Burman, Khagendranath, 141
- Burrakatha*, 86, 186n3
- Burt, Ramsay, 147, 160, 188n8
- Cassandra* (dance work), 139, 155–8,  
 161, 164
- Cave of the Heart* (dance work), 113,  
 116, 134
- celibacy, 39–40, 43
- Chaki Sircar, Manjusri, 1, 5, 9, 11,  
 12, 13, 18, 20, 108–37, 138,  
 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144,  
 145, 151, 153, 157, 167, 168,  
 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 178n1,  
 180n10, 181n4, 187n1n2, 188n7,  
 188n9, 189n16, 189n3n5n6  
*see also* Sircar, Ranjabati
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 3
- Chambers, Iain, 169
- chandal*, 43, 126, 129–31
- Chandalika* (dance drama), 24, 38–9,  
 42–4, 49, 126, 128, 148
- Chandralekha (dancer/  
 choreographer), 8, 108, 123,  
 165, 179n5, 180n9n10, 188n9,  
 191n4
- Chandralekha* (film), 71, 77
- Chatterjee, Partha, 9–11, 22, 24, 105

- Chattopadhyay, Bankim Chandra, 24  
 Chattopadhyay, Harindranath, 86  
 Chattopadhyay, Kamaladevi, 94  
 Chattopadhyay, Ramananda, 27  
 Chekhov, Michael, 60, 65–7  
 Chekhov Theatre Studio, 60  
 ‘chemical synthesis’, 136, 143  
 Chhau, 132, 135, 143–4, 146, 155  
*Chimamul (The Uprooted, film)*, 113  
 Chipko movement, 132–3, 188n13  
 Chitra Theatre, 32  
*Chitrangada* (dance drama), 24, 38, 39–42, 43, 45, 48, 123, 143, 144  
 Chittaprasad, 86, 91  
 chorus, 118, 131–2  
 Chowdhury, Indira, 10  
 Chowdhury, Khaled, 112  
 Chowdhury, Salil, 86  
 cinema, 68–9  
     Indian cinema, 76–7  
     realism in, 112–13  
     world cinema, 77, 112, 175, 185n12  
 citationality, 144, 146  
 Civil Disobedience Movement, 82  
 Cixous, Hélène, 150  
 class 9, 14, 80, 101, 102, 103, 104, 168, 173  
     middle-class, 12, 26, 48, 107, 128, 140  
 Cold War, 101, 188n6  
 Collective Dance Theatre, 120, 141  
 collectives (dance), 12, 93, 103, 117, 120, 133, 171  
*Colliery* (dance work), 101  
 colonialism, 4, 7, 12, 24, 65, 112, 119, 120, 166, 170  
     anti-colonialism, 1, 3, 5, 10, 11, 14, 22, 37, 51, 70, 80, 81  
     colonisation, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 57, 83, 104, 107, 120, 167, 170, 172  
     see also postcolonialism  
 Communist International, 82  
 Communist Party of India, 80–2, 86  
*Conditions of a Narrative: Cassandra* (1984), 156  
 Coomaraswamy, Ananda Kentish, 14, 63, 185n7  
 Coorlawala, Uttara Asha, 2, 157  
 courtesan/s, 25–6, 35–6, 44–5, 48, 190n8  
 creative dance, 8, 141–2  
 Cunningham, Merce, 102, 117, 147  
  
*Dalil (Document, film)*, 113  
 Daly, Ann, 16, 122  
 Daly, Mary, 146, 189n6  
 dance ballets, 79  
 dance classes, 64–5, 124, 142  
 Dance Drama Group (Margaret Barr), 101  
 dance dramas, 12, 17, 20, 147, 148, 167, 168, 173, 174, 175, 181n4, 182n13, 188n9n14, 189n3  
     IPTA, 79–107  
     Kathakali, 178n1  
     Manjusri Chaki Sircar, 108–37  
     Margaret Barr, 101  
     Tagore, 21–49  
*Dance of Death*, 89, 187n11  
 Dancers’ Guild, 19, 121, 126, 138, 141–3, 148, 164, 171, 176, 179, 188, 190  
 Dartington Hall, 17, 49, 59–61, 65–6, 101, 171, 175, 181, 185  
 Das, Sima, 107, 176, 187  
 Dasgupta, Abani, 88, 97  
 Dasgupta, Sushil, 88  
 Dashrathlal, 88, 97  
 de Moor, Teda, 101  
 De Sica, Vittorio, 112  
*Deaths and Entrances*, 116  
 Denishawn Dance Company, 115  
 Derrida, Jacques, 146  
*devadasi/s*, 31, 117, 121–3, 149, 178n1, 182n9, 190n9  
 Devi, Protima, 30–1, 38–9, 49, 143, 181n4, 182n8  
 Devi, Sita, 27  
*Dharti Ke Lal* (film), 93  
 Dhawan, Prem, 88–9

- diaspora, 16, 18, 21, 58, 140, 159, 169, 171  
 Bengali, 21  
 Indian/South Asian, 4, 138  
 Dina Sanghvi (Pathak), 88–9, 104–5  
*Discovery of India* (dance work), 95–6  
 dramaturgy, 63–4  
*drambalets*, 87, 100  
 Dutt, Usha, 88  
 Dutt, Utpal, 86  
 Dutta, Ruby, 88–9, 105
- East Bengal, migration from, 110–11, 187n4  
 East-West Dance Encounter, 8, 119, 180n10, 188n9  
 ecology, 132, 134, 190  
 education  
 dance/arts in, 17, 20, 26, 29, 30, 49, 69, 85, 179n4  
 educational institution/s, 10, 20, 24, 26, 29–30, 36, 37, 85, 97, 112, 185n10  
 educationists, 23, 25  
 experiment/s, 20, 24, 61, 66, 75  
 system/s, 17, 30, 75  
 effeminacy, 57  
 Eisenstadt, Katie, 101  
 Elmhirst, Dorothy and Leonard, 17, 28, 49, 59–61, 64, 74, 171, 181n15, 184n5, 185n11  
 embodiment, 20, 37, 41, 48, 65, 80, 88, 102, 109, 114, 126, 127, 131, 132, 142, 146, 149  
 Emerson, Gertrude, 64, 185n11  
 Empire, 1, 3, 9, 12, 16, 17, 22, 24, 56–7, 166–7, 169, 171–2, 184n4  
 Empire Theatre, 32, 39  
 New Empire Theatre, 113, 115  
 English social dancing, 27  
 European opera, 27  
 exoticism, 51, 55, 56, 58, 115, 120, 184n2  
 expressionism, 8, 14, 117, 180n8
- Fable for La Gran Sabana* (dance work), 139, 151–3, 157, 161  
 fable/s, 98, 100, 139 151–3, 157, 161  
 famine of Bengal, 73, 81, 83, 87–9, 91, 186n7  
 fascism, 83–4, 124  
 Fauvism, 14  
 female desire, 151  
 female reproduction, 153  
 female sexuality, 29, 103, 130, 145, 151  
 feminism, 1, 12, 47, 106, 108, 139, 143, 146, 147, 151, 187n1  
 embodying feminism, 108–37  
 feminist analysis of texts, 21–49, 108–37, 138–65  
 feminist ecology, 134–6  
 Indian, 168  
 Marxist, 103  
 New Dance, 108–37, 138–65  
 postcolonial, 136–7  
 scholars and scholarship, 103, 122, 125, 127, 132, 168  
 Third World, 104  
*see also* proto-feminism  
 fetish/fetishism, 170, 189n15  
 First International Creators' Encounter Venezuela, 151  
*Flames of Paris, The* (drama ballet production), 87  
 Fokine, Mikhail, 97  
 folk performance, 6, 26, 73, 75, 111, 136, 166, 186n3  
 appropriation of, 106–7  
 Indian government patronage of, 191n1  
 IPTA, 79–107  
 Forbes, Geraldine, 105–6  
 Foster, Susan Leigh, 16  
*Fountain of Bakhchisarai, The* (drama ballet production), 87  
 freedom in movement and dance, 34, 42, 50, 121, 132, 142, 145, 146  
 freedom as theme in dance, 67, 84  
 freedom struggle in India, 12, 15, 94  
 Friends of the Soviet Union, 83  
 fusion, 4

- 'gamak', 32–3  
*gamelan*, 35  
 Gandhi, M.K., 12, 23, 40, 43–4, 82, 95, 186n6  
 Gandhi, Shanta 88  
 Gangadharan, 88  
*Gangavataran* (dance work), 139, 153–4, 161, 164  
 Ganguli, Prabhat, 86, 88, 175  
*Gardener, The*, 23  
*geeti-natya*, 27  
 Gemini Studios, Madras (Chennai) 69, 71  
 gender 2, 9, 25, 41, 47, 48, 79, 80, 100, 103, 104, 105, 110, 118, 122, 123, 126, 139, 147, 150, 155, 161, 165, 167, 168, 173, 182n13  
 gendered project of British imperialism, 12, 167  
 gendered social relations and spaces, 12, 22, 103, 107, 111, 167  
 gendered stage and movement training systems, 29, 106, 132, 138–65  
 gestures in dance, 65, 67, 129  
 hand, 33, 35, 38, 63, 98, 142, 155  
 in movement, 35, 37, 38, 49, 96, 174  
 Ghanshyam, 88  
*Ghare Baire (Home and the World)*, 24, 47–8  
 Ghatak, Ritwik, 86, 113  
 Ghose, Shantidev, 27–8, 37, 181n4  
 Ghosh, Haren, 81  
 Ghosh, Nemaï, 113  
 Gilroy, Paul, 169  
*Gitanjali*, 23  
 Golden Age of Indian Cinema, 76–7  
 Graff, Ellen, 101–2  
 Graham, Geordie, 102  
 Graham, Martha, 102, 113, 115–19, 132, 134, 157, 176, 188n6n10  
 Guha-Thakurta, Tapati, 14, 180n8  
 Hall, Stuart, 169  
 Harijans, 43  
 Havell, E.B., 14  
*Heretic, The* (dance work), 118  
 Hindu Mela, 11  
 Hinduism, 17, 33  
 gods and goddesses, 153  
 Mela, 11  
 narratives/texts, 38, 134, 153, 168  
 nationalism, 40, 180n11, 188n15  
 patriarchy/patriarchal systems, 31, 43, 121–2, 129  
 religion, 33, 187n1  
 religious reform movements, 22–3, 178n1  
 spirit, 55  
 warriors, 39–40  
 Hollywood, 55, 77  
 Horst, Louis, 116  
 hybridity, 13, 22, 25, 48, 58, 78, 171, 178n1  
 immigrant, 62, 110, 113, 161  
 settlements, 110  
 imperialism, 3, 17, 84, 87, 92, 128, 173, 180–1n14  
 anti-imperialism, 82, 95  
 British, 12, 82, 83, 92  
 improvisation, 28, 63–6, 142, 175  
 contact improvisation, 142  
 Independence (Indian), 59, 62, 71, 75, 77, 95, 97, 106, 108, 110, 124, 166, 178n1, 186n16  
 post-Independence, 16, 20, 62, 87–8, 110, 138, 144, 168, 191n1  
 pre-Independence, 62, 191n1  
 India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), 5  
*India Immortal* (dance work), 92–3  
 India Renaissance Artists, 96  
 Indian classical dance, 2, 4–8, 38–9, 52, 55, 58–9, 62–5, 77, 86, 93, 98, 108, 112, 114–15, 118, 120–3, 126, 130, 136–7, 138, 141–50, 160, 166, 167, 176, 178–9n1, 179n3, 179n5, 179n7, 180n9, 187n10, 189n16, 189n5, 190n9, 191n1

- reconstruction of, 2, 4, 7, 31, 63,  
 93, 166, 178n1  
 semi-classical, 126, 136  
 Indian contemporary dance, 1, 2, 4,  
 5, 8, 9, 108, 121, 136, 143, 147,  
 148, 150, 162, 170, 174, 176,  
 179n5n7, 189n3  
 in Britain, 118, 143, 188n8  
 Indian modern dance  
 authenticity, 55, 56, 78, 85, 172  
 definition, 5–9  
 inauthenticity, 5, 48, 55, 56, 58,  
 177  
 Indian National Congress, 12  
 Indian National Theatre (INT), 80,  
 94, 96, 100  
 Indian People's Theatre Association  
 (IPTA), 8, 9, 12, 20, 79–107,  
 108, 112, 113, 114, 121, 124,  
 167, 171, 174, 176, 180n8,  
 186n5, 187n11, 187n3  
 'Call of the Drum', 90–1  
 Central Cultural Squad, 12, 81,  
 89–90, 92–4, 99, 167, 171  
 Indology, 14  
 Indrapuri Studios, 71  
 inner domain of culture, 9–11, 24,  
 47, 105–6  
 Irigaray, Luce, 152  
 Iyer, E. Krishna, 52, 178n1  
  
 Jain, Nemichand, 88  
 Jain, Rekha, 88–9  
 Jalal, Ayesha, 11, 181n13  
 Jamuna (dancer), 42  
 Japanese dance, 27, 36  
*jatra*, 25, 111  
 Javanese dance, 33–7, 185n9  
 Jayawardena, Kumari, 168  
 Jeyasingh, Shobana, 163  
 Jhaveri, Guniyal, 88  
 Jooss, Kurt, 49, 60, 67  
 Jorasanko house, 26, 31  
 Joshi, P.C., 81, 88, 90  
 Judson Dance Theatre, 117, 120  
*Jwala (Flame, film)*, 113  
  
 Kalaripayattu, 132, 162,  
 Kalighat painters, 13  
*Kalpana (film)*, 20, 67–78, 112,  
 147, 168, 171, 175, 180n8,  
 185n12  
 Kandinsky, Wassily, 117  
 Kapoor, Prithviraj, 93, 186n7  
 Kar, Surendranath, 31  
 Kartha, Appuni, 88, 89, 92, 97  
 Kathak, 36, 112, 130, 162, 163, 176,  
 177, 178n1, 182n12, 187n10,  
 188n9  
 Kathakali, 5, 37–8, 40, 62, 63, 64,  
 71, 112, 132, 141, 144, 155,  
 178n1, 183n13  
 Kerala Kalamandalam, 37  
 Khan, Alauddin, 64  
 Khana, 155, 190n11  
*khemta*, 25  
 Khokar, Mohan, 2, 50, 51–2, 178n1,  
 184n5, 185n7  
 Ki Hadjar Dewantara, 36  
*Kolata (dance work)*, 86, 186n3  
*Komal Gandhar (film)*, 113  
*Krauncha Katha (Ballad of the Cranes,*  
*dance work)*, 109, 134–6  
 Kripalini, Nandita, 42, 44  
*Krishna and Rhada (dance work)*, 50  
 Kuchipudi, 5, 178n1  
 Kumaramangalam, Kalyani, 88  
 Kurosawa, Akira, 112, 113  
 Kutty, Govindan, 141  
  
*Labour and Machinery (dance work),*  
 67, 73–4, 92  
 Lahiri, Shanu, 120  
*Lamentation (dance work)*, 134  
 Lang, Fritz, 74, 197  
*Metropolis (film)*, 74  
 Lechner, George, 8, 188n9  
 Leeder, Sigurd, 60  
 leftist dance, 80, 100–3  
 Lenin, 82  
*Letters from Java*, 34–6, 182n11  
 liberal thought/liberalism (western),  
 3, 103, 140

- Limon, Jose (*The Winged*, dance work), 117
- Little Ballet Troupe (LBT), 80, 97, 99, 100, 175, 187n8
- Madiga* (dance work), 87
- Madras Music Academy, 55
- Mahabharata*, 34, 38, 39
- male gaze, 121, 122
- Manipuri, 28, 31, 32–3, 37–8, 63–4, 70, 75, 81, 89, 112, 132, 142–4, 178n1, 182n10, 182–4n13
- Manmayi* (play), 27
- Manning, Susan, 101, 102
- Martin, John, 54–5, 116
- Martin, Randy, 16, 127
- Marxism, 20, 80, 82, 100, 102–6
- Mayar Khela* (musical play), 27
- McCarthy era, 101
- Medicine Man* (dance work), 87
- Meerut Conspiracy, 82
- Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Cloud Capped Star*, film), 113
- memory in Indian modern dance  
 technique, 63–7  
 bodily, 66, 131, 176  
 individual/personal  
 autobiographical, 36, 51, 65, 66, 67, 73, 78, 110  
 national/cultural/historical, 32, 51, 63, 65, 66, 70, 73, 159, 160, 174
- migration  
 in India, 83, 108, 110, 169  
 international, 140–1, 169, 171
- Mirror of Gesture*, 63, 185n7
- Mitra, Shambhu, 86, 88
- Mitra, Shaoli, 125
- Mitra, Subrata, 112
- Mitra, Tripti, 112
- Mitter, Partha, 14, 59, 180n8, 186n14
- Modern Review* (journal), 27
- modern dance  
 Euro-American postmodern  
 dance, 115–21, 150, 188n8  
 modernist, 4, 8, 13, 14, 22, 68, 176, 188n8  
 North American and British, 4, 100–2, 115–21, 191n2  
 political, 102  
*see also* Indian modern dance  
 modernity 3, 4, 11, 15, 16, 18, 23, 51, 78, 100, 125, 147, 168, 169, 170, 171, 174  
 in dance, 2, 3, 4, 8, 18, 22, 75, 80, 100, 101, 102, 109, 120, 148, 164, 166, 170, 177, 179n3, 188n10  
 emotional, 181n4  
 'strange', 174
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, 104, 168
- Mohiniattam, 5, 179
- monism/monistic thinking, 3
- Morris, Mark, 118
- Mothers* (dance work), 101
- mudra*, 38, 98, 182–3n13
- Mukherjee, Radhikanath, 39
- Mukherji, Benode Behari, 14
- multiculturalism, 139, 163  
 British, 158–9, 162–3  
 Indian television's  
 multiculturalism, 189n15
- Mulvey, Laura, 122
- mythology, 49, 100, 109, 151, 153, 157, 168  
 Buddhist, 38, 168  
 Greek, 155, 157  
 Hindu, 38, 40, 56, 134, 145, 153, 168, 185n9
- naba nari* (new woman), 24, 26
- Nabamma* (play), 87, 186n4
- Nagarik* (*The Citizen* film), 113
- Nagesh, 88, 89
- Nair, Kelu 37, 41
- Nambudiri, Shankaran, 64
- Nandy, Ashis, 22, 23, 31, 45
- Nandy, Bhupati, 88
- Nastaneer* (*The Broken Nest*), 24
- Nataraj* (play), 32
- Nathabati-Anathabat* (play), 125

- nation 4, 7, 9, 14, 48, 62, 75, 76, 80, 91, 93, 95, 96, 106, 108, 121, 166, 167, 171, 173, 181n13, 186n16, 186n6, 187n4
- National Council for Women in India (NCWI), 12
- National South Asian Youth Dance Company (YUVA)
- nationalism,  
Hindu, 40  
Indian cultural, 1, 4, 22, 50, 51, 58, 59, 72, 80, 84, 178n1  
twin domains, 9–12, 105–6  
*see also Swadeshi*
- Nationalism* (1917), 24, 48
- Natir Puja* (poem/performance), 30–2, 36
- Natyashastra*, 122, 166
- 'nautch girls', 178  
Anti-Nautch Campaign, 178n1  
*sadir nautch*, 63
- Navanritya (New Dance), 2, 20, 108–37, 138–65, 167, 176, 189n3, 189n5  
methodology, 141–6
- Nazi, 82, 83, 87
- Negro Speaks of Tivers, The* (dance work), 101
- Nehru, Jawaharlal, 44, 95
- neo-classical dance, 6
- neo-realism (cinema), 112
- New Dance (Britain and US), 118, 143
- New Labour (Britain), 139, 158, 159, 161–3
- New Paltz, 117, 139, 140, 157
- New Theatre Studio, 32
- New Theatres Limited, 32
- New York 102, 115, 117, 120
- Nibedita (dancer), 41–2
- Nigeria, 115, 139
- Night Journey* (dance work), 116
- Nikolais, Alwin, 117
- Noguchi, Isamo, 116
- Nolde, Emile, 117
- non-cooperation movement, 23
- North American modern dance and postmodern dance, 115–21  
*see also modern dance*
- Nritta Rashe Chitta Mamo*, 109
- Nrityakatha Mirabai* (dance work), 120
- Oblique* (dance work), 139, 161–3
- Odissi, 130, 132, 135, 144, 155, 178n1
- Orient, 13, 23, 50, 52, 76, 181n14, 188n10  
dance and dancers, 50, 51 56, 115, 184n3  
Orientalism, 56, 77, 102, 181n14, 188n10  
Orientalist, 14, 18, 173, 181n14
- outer domain of culture, 10, 24, 47, 105, 106
- Pal, Panu, 88, 187
- Panchatantra* (dance work), 97, 98–100
- Pant, Sumitranandan, 70, 74, 81, 86
- Parekh, Bhikhu, 3–4
- Parishadh* (poem/dance production), 36, 44, 182n12
- Partition, Bengal, 23, 107, 110, 111, 113, 187n4  
India–Pakistan, 77, 96, 108, 110, 124, 186n16, 187n11  
post-Partition, 98, 109–11
- Pather Panchali* (film), 112
- patriarchy, 12, 24, 31, 109, 122, 128, 132, 154, 155, 168
- Pavlova, Anna, 50, 56
- Pearson, William, 27, 28
- pedagogy (dance), 28, 38, 68, 69, 167, 174  
pedagogic(al), 17, 22, 28, 33, 138, 142, 157, 175, 176, 182n13  
pedagogue, 22, 25, 69
- Petrouchka, 97
- Phalguni* (play), 28
- Pillai, Kandappa, 63
- Pinaki, 88

- postcolonialism, 2, 3, 5, 18, 23, 119, 166, 169, 171, 172, 181n13  
 and feminism, 136, 137  
 theory/studies/history, 9, 16, 20, 22, 105, 106, 169, 171, 176, 181n14  
*Prabashi* (journal), 27  
 Pradhan, Sudhi, 84, 85, 87  
 Presidency College, Calcutta, 112, 113  
 Prickett, Stacey, 101–2  
 Primus, Pearl, 101  
 Proletkult, 85  
 protest, dancing bodies in, 7, 9, 12, 20, 79–107, 131, 134, 157, 167, 173, 174, 176  
     social protest, 133  
 proto-feminism, 47, 123, 167  
 psychoanalysis, Freudian and Jungian, 116  
 psychophysical actor training techniques, 65  
*Pujarini* (poem), 30  
 puppets, in dance, 74, 98, 168  
     in Indian folk theatre, 97  
     in Russian theatre, 85, 97  
*Puranic* legends, 34, 134  
     *Puranas*, 134  
 purity, 6, 7, 25, 35, 36, 48, 56, 58, 92, 125, 166, 173  
     impurity, 4, 6, 9, 20, 48, 51, 56, 121, 131, 173, 177  
*Purnabasanta* (play), 27  
  
 Quit India Movement, 95  
  
*Rabindra Nritya/Rabindrik Nritya* (dance), 21, 114, 123  
 race, 9, 80, 87, 101, 102, 104, 139, 159, 161, 163, 168, 173  
     multi-racialism, 18  
     racialism, 159, 169  
*raek* shows, 85  
*raibeshe*, 25  
 Rainer, Yvonne, 117  
*Rainforest* (dance work), 117  
*Raja* (*King of the Dark Chamber*, play), 27  
  
 Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder, 125, 201  
*Rakta Karabi* (*Red Oleanders*, play), 112, 181n4, 187n5  
*Ramayana*, epic, 34, 38, 97, 134, 185n9  
     dance production, 97, 98, 168  
 Ranidhar Ridge, 64  
*Rashomon* (film), 113  
 Ray, Piali, 161  
 Ray, Satyajit, 112, 113, 114  
 Red Flag Hall, 90  
 Red Petrushka collective, 97  
 Reddy, 88  
 reform, social, 9, 23  
     and revival of Indian dance, 36, 149, 190n9  
 refugee women, 110–11  
*Rhythm of Life* (dance work), 67, 92  
*Roomal* (*Handkerchief*, dance work), 97  
 Rowbotham, Sheila, 103  
 Roy Chowdhury, Reba, 88–91, 94, 104, 105, 107, 186n7  
 Roy, Benoy, 88, 186n5  
 Roy, Jaya, 88  
 Roy, Rammohun, 23  
*Rudra Madhur* (dance work), 120  
 Russian Agitprop movement, 85, 97, 100  
  
*Sabala* (dance work), 120  
     Tagore's poem, 123  
*sadir*, 36, 63, 149, 178n1  
 Sahni, Balraj, 86, 100  
 Sakhi Samiti, 27  
 Salt Lake City (Calcutta, India), 121, 142  
 Sampad, 161–2  
 Sangeet Natak Akademi, 4, 8, 179n3, 185n12  
*Sanjeevani* (newspaper), 29  
*Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, 42  
     language, 134, 181n3  
     Sanskrit performance texts, 25, 27, 38, 64, 190n9  
*Sanyasi* (dance work), 87  
 Sarabhai, Mallika, 108, 176

- Sarabhai, Mrinalini, 39, 41, 42, 44, 45, 177
- Sarkar Munsif, Urmimala, 2, 5, 6, 8, 25, 51, 56, 66, 70, 105, 166, 191n1
- Sarkar, Priti, 88, 89
- Sarkar, Sumit, 47, 167
- secularism, 7, 33  
subaltern, 168
- Sehgal, Zohra, 175, 185n6
- self-rule, 3
- semiotics, 148, 149, 172
- Sen, Boshi, 64, 185n11
- Sen, Mrinal, 86
- Sen, Tapas, 112
- sexuality, 9, 12, 103, 104, 149, 165, 173  
women's sexuality, 29, 48, 103, 126, 130, 145, 146, 151, 152
- Shakespeare, William, 35, 175
- Shankar, Amala, 70, 71, 175, 184n5, 186n13
- Shankar, Debendra, 96
- Shankar, Rajendra, 96
- Shankar, Ravi, 86, 92, 94, 96
- Shankar, Sachin, 88, 94
- Shankar, Uday, 1, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 50–78, 79, 80, 81, 86, 88, 90, 92, 94, 97, 99, 101, 102, 110, 112, 121, 124, 134, 147, 153, 167, 168, 171–6, 179n7, 180n8, 184n2n3n4n5, 185n6n7n9n11n12, 186n15, 187n3
- Shantiniketan, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21–49, 50, 61, 66, 69, 114, 123–4, 143, 171, 175, 177, 181n15, 182n8, 182n11, 184n1, 185n6n10  
*Shantiniketan* (newsletter), 28
- Sharma, Bharat, 5, 176, 179n4
- Sharma, Narendra, 64, 65, 86, 88, 94, 175, 176, 179n4
- Shawn, Ted, 115, 184n3
- She Said...*(dance work), 164
- Shirali, Vishnudas, 64, 70
- Shishir* (newspaper), 29
- Shyama* (dance drama), 36, 38, 44–6, 48, 181n4, 182n12
- sign (the body as), 20, 167, 172–4
- Simkie, 97
- Simtola, 64
- Singh, Amobi, 64, 70, 81
- Singh, Buddhimantra, 28
- Singh, Nabakumar, 31, 32
- Sircar, Ranjabati, 1, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18, 20, 115, 119, 121, 125, 127, 130, 131, 136, 138–65, 167, 168, 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 187n1, 189n2, 189n5, 189n6, 189n7, 190n8n10n15  
*see also* Chaki Sircar, Manjusri
- Sister Nivedita, 14
- social realism, 8, 180n8
- Southeast Asian dance, 27, 33  
*see also* Balinese dance; Javanese dance
- Soviet Union, 82, 83, 87, 97
- Spirit of India* (dance work), 90–2
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 106
- Sriniketan, 29, 181n15
- St Denis, Ruth, 49, 63, 115, 184n14, 184n3, 188n10
- Stanislavski, Constantin, 65
- Straight, Beatrice, 60, 68
- Strange Fruit* (dance work), 101
- Streer Patra* (*The Wife's Letter*, short story), 47–8
- subaltern, 26, 107, 133, 134, 168
- Subarnarekha* (film), 113
- subjects, colonial and postcolonial, 1, 17, 48, 83, 171, 172  
women as subjects, 127, 132, 151, 165, 167, 168
- subjectivity, 41, 118, 119, 122, 123, 125, 127, 139, 148, 168
- Sundarayya, Leela, 88
- Swadeshi* movement, 11, 23, 82, 180n11  
ideology, 14  
nationalism, 14, 23, 47

- Tagore, Abanindranath, 14, 29, 185n14
- Tagore, Debendranath, 22, 23
- Tagore, Dinendranath, 30
- Tagore, Dwarkanath, 22
- Tagore, Dwijendranath, 30
- Tagore, Jyotirindranath, 27
- Tagore, Rabindranath, 1, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21–49, 50, 52, 61, 66, 69, 112, 113, 114, 118, 121, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 129, 132, 134, 136, 140, 143, 147, 148, 153, 167, 168, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 181n15, 181n1, 181n2, 181n4, 182n6n7n8n12n13, 184n14, 185n10, 187n5, 188n9, 188n14, 189n3
- Nobel Prize for Literature, 23
- Taman Siswa, 36, 37
- Tanvir, Habib, 86
- Tashkent Military School, Russia, 82
- Taylor, Paul, 117
- Thangk-ta, 144
- Tharp, Twyla, 118
- third domain (of nationalism), 106
- Thirsting River* (dance work), 159–60
- Time Out/Dance Umbrella award, 161
- Tomari Matir Kanya* (*Daughter of the Earth*, dance work), 109, 126–32
- transformation, 2, 80, 123, 126, 150, 172, 174, 176
- social transformation, 101, 103, 110 177
- transgression, 9, 18, 31, 46
- translation (performance/dance as), 51–2, 56
- transnationalism, 1, 3, 16–18, 20, 49, 58, 62, 72, 78, 139, 140, 167, 169–72
- Uday Shankar India Culture Centre (USICC), 59, 60, 62, 64, 68, 74, 175, 184n5, 185n6
- United National Front, 82
- universalist (view of progress), 3
- universalism, 11, 33
- University College London, 27
- untouchables, 43, 129
- see also *chandal*
- Vaishnavism, 33, 178n1
- Vallathol, 37, 178n1
- Valmiki, 134
- Valmiki Pratibha* (play), 26
- Vasan, S.S., 71, 77
- Vatsyayan, Kapila, 2, 6, 79, 98, 178n1, 179n6, 179–80n7, 184n2
- Visva Bharati Quarterly*, 34
- Visva Bharati University, 24, 37, 49, 61, 66, 182n13, 184n14
- Vivekananda, 40
- Wade, Trevor Montague, 120, 126, 176, 187n1, 189n4
- Werbner, Pnina, 16, 140
- West Bengal, 17, 21, 110–11, 120, 175, 185n10
- migration to, 187n11
- western dance, 3, 4, 119
- Wigman, Mary, 117, 185n6
- Wittig, Monique, 152
- Wolf, Christa, 156
- woman question, the, 1, 47, 103, 105
- Women's India Association (WIA), 12
- women's rights and movement, 9, 47, 103, 109, 125, 143, 188n13
- Workers Dance League, 101
- World Wars (First and Second), 8, 59, 68, 71, 82, 124, 171, 181n2
- X6 Collective, 118
- Yoga, 136, 142, 143, 144, 145, 188n10
- Yugasandhi* (dance work), 110