# Dance and Nationalism in India:
# Evolution of the Modern, 1926-1985

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of

Master of Philosophy (Arts) in History

By

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2019

Certified that the thesis entitled, **Dance and Nationalism in India: Evolution of the Modern, 1926-1985**, submitted by me towards the partial fulfilment of the degree of Masters of Philosophy (Arts) in History of Jadavpur University, is based upon my own original work and there is no plagiarism. This is also to certify that the work has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree/diploma of the same Institution where the work is carried out, or to any other institution. A paper out of this dissertation has also been presented by me at seminar/conference, thereby fulfilling the criteria for submission as per the M.Phil Regulation (2017) of Jadavpur University.

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On the basis of academic merit and satisfying all the criteria as declared above, the dissertation work of SHALINI MUKHERJEE entitled **Dance and Nationalism in India: Evolution of the Modern, 1926-1985,** is now ready for submission towards the partial fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in History of Jadavpur University.

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## Acknowledgement

For the completion of my thesis I wish to offer my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Mahua Sarkar, Professor, Department of History, Jadavpur University, for everything that I have learnt from her and for her continuous help and support in all the stages of this thesis. I thank Dr Sarkar for showing enthusiasm for my chosen topic and guiding me in shaping of my research question and ideas for the structural aspects of this thesis.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Prof. Aishika Chakraborty, Associate Professor, Director, School of Women Studies, to whom I constantly approached to clear my doubts on technical elements of dance. Her experience of being a student at Dancer's Guild under Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, have been especially helpful in understanding the modern dance in their perspective.

I would also like to thank my friends and classmates for constantly supporting me academically and psychologically. I am especially obliged to them for receiving my last minute calls for proof reading my entire thesis. The Department of History library was very helpful from where I got the important books for my studies without which I would not have been able to complete my thesis.

Finally, I want to thank my parents for trusting me in my every endeavour. Their constant support had helped me to overcome all the struggles in my life and in writing of this thesis.

# Introduction

As the title of my thesis suggests, the focus of my studies in the entire thesis would be the impact of nationalism in the revivalism of dance in the twentieth century. My studies would especially involve those dance forms which were categorised in the concept of "modern" dancing. It was a common concept in the twentieth century cultural milieu of India, and even today, that modern dancing would be equated with the dance forms of the Occident, which involved "Free Movements". This conceptualisation of the "modern" had created a rift between the people who were propagating the "classical", that is the dance forms which were considered to be practiced in India since the ancient times, and those who were in the process of innovating new forms. In the entire thesis, I have tried to argue that this formation of the "modern" had evolved from within the practices of the classical forms which was an amalgamation of the different dance styles for any choreography in a harmonious way.

Along with this new concept of "modern" dance the ideas of representing the cultural aspects of nation were also incorporated. In the era of Indian National Movement there was a new zeal amongst the nationalist leaders to portray a cultural history of India which can be distinguished from the Western cultures. This search for a new identity through the cultural praxis of India had brought about an agenda to represent India only through her classical heritage. It involved the institutionalisation of the classical dance, like that of Rukmini Devi Arundale's *Kalakshetra* in 1936. The numerous music conferences across India during this period also had the same agenda of propagating the authentic national culture. These were aimed at the urban middle

class in an attempt to develop their taste in classical traditions. This step was considered necessary to develop a national cultural identity amongst the bourgeoisie to reverse the effects of Thomas Macaulay's ideas (of creating a class of people Indian by birth, but European in taste)

This new agenda had brought about criticism to the practitioners of the modern dance, the evolution of which had gone hand in hand. The centre of the criticisms directed at such dancers was that they did not represent the Indian culture on the global stage which could have been only presented through the ancient Indian heritage or the classical forms of India. Because of this, I tried to study the themes of various dance productions and related them to their contemporary political background. It also includes the changes in the policies that were introduced concerning the national interests in India. I shall try to argue that the themes introduced by the modern dancers were aimed at showcasing the national interests on the stage. Their main aim was to make aware the audience consisting mainly of the middle class of their socio-political scenario through the eyes of an artist. Hence, the presentation of these dance forms had become equally important in representing the Indian culture. For this particular reason this study holds an importance in the present day. The stereotype of equating the modern or the contemporary dancing with the West is still prevalent amongst the practitioners of the classical dance and also amongst the audience.

In the current historiography of the performance studies some of the most important works which have helped me in writing this thesis and also forming my ideas are the works of Aishika Chakraborty. She has written extensively on Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar and her daughter Ranjabati Sircar. Her articles like *Navanritya: Her Body, Her*

*Dance* (2013) has been helpful in gaining deep insights into the ideas of Dr. Sircar. Dr. Chakraborty was herself a student of Dr. Sircar. She is still associated with Dancer's Guild, the school established by Dr. Sircar in 1985 at Kolkata. Along with that her critics on the works of Tagore, like *Dancers and Critics: Re-viewing Tagore* (2017), and *Dancing against the Nation? Revisiting Tagore's Politics of Performance* (2017) have been especially helpful in understanding Tagore's perspectives on dance.

Along with that the books written and edited by Pallabi Chakraborty on classical dance, especially Kathak, like *Bells of Change* (2008) have helped me in understanding the classical dance forms of India and the criticisms on the modern dance. Pallabi Chakraborty had also emphasised the necessity of innovations in the classics to get more popularity in the contemporary times.

In getting the perspective of nationalism incorporated within dancing, Prarthana Purkayastha's book, *Indian Modern Dance: Feminism and Transnationalism* (2014), was especially helpful in understanding the importance of cultural nationalism associated with dance. Works of the dance critics like Kapila Vatsyayana and Sunil Kothari in this field have been very helpful in gaining insights into the modern, classical and the folk forms of India.

To narrow down my thesis into a research question, my studies on the various performers of the modern dance would try to find out how these new forms have affected the practice of the classical forms, grounds of criticisms that the former have faced and are still facing in the hands of the latter.

**Methodology**

The time period of my study are from 1926, from the presentation of Rabindranath Tagore's dance drama *Notir Pujo,* till 1985, when Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar presented the re-interpretation of the Tagore's play *Chandalika* as *Tomari Matir Kanya*, through her new dance or *Navanritya.* The Rabindranath's Shantiniketan, established in 1901, the first seeds of modern dancing were introduced by his students like Santidev Ghosh, Srimati Devi etc., which were carried forward to a mature stage by artistes like Uday Shankar, Mrinalini Sarabhai, and Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar. I have kept the primary area of my research within Bengal and especially Kolkata which was the centre of the cognitive revolution of the nineteenth and twentieth century. There were quests for a new intellectual and cultural identity of the Bengali intelligentsia, of which dance and theatre played a significant part. Along with this the study of the Western dancers who chose to distinguish themselves from the classical ballets forms, was also important to show the distinction between the "modern" Western dance and the Indian "modern" dance.

For the research work I have based my studies on the autobiographical works of the performers like Mrinalini Sarabhai's *The Voice of the Heart* (2004), Martha Graham's *Blood Memory* (1991), etc. For Rabindranath Tagore's vision of dance, I have kept the memoirs of the people who were directly associated with Shantiniketan as my primary source, for example Shantidev Ghosh and Pratima Devi's accounts have been particularly useful. For understanding the dance forms used by these performers, the audio visual media especially for understanding Uday Shankar, his film *Kalpana* (1948) was very important to understand his perspectives on dance.

This work incorporates both social history and the history of dance. Therefore it includes both empirical and performance studies. I have used the libraries of Ramkrishna Mission, Golpark; the National Library; Centre for Studies of Social Sciences; Bangiya Sahitya Parishad; the Internet Database, such as, www.jstor.org, https://pad.ma, www.internetarchive.org etc., which have been helpful in collecting the required primary and secondary source materials. One major gap in this quest for source materials was the unavailability of the biography of Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, *Nrityarase Chittamama* (2000), which has gone out of print. To fill the gap I have used the articles written by her daughter, Ranjabati Sircar, available in Aishika Chakraborty edited book, *Ranjabati, A Dancer and Her World: Selected Writings of Ranjabati Sircar* (2008). Hence, I have perceived this particular book as published primary source. I have also tried to incorporate my limited experience in dance and personal observations in some of the dance performances which I was able to attend.

**Chapter Division**

The entire thesis would be divided in three chapters in the following sequence:

Chapter one, titled "Rabindranath Tagore and Perspectives of Nationalism in Dance". In this chapter I have discussed how the ideas of nationalism by Rabindranath Tagore had expressed his conception on dance and then were incorporated into the syllabus of Shantiniketan. This went completely parallel to the dance revival movement in the South India. There, the *sadir* dance of the *devdasis* was getting sanskritized into Bharatanatyam, now taken up by the urban middle classes and opening of the *Kalakshetra* (1936) by Rukmini Arundale. In the North also there was a new

introduction to Kathak by Leila Sokhey, the daughter of a Barrister in Calcutta, with the formation of her dance troupe in Bombay in 1934. This had also sought to take away Kathak from the *tawaifs*/*nautch* girls. This chapter would also look into the choreographies of Tagore's dance-dramas which had incorporated the different dance forms from all over Asia and the West. His first dance drama was *Natir Pujo,* staged in 1926. His dance-dramas reached its mature form in *Chintrangada* (1936) and *Chandalika* (1938). These dance-dramas were themed around their contemporary socio-political conditions, which has been discussed thoroughly in this chapter. With these productions I have also put forward the contributions put forward by the students of Shantiniketan like Shantidev Ghosh, Srimati devi and, his daughter-in-law, Pratima Devi.

Chapter two, titled "Uday Shankar: a New Maestro with New Aesthetics for India". This would shift the focus to Uday Shankar and the development of a more clear form of modern dance. This chapter would study his first association with dancing through the Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova (1881-1931). With him Indian modern dancing had marked its entry onto the global stage. This had also changed the views of the exotic orient, represented by the dancers like Ruth St. Denis, which only represented the spiritual and sexual aspects of India. With Shankar, dance now shifted towards a more glorified historical aspect of the east which worked in re-presentation of the Orient. For the stages at home, on the contrary, he wanted to showcase the socio-political aspects of India which was moving towards Independence, in spite of getting constant criticisms from the conservative classical dancers. Through his "Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre" opened at Almora in 1938 and his only film *Kalpana*

in 1948, which presented the idea of a nation state through the eyes of an artist, he had made a crucial input to the Indian intellectuals when India got her independence and was beginning to shape its new ideals.

Chapter three, titled "Adaptation, Coordination, and New National Forms: Mrinalini Sarabhai and Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar", can be seen as a continuation of the quest for modern dancing in India but in a different perspective. These new artists, after getting their training in classical Indian dances, were trying to mould this classical dance itself into a presentation of the contemporary politics through their direct/indirect association with Indian People Theater's Association (especially on the concepts of feminism). In the study I chose to incorporate works of Mrinalini Sarabhai, like *Manushya* in 1949 and *Memory- a Ragged Fragment of Eternity* in 1969, which was based on the style of Kathakali and Bharatanatyam forms but sans the traditional costumes, themed on real life with which the audience can connect. Similarly Manjusri Chaki-Sircar had also in her quest for a new dance form had found *Navanritya*, to portray the body as a stage in itself to show the human emotions. Their immense contributions in the world of "modern" dance had opened the road for post-modern dance in India. In this chapter, I have also discussed briefly the works of the artists like Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham. Through a discussion of these western artists, I tried to differentiate the Indian concepts of modern/contemporary dance from the Western perspectives.

# Chapter I

## Rabindranath Tagore and Perspectives of Nationalism in Dance

In 1901, when Shantiniketan *ashram* was established by Rabindranath Tagore, dance was not incorporated in the curriculum for students. In the twentieth century Bengal, dance as a part of the *bhadralok* culture was not accepted as it was associated with the *baijis* or the nautch girls for entertainment purposes especially during the Durga Pujas in the big houses of Calcutta[1]. The British law never made any distinction between these *baijis* and the prostitutes for both their dwellings were called "brothels", which was identified as places of public nuisance. The Presidency Towns were given ample power to remove the brothels by various "Town Police Acts"[2]. Any house which entertained its "admirers with music or disreputable nautches"[3] and caused a nuisance for its neighbours were considered as brothels. Thus it can be interpreted that the *bhadralok* society, following the Victorian ethics, did not approve dance as a reputed curriculum.

Amidst this perspective developed Rabindranath Tagore's idea of dance as a physical representation of emotions[4] in Shantiniketan after 1920s. Much before that, in 1910, the female students had staged an all-girls drama "*Lakkhir Porikha"* on the occasion of the arrival of Rathindranath Tagore's newly

[1] See Sumanta Banerjee (1989), *The Parlour and the Streets : Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century,* Calcutta: Seagull Books.
[2] John D. Mayne (1896), *The Criminal Law of India,* Madras: Higginbotham and Co.p554
[3] *ibid*
[4] Amita Sen in her memoir` *Shantiniketaner Ashramkanya* had emphasised on this point calling it *"bhavatmak nritya".*

married wife Pratima Devi, where she played the role of Lakkhi. This play according to me had set an important benchmark as the staging of the play had reversed the seating arrangements in front of public stage where the male students were made to sit behind the curtains while the female audience were in the front[5]. This can be seen as an important role reversal in the seating arrangements where the women were generally made to sit behind the *parda*. It can be viewed as a step towards breaking of the *parda* by the new *bhadralok* women, with women's education taking ground in the nineteenth and twentieth century.[6]

Parallel to Tagore's school of dance and music, the institutionalisation of dance, under the banner of "classical dance" had already begun. The most famous examples was Rukmini Devi Arundale's *Kalakshetra*, founded in 1936, for *Bharatnatyam* . This new institute was slowly taking its place as representatives of the national culture at the expense of the degradation of the traditional *devdasis* and sanskritising their dance to match the new urban milieu[7], after coming under the aegis of Madras Music Academy. Another personality who tried to get Kathak in the same genre of "clean dances", that is differentiating it from the court *nautch* dancers, was Leila Sokhey or popularly known as Madame Menoka. She had got her training in Kathak from the well-known dance exponents like Acchan Maharaj and Lacchu Maharaj, who belonged to the Luchnow *gharana* of

[5] Amita Sen (1977), *Shantiniketaner Ashramkanya,* Tagore Research Institute, Kolkata, p.9
[6] See Geraldine Forbes (1996), *Women in Modern India,* Cambridge University Press.
[7] See, Davesh Soneji(2012), *Unfinished Gestures: Devdasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, and U.Asha Coorlawala (2004), "The Sanscriticed Body" in *Dance Research Journal,* Vol.36, No. 2, (Winter,2004), pp.50-63

Kathak dance[8]. At a younger age she had to go through the ordeal of separating herself from music and dance. Her father, Pearey Lal Roy, a Barrister in Calcutta, had to put a stop on her from being a professional Violin player as the respectable women were not allowed to perform in public. In order to keep her students and herself away from such ordeals she only incorporated the "respectable middle class women" along with changes in the pattern of performance incorporating ideas of dance dramas as an alternative of the solo performances[9]. She formed her troupe in 1934 with a bunch of amateur dancers in her Bombay house. She performed with them at Europe's International Dance Olympiad, under the name of "Menaka Hindoo Ballet" and gained international recognition in 1936.[10] In her school, *Nrityalam*, she followed the trend of Arundale, that is exclusion of the hereditary dancers, the *tawaif*, shifting the authority to the women of respectable household and the responsibility of teaching to the male teachers.[11] Therefore, in the three artists involved in reviving dance in India, one thing that was common was the marginalisation of the hereditary *nautch* girls/ *tawaifs* as a consolation for the *bhadralok* classes for the inclusion of respectable women in these projects. Although exceptions were there like the famous Bharatnatyam dancer T.Balasaraswati, who belonged the house of hereditary family of temple music and dance, the *devdasis.*

But Tagore had come out different from these artists in the perspective towards dance. Both Rukmini Devi and Leila Sokhey wanted to present the "authentic"

[8] Damantyi Joshi (1989), *Madam Menaka*, New delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, p. 10.
[9] Solo performances were a characteristic of the court *tawaifs*
[10] *Ibid.,p. 24.*
[11] Margeret E Walker(2014), *India's kathak Dance in Historical Perspective* England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., pp. 119-120.

Indian classical dance as representatives of the Indian culture[12]. Tagore was equally averse to the idea of stagnant traditions, especially for dance which was a symbol of movement in itself. He had put up his ideas on tradition very clearly in a lecture delivered in Dacca on *Art and Tradition* in 1926. He had explained that art in India had always allowed improvisation to give space to Persian and other alien influences. But this had never affected the identity of the artists or their art for not being "Indian" because of the borrowings.[13] Therefore, he insisted on casting away the rigid forms of traditions which compelled an artist to confide in regional art for "Indianess", saying thus, all traditional structures of art must had sufficient degree of elasticity to allow it to respond to varied impulses of life…..; to grow with its growth, to dance with its rhythm. There are traditions which….establish their slave dynasty, dethroning their masters, the Life-urge, that revels in endless freedom of expression. This is the tragedy whose outrage we realise in the latter-day Sanskrit literature and in conventional arts and crafts of India, where mind is helplessly driven by the ghost of the past.[14]

According to Tagore, traditions, instead of acting as 'block' for the artist, should allow free flow of ideas to enhance the creative perceptions of the artists. These ideas on traditions were reflected in his interests on introducing various dance forms from numerous states of India, as well as the new modern dance

[12] For a detailed study of Rukmini Devi's contribution on Bharatanatyam and other theosophical aspects see, Avanthi A. Meduri ed., (2005), *Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986) : A visionary Architect of the Indian Culture*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Das; Rukmini Devi Arundale (2003), *Some Selected Writings and Speeches of Rukmini Devi Arundale*, Chennai: Kalashetra Foundation

[13] Rabindranath Tagore (1961), *On Art and Aesthetics: A Selections of Lectures, Essays and Letters,* Calcutta Orient Longman, p. 59

[14] *Ibid*, pp. 63-64

introduced by Isadora Duncan, about which I shall discuss later in the chapter. Integrated within these new experiments with dance, there was also a sense of nationalism which got its glimpse in the various dance-drama composed by him and also in the idea of bringing together various folk and classical dance forms under one institution.

**Expressing the ideals of Nationalism**

The nineteenth and twentieth century Bengal was in a phase of discovering its identity through the new cultural and political "cognitive revolution".[15] It had developed from two cognitive features: *cross-culturalism,* between Indian cultural and philosophical pasts, and Western intellectual and creative traditions; and *universalism,* a perception of unity in diversity and differences between Western and Indian concepts[16]. For historian Sabyasachi Bhattacharya 1920s was an important time period for redefinition of the Bengali identity with the vernacularisation of politics which brought the Bengali language into a larger public sphere. In the field of literature there was an emergence of the *Kallol* era (1923-1929), that is a group of creative authors who brought in the proletariat and the sub-proletariat into fictions as protagonists. Along with this, questions were raised on the situation of unconditional patriarchal dominance over women, giving new dynamics to the gender relations[17]. In the field of theatre too there was a significant development in the building up of themes

[15] Subrata Dasgupta had coined this term in his book *The Bengal Renaissance: identity and creativity from Rammohan Roy to Rabindranath Tagore,* to highlight "the creation of a new and historically significant cognitive identity shared by a group".
[16] Subrata Dasgupta (2007), *The Bengal Renaissance: Identity and Creativity from Rammohan Roy to Rabindranath Tagore*, Delhi: Permanent Black, p. 4.
[17] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya(2014), *The Definining Moments in Bengal: 1920-1947,* OUP, p 1-2.

related to politics. Rustom Bharucha has traced this development from the time of Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's *Kulin Kulasarvasa*, written in 1853 against the practice of polygamy among the *kulin* Brahmins, although it was not related to Bengal politics. Dinabandhu Mitra's *Neel-Darpan* (Indigo Mirror), written in 1860, was the protest play against the oppression of the forced indigo farmers by the colonial planters. Bharucha saw this play as the first instance of "theatre as political force confronting the British government, the first attack on the Raj's commercial exploitation and, indirectly, its political tyranny and disregard of human rights"[18]. Numerous music conferences were also organised in a bid to introduce Indian dance and music to the audience from the 1930s. In one such conference in Benaras, in 1935, Shantidev Ghosh had witnessed the dance of T. Balasaraswati. After watching her performance, Ghosh was filled with admiration for her gestural *abhinaya*[19].Thus, these conferences provided a new exposure to every dance enthusiast.

For Tagore, his dance dramas could not be classified under "political" protests, but comes under addressing of the social issues. In his essay "Nationalism in India" he addressed nationalism in these following terms:

"……We think that our one task is to build a political miracle of freedom upon the quick sand of social slavery……..We must remember that whatever weakness we cherish in our society will become a source of danger in our

[18] Rustom Bharucha (1983), *Rehearsals of Revolution: The Political Theatre in Bengal*, Seagull Books, p.17.
[19] Shantidev Ghosh (1983), *Gurudeb Rabindranath Thakur O Adhunik Bharatiya Nritya*, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, p.167

politics. The same inertia which leads us to our idolatry of social institutions will create in our politics prison houses immovable walls."[20]

The 'social slavery' which he referred to implies the caste ridden Indian society which was the prime area of concern for Tagore. According to him, the Indian caste system had developed because of toleration towards the marginal caste. This gave the "freedom" within their respective boundaries but should not cross them, under a common banner of "Hinduism". Thus, it did not recognise mutability.[21] Along with this he had also criticised the influence of the western markets which had hampered the local handicraft industry as well as the social life which had led to a following of a mechanical way of life, engaging in materialism and ignoring the moral health, which was more important. Although Tagore had appreciated the West for its moral philosophical thinkers and rule of law, which considered people equal irrespective of their caste and creed, but alongside he also criticised the West as the "Nation" which tried to rule over other nations through economic dominance.[22] Tagore believed that freedom from such materialism could not come through gaining "political freedom", which can make an individual negatively "powerful". Rather, it had to be attained through "spiritual freedom". He found this freedom in the practice of dance and music, which, according to him was the only way to bring back the rural life of simplicity. On the occasion of installing a hundred weaving loom on May 2,

[20] Rabindranath Tagore (1917), *Nationalism*, San Francisco: The Book Club of California, pp. 145.
[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.
[22] *Ibid., pp.142-143.*

1936, in Sriniketan apart from emphasising the importance of craft for rural development he gave importance to music observing thus:

"……The life in the villages have lost their music that was once the source of their inspiration, stirring the souls of various types of creative expressions. Bengal developed her music particular to her racial temperament"[23].

So, along with the installation of craft , he wanted to revive music and later dance in the rural life as for him these instruments were the main source for the revival of the rural cultural life in a holistic way. Dance was interpreted by Rabindranath in the following terms:

"The art of Dance expresses, first and foremost, the inchoate beauty of our body movements that mirror only the joy of the rhythms…..Our body bears the burden of all the limbs and is…. propelled by their movement. When these two opposites coalesce, with one another, the dance is born. The body's movement gives the body's burden a dynamic form of art: not for a livelihood but for a creative intent."[24]

It is clear from this definition of dance provided by Tagore that he wanted to incorporate all the ideals of nationalism, that is "freedom from material bondage", into the moving body. This should be easily be accessible to the audience with an intent of drawing them away from the "economic' aspects of beauty to appreciate the spiritual being within. Thus, appreciating examples

[23] Anonymous, "Industrial Uplift: Sriniketan Move, Weaving Looms Installed at Shantiniketan*", Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, May 2, 1936.
[24] Cited in Shantidev Ghosh *Op.Cit.,*, p. 2, trans. By Utpal K. Bannerjee in *Tagore's Mystic of Dance* p. 70.

from the West of incorporating dance in the academic syllabus, Tagore had incorporated dance in the curriculum of Shantiniketan with an assurance that it would be different from the dance form of "low class", like *Khemta,* a necessity for the *Bhadramahilas* studying in the institute.

Apart from the cultural aspect, dance was also gaining ground on medical terms. Under an article titled "The Right Games for Women" by Professor W.G. Anderson, M.D, M.P.E, he referred to dance as an exercise especially for girls of ages between 3-7. "Action" songs and country dances were considered to be the best way for building and strengthening the muscles[25]. For Tagore too this aspect of physical fitness of the girls became very important in Shantiniketan. He introduced stick and sword fighting, jujutsu, music and dance for the male and female students for their physical fitness, with training in fighting for the girls by a student of Pulin Das[26]. This was a part of his ideals of *atmashakti*, described by Prof. Anuradha Roy as "power within oneself", which she compared with Benedict Anderson's view of "imagining a nation within a community".[27] Apart from this, in the 1920s the women question debate was also gaining ground in the *bhadralok* and *bhadramahila* society[28]. Adapting to Victorian ethics, the gentlewomen were expected to be good home makers, as was indicated in various domestic manuals meant as a guide to work through the household[29]

[25] W.G. Anderson, *The Right Games for Women*, Amrita Bazar Patrika, May 3, 1936
[26] Amita Sen, op.cit, p.59.
[27] Anuradha Roy (2014), "Rabindranath Tagore's vision of India", in documentation of International Seminar on *Rethinking the Cultural Unity of India,* Ministry of Culture, Govt.of India, Ram Krishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, pp.473-475.
[28] See Geraldine Forbes (1996), *Women in Modern India,* Cambridge University Press.
[29] For a detailed study on the domestic manuals see, Judith E. Walsh (2004), *Domesticity in India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice,* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

which became a characteristic of being a *satee* or chaste women along with the idea of binding a women solely to her husband. It can be thus easily be discerned that a women's learning skills were only meant for her husband and her family members, be it music or dance. The idea of individual women's rights was surfacing slowly in the 1920s and 1930s. Within this situation came in Tagore's dance-dramas *Natir Pujo,* staged in 1926; *Chitrangada,*1936; and *Chandalika,* 1938.

**The New Genres of Dance-Drama**

In this section I would discuss the themes of the three dance – dramas that had developed centring around the new dance curriculum of Shantiniketan, along with the socio-political relevance it held around the same time period. Out of these three, *Notir Pujo* and *Chandalika* holds a special importance in accordance to the social context around which these were staged. Like the Kallol group of authors, these dance-dramas started to keep the "lesser dignified" members of the Hindu society, who were, in both the plays, incorporated into Buddhism. In *Natir Pujo,* Srimati was represented as a court dancer, similar to the *nautch*, who gave her self-description to be an "unfortunate *noti"*[30], to the Buddhist monk, Upali, who had approached her for alms. The presence of the *noti* as the central character of the play holds a particular importance. In the Buddhist *Jataka* story of the King Mahajanaka, there was a reference of the presence of "beautiful dancing girls" in the court of the king, along with King's ministers, a host of Brahmins, and wealthy merchants, in the festival arranged by the

[30] A Bengali term for *nautch* girls.

subjects in the honour of the king.[31] These dancing band of women were placed within a hierarchy. According to the story, when Queen Silavati was unable to provide the Kingdom with an heir, these dancing girls, starting from the lowest order to the highest rank were sent on the streets to get religious sanctions for successful results, making them a necessity for the wealthy[32]. These dancing girls were different from the courtesans who also had the abilities of singing, dancing and lute playing, but were also involved in prostitution [33]. I.B. Horner had argued that the prostitutes were accepted in the society as people who had worked out of their *Karma.* Their position could be improved if they were willing to change by choosing different path to grow to "escape from the prison of sense desires"[34], which was portrayed in Srimati as well.

In the writing of his play, Tagore chose to emphasise on the *ahimsa* or non-violent aspect of Buddhism as against the war prone Khastriya class in Hindu society. Parallel to this, in the scenario of the Indian National Movement, Gandhi had launched his Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920-1922 to incorporate the masses and propagation of his ideas of non-violence, *ahimsa,* and attainment of *swaraj*.[35] Prof. Anuradha Roy had categorised this as the third phase in Tagore's nationalism, the first phase being that of idealising the Hindu-Aryan Race, and the second phase was that of Swadeshi Movement. He had shifted to a humanitarian

[31] I.B. Horner (1999), "Women under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen", in Kumkum Chterjee (ed), *Women in Early Indian Society,* Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributers, p.89
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Ibid.,* p. 91.
[35] For details on Non-cooperation Movement see Sekhar Bandhopadhyay (2004), *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman; Sumit Sarkar (1983), *Modern India, 1885-1947,* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, and Bipan Chandra (2001), *History of Modern India,* New Delhi: Orient Blackswan. For Gandhi's theories of Ahimsa see, Dennis Dalton (1993), *Non-violent Power in Action*, New York: Colombia University Press.

phase of liberal Hinduism[36]. It can be said that Tagore had found an alternative to the Hindu caste system in Buddhism, which was more suitable for his liberal views. Srimati, thus, is to be taken as a resistive body against the caste and class hierarchy of the Hindu society.

In the end of the play, Srimati was executed while dancing in front of the Buddha stupa, throwing away her traditional dancing attire in the process to reveal her Buddhist saffron robes as a symbol of her prayers to Buddha. Prarthana Purkayastha has explained it as an embodiment of the anti-devdasi movement in South India of the 20th century[37], when the *devdasis* were being marginalised on the grounds of immorality from the realm of dance. She argued that *Notir Pujo* was an attempt in the "idealisation of the female dancer"[38] at a time when she was silenced and that was symbolised by Srimati's execution. But it has to be taken in fact that in *Natir pujo* , the concept of formal dance had not evolved. For this play, Nabakumar Singha, the Manipuri dance teacher at Shantiniketan had trained Gauri Bose, daughter of Nandalal Bose. The dance forms of south India had not reached Shantiniketan yet. Dance had played a secondary role in the play, except for the last act, where Srimati danced to the song "*Amaye Khoma He Khoma"*. After this, Princess Ratnabali, the main accuser who disliked the fact that a court dancer was asked to worship Buddha, also was shown to have converted to Buddhism. Thus, Srimati's voice was not entirely put to silence as her music and dance were able to convert the minds of

[36] Anuradha Roy, *Op. Cit.,* pp.480-481
[37]Prarthana Purkayastha (2014), *Indian Modern Dance: Feminism and Transnationalism*, U.K: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 31.
[38] *Ibid.*

Ratnabali and, the war prone queen, Lokeswari. This was not the only representation of the *devdasis* for Tagore. *Shyama,* 1939, was also centred around the story of the court dancer Shyama and her tragic-love story with Bajrasen. In this first attempt towards dance –drama the reviews that followed were of the negative kind like in *Nachghar*, in 1926, when the play was presented in *Jorasanko*, Tagore had faced severe criticism for putting the students on stage for dancing and gathering funds for the University.[39] Those who understood the emotions presented through the play, like Abanindranath Tagore, were full of praise for the performances put up by the caste of the play, especially the dance of Gauri Bose and the Rabindranath as Upali.[40]

Tagore's dance-drama had taken its full shape with *Chitrangada*, first staged in 1936,written in verse form in 1892, under the initiative of Pratima Devi. This play can be considered to be the first planned-choreographed dance-drama, though in the social context it was different from that of *Natir Pujo,* as it was based on Mahabharata, an important Hindu epic. The story here revolved around the warrior princess of Manipur, [41] and her relationship with Arjuna, the Pandava Prince. Chitrangada, being a member of the Royal household, is to be looked upon as a privileged *Bhadramahila* of the Hindu society. The central idea of Chitrangada was "to follow a man is not the idea of austerity of a women"[42]. She was portrayed as a women who was trained in the skills of war tactics and state politics. But as she fell in love with Arjuna, she wanted

[39]Rudraprasad Chakraborty (1995), *Rangamancha O Rabindranath: Samakalin Pratikriya,* Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, p. 208.
[40] *Ibid, p.* 209.
[41] A state in Orissa.
[42] Amita Sen, *Op. Cit.*, p.46.

to give up her masculine *kurupa* to adorn the sensual women, *surupa*. This entire play represents the conflict inside Chitrangada between who she was and who she wanted to be. Tanika Sarkar had argued that in the nineteenth and twentieth century conjugality had the relationship of absolutism of male partner and total subordination of the other. This had played an important role in showcasing an alternative space to colonial subordination. The institute of marriage and home space had become important to the Bengali male society to portray their abilities in administration, denied by their colonial bosses in the office spaces, over the household and especially on the wife.[43] On the other hand, there was also a propagation of the sacralised and feminised image of *Bharat* as opposed to the masculine colonial state. Sarkar had argued that the image drawn by Abanindranath Tagore was that of a frail women. On the contrary Bankim Chandra Chattopadhayay in his novel *Anandamath,* had portrayed the image of an angry Kali, who represented death and destruction.[44] In this environment Chitrangada, through her song "*Ami Chitrangada"*, introduced herself to Arjuna, the superior male, as she being neither an ordinary women nor a goddess. This showed Tagore's departure from the popular nationalist thought. Tagore did not want the women to be taken as something as sacred like Kali, or to be treated as a protected member of the household. Apart from this, Esha Niyogi De had seen within *Chitrangada* a diversion from the Victorian-masculine traditions where the male were supposed to be publicly "active". On the contrary, *Chitarangada* had cultivated the *rasa* desires not through a dependent relationship with Arjuna, but

[43] See Tanika Sarkar (2001), *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
[44] *Ibid,* pp. 176-177.

amidst her female sakhis.[45] Despite this, this dance-drama was criticised by the novelist Dwijendralal Roy who commented on the portrayal of the immorality of *Chitrangada* for breaking Arjuna's celibacy and for portraying Arjuna as a "lecherous beast".[46] Tagore, however, had sketched *Chitrangada* in a broader perspective of an independent, politically conscious, nationalist woman. These new women were proving themselves to be capable enough for establishing their own in establishing their own organisations like All India Women's Conference, 1927, to present their demands and grievances in front of the governmant[47]

The next dance-drama by him, *Chandalika*, staged in 1938, was written in 1933, which was again based on his emphasis on Buddhism as an alternative of the caste divided Hinduism. The whole story of *Chandalika* revolved around the life of Prakriti and her mother, Maya living in the margins of the Hindu society because of being untouchable (*Chandal*) women. Praktriti got her solace in a Buddhist monk, Ananda, who took water from her hands despite of knowing that she was untouchable. He had assured her that caste did not matter to him as both of them are "*manushya*" or human. Prakriti was so comforted by the idea that she wanted her mother to bring Ananda back to her through her black magic so that she can physically and spiritually become one with the monk. The play was staged in 1938, a period in Indian history when the lower castes of the society, the Dalit's movement, was taking ground. Before that, from the nineteenth century onwards, there was also a notion of upward mobility of the lower castes through

[45] Esha Niyogi De (2011), *Empire, Media and The Autonomous Women: A Feminist Critique of Postcolonial Women,* Delhi: OUP p. 99
[46] Aishika Chakraborty (2017), "Dancers and Critics: Re-viewing Tagore", Pallabi Chakravorty and Nilajana Gupta ed., *Dance Matters Too: Memories, Markets and Identities,* Delhi: Springer, pp. 13-14.
[47] Geraldine Forbes *Op.Cit.*, pp. 78-83.

economic means which had also become common . Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal had identified four types of such mobility: The first type of mobility occurred within the individual *jatis*/ castes, which was categorised by attaining a higher status through marriage forming a hypergamous *kulin* section; the second type occurred in gaining higher respectability in the individual castes without changing the ranks of the entire caste; the third type consisted of the formation of the dissident groups, claiming to have higher respectability; and the fourth type of mobility introduced new castes with higher ritual ranks.[48] Apart from these there was also an emergence of various groups which were outside the orthodox practice of Brahminical social order and were ready to accept these marginal untouchables. Among such groups the sect of *Chaitanya Vaishanavism* was the most popular one because of the *kirtans* and dancing that was open to all[49]. But these reforms were limited to the spiritual freedom only as the lower castes. The latter were gradually being aware of their social position through the incorporation of caste category in the Census Reports of 1931 and were demanding political power as well. Coming to Gandhian pro- Harijan movement in the 1930s, of which Tagore was also a follower, many scholars believed that this was only for the social moral upliftment of the untouchables and not for their political involvement. This became more clear after the Poona Pact, which came against the Communal awards of 1932, where Gandhi had rejected the idea of separate

[48] Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal (1981), *Social Mobility in Bengal*, Calcutta: Papyrus, pp. 42-45.
[49]For a full discussion on emergence of such groups outside the Brahminical order see Sekhar Bandhopadhayay, (2004)*Caste, Culture and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal*¸ New Delhi: Sage Publications, and Partha Chatterjee (1989), 'Caste and Subaltern Consciousness', , Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) Occasional Paper No. 111, Calcutta: CSSS.

electorate for the scheduled classes.[50] Many scholars argue that *Chandalika* was based on the same thought of moral purity of the marginal castes as ultimately the physical desires of Prakriti were not fulfilled[51]. In the end Ananda showed her the path to liberate herself from the earthly desires and advised her to surrender herself to Buddha, while the mother, Maya, died at his feet. The death of Maya signified the death of a generation of people who had accepted their untouchable status in the Brahminical society as ordained from God. This led to a rise of the people like Prakriti who would rebel against God to get the respect in the same society as is evident from the conversation between the mother and the daughter, where in one occasion the mother asked "do you have no respect for the religion?", her reply was:

"…… I respect him who respects me. Everyone united to make me confirm to a creed that blinds and gags . But since that day (that is the day she met Ananda) something forbids me to conform any longer. I am afraid of nothing now."[52]

These lines clearly portray the rebel behaviour to find respect within Prakriti to which her mother abides and agrees to bring Ananda to her. Her recluse in Buddhism as an alternate religion to follow was a thought later shaped by B.R. Ambedkar who saw in *Dhamma* the power to "reconstruct the world".[53] Apart

[50] Joya Chatterjee (1994), *Bengal Divided: Hindu communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 33-40.

[51] See, Sutapa Choudhury,"Signifying the Self: Intersections of Class, Caste and Gender in Rabindranath Tagore's Dance Drama *Chandalika* (1938)", *Rupkatha -Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Vol. 2. No. 4.2010. Special Issue on Tagore. P. 549- P. 556, ; Debi Prasad Misra and Dr. Arindom Modak, "Rabindranth Tagore's *Chandalika* and the Subaltern Consciousness*". International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, Vol. 3.Issue. 6. Oct. 2014.

[52] Rabindranath Thakur, (1933), *Chandalika*, trans. By Majorie Skyes in *Three Plays* (1950), OUP, p.143.

[53] Cited by Gail Omvedt (2003), *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, Delhi: Sage Publications, p.1, before Ambedkar it was Jyotirao Phule, the most famous Dalit leader of Maharashtra who

from this, *Chandalika* can also be seen as an attempt made by Rabindranath Tagore to show the ideals of Visva Bharati where such segregation based on *jati*/castes were ignored, as one of the students, Tarakrishna Basu, notes:

"We of Visva Bharati have no caste ...Touchable or untouchable, anyone will do'. But, said [ my friend], 'that's not the point. An untouchable is not allowed at most village wells ... and secondly, if you take water from the hands of these people, the villagers won't accept you."[54]

This statement had went in stark contrast to the claims of the Hindus in the Legislative Assembly that Bengal has no untouchables as an argument against the proposal of Abolition of Untouchability Bill in 1933 passed by M.C. Rajah in the Central Legislative Assembly.[55]In such an environment this dance-drama had affirmed more strongly the presence and practice of Untouchability in Bengal and in India. For such a significance of this dance-drama he wrote in a letter that this drama was neither meant "for sale" to his audience, nor would it gather much appreciation from the "intellectuals" of the country.[56] Contrary to this statement, the various newpapers which published reports of *Chandalika* like The Statesmen, Amrita

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saw in Buddhism an alternative of the oppressive Bhramanism. Ambedkar had felt that the *Dhamma* of Buddhism could be only way to free the outcaste of the society from *dhukkha* (sorrow). For a full discussion of Ambedkar's theory of Buddhism and Dhamma see, B.R. Ambedkar(1957), *Buddha and His Dhamma*, reprinted in 1992, of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Volume 11, compiled by Vasant Moon, Bombay: Government of Maharashtra.

[54] Quoted in Joya Chatterjee (1994), *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communism and Partition ,1932-1947*, Cambridge University Press, p.41. Also see, Hashim Amir Ali (1966), *Then and Now (1933—1958) A Study of Socio-Economic Structure and Change in Some Villages near Viswa Bharati University Bengal*. New Delhi.

[55] Joya Chatterjee, *Op. Cit.*, p.40. A strong disapproval had come from the members of the Legislative Assembly like Pandit Satyendranath Sen who had argued that Gandhi, who had stood up for the *harijans* was himself opposed by these people, and so passing of the bill would not be use full. See Legislative assembly Debates (official records) ,1934, Vol 1. 24th January to 16th February, Seventh Session, pp. 94-139.

[56] Rudraprasad Chakraborty, *Op.Cit.*, p. 265.

Bazar Patrika, Yugantar, etc., were all filled with praise for the unique blend of Manipuri and South Indian dance style used in the play.[57]

**The Practice of Dance**

Coming to dance forms used in these three dance dramas, Pratima Devi had given a detailed description of the ideas evolved for the dance used in *Chitrangada*. The dance used was an amalgamation of Manipuri and South Indian forms.[58] Neither of dances were used in its true classical form, but were modified according to the *taal* of each song. Utpal K. Banerjee (2011) gave a detailed description of the dance form which he described to be a " juxtaposition" of Manipuri with folk movements. Kathakali in Arjuna's dance was used by Kelu Nair, when he performed between 1939-40, but only the broad hand gestures were incorporated keeping aside the minute details of Kathakali.[59] Banerjee argued that this amalgamation of different dance forms was to capture the emotions of *Chitrangada*, it was choice of dances that has to be taken in consideration. Apart from the dance form, the entire staging of the dance –drama was planned according to the Pratima Devi's observations in Dartington Hall in 1931 learnt from Kurt Joos's workshops. Apart from the technical elements of the staging of the dance drama like development of each scene separately and their amalgamation, importance was also given to the expression of feelings through rhythm.[60] Amita Sen had traced this expression of feelings in dance, *Bhav nritya*, before the introduction of "techniques" which was taught by Tagore himself.

[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 266-274
[58] Utpal K. Banerjee (2011), *Tagore's Mystique of Dance*, New Delhi: Niyogi Books, Pp.137-138.
[59] Pratima Devi, *Op.Cit.*, pp.20-21.
[60] Pratima Devi, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 14-15.

She wrote that with the introduction of these techniques the simplicity of Tagore's teachings was somewhat lost.[61]

In Pratima Devi's description of *Chandalika*, she had clearly stated the need for such amalgamation. She explained that the pure forms, especially of the South Indian dances, would have been irrelevant in the context of accompanying songs of Tagore and also to follow the strict orders of the classics would have been a breach in his ideals. She said that the pure *Kathakali* dance would be irrelevant as also the audience would not understand the detailed hand and body gestures of such dance. Hence it would be practical to present the dance in a "modified" and simple way. She also had stated that the performing artists should get the freedom to improvise to express his/her emotions and understanding of a particular dance in their own way. This freedom in dance was necessary for an artist to evolve from the "shackles of traditions".[62]

Shantidev Ghosh[63], a very distinguished student of Shantiniketan and appreciated by Tagore, in his memoirs had given various description of his encounter with dance. He showed great enthusiasm for learning the various "manly" dance forms, like Kathakali, the folk dances of Baul and the dances of the Dom community and that of Muslims community of Mymensingh, *Mayurbhanj Chau nach* of Purulia [64]. For girls too various dance forms were made available, mostly Manipuri, along with various folk styles like the Garba dance of Gujarat, supervised by

[61] Amita Sen, *Op. Cit, pp.* 134-135.
[62] Pratima Devi, *Op.Cit.* pp. 24-25.
[63] His real name was Shantimoi Ghosh, "Shantidev" was the name given by Tagore.
[64]Shantidev Ghosh, *Gurudeb Rabindranath Thakur O Adhunik Bharatiya Nritya* P. 44-45

Pratima devi[65]. Ghosh was very impressed with such dance forms and had repeatedly admired them for being masculine in character. Gaining a deeper knowledge of Kathakali, Ghosh had personally taken admission in the Kerala Kalamandalam with a recommendation from Tagore in 1931[66]. Apart from these Indian dances, he was very impressed with Srimati Devi, who also had been a student of Rudolf Laban, Marry Wingman and Kurt Joos in Germany from 1927-1931, for her "Modern Dance". She had performed on Tagore's poem "*Ami Poraner Songe Khelibo aj Moron Khela"*. But, Ghosh did not want to adopt this western modern dance. He, thus, formulated his own version of "Modern Dance" which incorporated the Indian dance forms with the Kandyan dance of Sri Lanka to perform on the same poem[67]. This kind of re-invention of the "Modern Dance" became more common with the dancers of the late twentieth century.

It was Manipuri dance which had gained wide popularity amongst the students. Tagore's interest in this dance had grown during his visit to Sylhet, Bangladesh, in 1919 (1326 Bengali year). There he witnessed the dance of Manipuri ladies and from there he requested the Prince of Agartala, Birendra Kishore Manikka, to send Manipuri dance teachers to Shantiketan.[68] The first teacher to be appointed was Buddhimantra Singha and with him started the academic teaching of dance in Shantiniketan. But as mentioned earlier, this progress had to be kept in secrecy for the critics outside. Hence, the news came

[65] *Ibid.,* pp. 16-17
[66] *Ibid.,* pp. 48-51
[67] Shantidev Ghosh (1999), *Nrityakala O Rabindranath,*Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, p. 47
[68]Shantidev Ghosh, *Gurudeb Rabindranath Thakur O Adhunik Bharatiya Nritya.,* pp. 8-11.

for them in the local newspaper "Shantiniketan" as a new exercise on the beats of *Mridungam*[69]. When these classes were introduced, only the male students were selected for this course. To incorporate the female students as well, Tagore had requested to send the wife of Buddhimantra too showing a keen interest towards the training of female students, which again went against the traditions of the society. But this training by Buddhimantra did not last long. After him came Nabakumar Singha in 1925, who started afresh with the female students teaching them dance[70]. Rabindranath had arranged for a presentation of the dance by the female participants for his visiting guest Governor General Lord Lytton in the secrecy of his house. Along with such encouragement in Manipuri dance, the Manipuri musical instruments like the *Khol* had also become an integral part of the musical compositions by Tagore. Apart from this the preference towards Manipuri was explained by Pratima Devi, that the head and eyes movements were not incorporated, recognised in south Indian and north Indian dances, for these were incorporations of Arabic and Parsian influence from music. Manipuri dance, thus, was more preferred for there was no "foreign element" in the dance.[71]

Apart from the re-introduction of these Indian dances, especially those which were outside the bounds of the "classical", under one roof, Rabindranath gave equal encouragement to the foreign dances as well. His interest in European dance had developed during his stay in London in his teenage years. So for

[69] *Ibid.,* p. 10.
[70] *Ibid.*,p.20.
[71] Pratima Devi (1949*), Nritya*, Visva Bharati, Calcutta,P.21.

him welcoming the European dance styles was not uncommon. It is fascinating to note that, more than ballet dancing, considered to be classic, he had invited the "new dance" with free flowing body movement which was taking shape after Isadora Duncan. Amita Sen in her memoir had given the description of the dance forms of the students of Isadora Duncan, who introduced modern dancing in the west, described as "Naturalistic dance performance"[72]. Along with that there were also dance demonstrations by French artists in 1931 , with "Free Movements", Japanese students and their traditional folk dance, the Kandiyan Dance of Srilanka between, folk dance forms of Java and Bali.[73] To these two places Shantidev Ghosh had visited personally to learn them. He had made four trips to Sri Lanka between 1936 and 1938, and in 1939 he had visited Java and Bali. For both Shantidev Ghosh and Tagore the inspiration to learn had come through the extensive travel of Tagore in various Asian and European countries as he wrote thus:

" I had earlier witnessed the art of dance while travelling around in the country- in Java, Bali, Cambodia, China and Japan as well as in our own land in Cochin, Malabar and Manipur. I am familiar with the folk dance and other forms of Europe…….All streams of dance have a confluence in our Ashram. The preparations and the artistic sense that inform them and manifest the beauty of the whole would be rare anywhere."[74]

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[72] Amita Sen ,*Op.Cit.,* P.34

[73] Tagore was very impressed with the dance forms of Java and Bali and wrote about it in his 1929 travelogue, *Java Jatrir Patra*, Calcutta: Visva-Bharati. This had inspired Shantidev Ghosh to visit to these place to learn their dance.

[74] Translated by, Utpal K. Banerjee *Op. Cit.,* p. 70.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has tried to evaluate the effects of nationalist ideals of Tagore into his dance and dance-dramas. In this entire context, I have tried to put him as parallel to other Institutes of classical dances, that is Rukmini Devi Arundale's *Kalashetra* in Chennai in 1936 for Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, and Leila Sokhey in Mumbai in 1934 for Kathak. The two artists wanted to represent the classical Indian dance as separated from the "low dance" forms of disrepute *nautchs* and the *devdasis.* It was a necessary step to bring their dance in the urban milieu with the participation of the "respectable" women, that is the bourgeois women, eventually marginalizing the "other" hereditary dancers. Although Tagore had also worked on the same perspective of bringing the *Bhadramahila* on the stage, he did not take up the pure classical styles as his only mode of representation. He had never conformed to the strict scriptures of traditions, but had always welcomed improvisation and re-moulding of the traditions, which was most vividly represented in his dance forms. He intertwined his dance-dramas with a sense of nationalism giving ample space to cross-culturalism and making the students aware of the "Free Movement" of Western modern dance. Other Asian dance forms, like Kandiyan dance from Srilanka, the folk and classical of Java and Bali, for which Shantidev Ghosh had taken a particular interest, were also given equal importance. He had given full freedom to his students to understand these various dance forms and apply them in the choreographies especially in the demonstration of his poems. Apart from this he had also introduced the Indian dances, especially emphasising on Kathakali and Manipuri, but not in the sense

of other institutes to upheld a sanskritized version of these dance, but in a simpler and modified way, made possible through his aversions towards traditions. Along with this the almost obsolete folk dances of the rural areas like Baul dance were also incorporated. Rabindranath had used all these different dance forms in composing his dance-dramas, the first attempt of which was made with *Notir Pujo,* 1926, which reached its mature phase with *Chitrangada* staged in 1936 and *Chandalika* in 1938. In the production of these dance–dramas Tagore had again stood out from his contemporary artists, for whom the most common theme was *Krishna and Radha*, mythological figures, as a way of portraying the Ancient Indian culture. Tagore's dance-dramas were an attempt to bring the social and political conditions around him along with his own viewpoints on stage, in front of a distinguished audience. For example in his 1938 dance-drama *Chandalika*, which took up the issue of untouchability and an alternative in Buddhism, appreciated by Mahatma Gandhi in 1940. This portrayal of the reality through stage was also an inspiration from the cognitive revolution taking place in the bourgeois society, especially in the field of theatre, which took up the issues of political development and their effects as the main theme. But, in spite of Tagore's attempts to uphold the socio-political scenario of the country, the newspaper reports were filled with criticisms for making the female students dance on stage. Because of this it is mentioned in multiple memoirs that the dance in Shantiniketan had developed behind veils. Aishika Chakraborty had argued that this initiative by Tagore to bring the women on stage was seen as a "scandal of freedom".[75] She had also criticised the current trends

[75] Aishika Chakraborty(2017), Dancing Against the Nation? Revisiting Tagore's Politics of Performance, in

in *Rabindrik Nach,* which has made dance completely subordinate to the Tagore songs.[76] Shantidev Ghosh had himself tried to clarify this misunderstanding in Tagore's dance. From his experience he had argued that the dance in Shantiniketan had developed according to different moods. Each dance was planned according to song and their rhythms. Hence, to codify this dance under *Ranbindra Nritya*, like other classical dance, could not do justice to the form.[77] Anyhow, the appeal of Tagorian dancing had reached other artists like Uday Shankar, who had marked his name on Indian stage, following the same ideals of Tagore which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

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K.L. Tuteja and Kaustav Chakraborty, eds., *Tagore and Nationalism*, New Delhi: Springer, p. 372.

[76] See Aishika Chakraboty (2011),"Performance, Modernity, Gender: Paradigm Shift(s) in Indian Dance", Simonti Sen ed., *They Dared: Essays in Honour of Pritilata Wadder*, Gungcheel, Calcutta, pp. 113-137

[77] Shantidev Ghosh, *Nrityakala O Rabindranath*, pp. 47-48.

# Chapter II

## Uday Shankar: a New Maestro with New Aesthetics for India

Following Rabindranath Tagore, another person who developed dance around the themes of the socio-political environment of his times was Uday Shankar. As discussed in the previous Chapter, Shankar was also a representative of the phase of transition and a major contributor in the field of new national dynamics of representation of modern dance in India as well as to the world. The Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova, made a discovery of a dancer inside the painter, Uday Shankar, who was a student of Sir William Rothenstein in the Royal College of Arts. Uday Shankar took up the work of re-presenting the Orient to the west through his mythological choreographies *Krishna and Radha*, with Pavlova Company in 1923,which gave his Western audience a fresh look into the exotic east. Here the term Orient has to be interpreted in the discourse of Saidian "Orientalism"[1]. Edward Said had argued that for Europe, the reference of the Orient had become the ground of comparison of civilisations to confirm the superiority of the Occident in the pre-eighteenth century era. But, on the grounds of religion, opinions had changed in the early nineteenth century Oriental studies which Said had termed under "Modern Orientalism"[2]. It had taken shape after Napoleon's description of his Egypt expedition (*Description de l'Egypte)*. Under this, the main feature was the study of the Oriental texts in Sanskrit, Zend, and Arabic along with institutes like American Oriental Society, giving Oriental studies a respected

[1] Edward Said(1978), *Orientalism*, New York: Panthean Books.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp 121-123.

status. Further Said argued that the Orientalist discourse took a Romantic turn with the urge to study the cultures and religion of India which can defeat the "materialism and mechanism" of the Occident. It was meant for the revival of Europe's holy mission.[3]

As for Oriental Dance, Joan Erdman had referred it to be an Occidental invention which represented the exotic Eastern dance associated with the Indian dress, that is dancing bare feet, women's uncovered midriff and men's bare chest.[4] She had argued that as the West had little or no idea about the East, any dance which represented Indian scenes on the stage could have qualified as Oriental Dancing.[5] In Indian perspective, Oriental dancing represented the dance of the Europeans which were presented in India, and thus, were not "authentically Indian". Dance as an important cultural aspect had not developed until the 1930s, but people were well aware of the dance traditions of the *devdasis* and the *tawaifs,* which became symbols of national culture.[6] This binary of "Oriental Dance" and Indian "Classical" dance was also a major challenge, which will be discussed later, faced by Uday Shankar when he tried to propagate his style of national dancing in India.

This renewed interest in the Oriental culture had set the stage for Pavlova's three miniature ballets called *Oriental Impressions* in 1923 which included *Japanese Impressions, Hindu Wedding* and *Krishna and Radha,* and *Ajanta Frescoes.* Shankar had become a part of this troupe. The idea for this theme came to her after her

[3] *Ibid.,* p115.
[4] Joan L. Erdman (1996), "Dance Discourses: Rethinking the History Of the "Oriental" Dance", in Gay Morris (ed), *Moving Words: Re-writing Dance, London: Routledge,* p.252
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.,* pp. 253-254.

tour to Orient. For the tradition of dance in Japan, she found a good response, as she got the support of Mr. Koshiro Fijima and Miss Fumi of Tokyo to choreograph *Japanese Impressions*. As for India, she returned disappointed as dancing in India was looked upon as "frivolous and vulgar pursuit". She got her inspiration instead from temples and festivities and returned to England in 1922. But for Shankar the experience was a little different as he had early encounters with dance during his stay in Jhalawar, where he witnessed the nautch performances of court dancers in classical Kathak style.[7] His biographer, Mohan Khokar notes that he was not impressed as he saw it as the dance which was meant to impress others. Instead, Shankar's interests grew towards the folk dances of the women of Rajasthan, the sword play of the Rajputs and tribal Bhil dance. From these ideas and his similar themed paintings, he "arranged" the choreographies of *Hindu Wedding* and *Krishna and Radha* which were showcased in the Royal Opera House, London, in 1923[8]. The music was arranged by Miss Comolota Banerjee, a pianist, who was known for her propagation of the Eastern music in the West. The newspaper reports were filled with praises for Pavlova for the performances. Miss Banerjee, on the other hand, was equally criticised for her music. In Daily Telegraph review of the performance, for example, there was a positive critique for the dance form and stage decoration which upheld the romanticism of the Eastern scenery and a panoply creating "a stage on stage". But for the music it reviewed:

[7] Mohan Khokar (1983), *His Dance, His Life: A Portrait of Uday Shankar,* New Delhi: Himalayan books, p.20
[8] *Ibid*., p.27

"….it was not wholly wise to go the East for music. In that field East is East and West is West. No doubt the tunes we heard were genuine enough and beautiful. But there are artistic products which cannot be exported without losing their characteristic flavour."[9]

This performance by Pavlova troupe was not the first attempt in representing the Orient. In 1906 Ruth St. Denis had presented her choreography *Radha* in America, which according to Jane Desmond was a presentation of Denis's physical performance with spirituality of the mind.[10] For its physical aspects, Ruth Denis had taken her inspiration from the Delsarte movement, theorised by Francoise Delsarte, emphasised on "natural body alignment ", based on spiralling body movements, statue posing and pantomime through which the expressions could be more authentic or spiritual.[11] This was combined with the idea of Oriental sexuality, termed as "Oriental orgasmic", which appealed very much with the American audience in search of an exotic Orient, especially the women who found through this a new freedom for their body as well as for their sexualities[12]. Ted Shawn, Denis's husband, had described the search of the Orient by Ruth was primarily for the spiritual upliftment of dance[13] which she sought in the Hindu practices of India which her imitators were not able to copy. A major role was played here by the new consciousness about the Orient that was working amongst the people of the Occident. The records and memoirs of the

[9] *Ibid., p.34*
[10]Jane Desmond, "Dancing out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's "Radha" of 1906", *Signs,* Vol. 17, No. 1 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 28-49, The University of Chicago Press
[11] *Ibid.,* p.35.
[12] *Ibid.,* pp.36-37.
[13] Ted Shawn (1920), *Ruth Denis:Pioneer and Prophet,* Vol. 1, San Francisco: Printed for John Howell by John Henry Nash, pp. v-vi.

imperialists had played a role in this. To go through it I would briefly discuss here the accounts left by Vincent Smith from his 1924 book "*Early History of India, from 600 B. C. to the Muhammadan Conquest, Including the Invasion of Alexander the Great*", studied exclusively by Ronald Inden, expressing that there has been no evolution in India in either the political or the spiritual upliftment of its people[14]. Needless to say that this situation was considered to be stagnant, because of which colonial administration over its people had become important. Another important observation for India was its religion, universally known as "Hindu", which incorporated everything, from its people, to their language ,to their culture. Hence, for an unique identification of every Indian troupe that represented India on the Western stage, they had to adopt the name "Hindoo". For example, when Leila Sokhey had performed in the Berlin Olympics International dance competition in 1936, she chose the name "Madam Menoka's Hindu Ballet"[15]. Here Hindu did not represent the religion but the country itself. Thus, the dance of India was "Hinduised" in the West. Hence, when Shankar arrived in the West he also had to face similar suggestions of incorporating the terms "Hindu" and being an "Indian Prince", to which he had objected, to be put in his posters of advertisements by the organisers of various shows[16].

In this scenario, Shankar came out different. He got his ideas of representing the east in the west in Shyam Shankar Choudhury's, his father, productions in 1922 *The Glorious East In West* at Little Theatre, London. It consisted of plays titled, "The

[14] Ronald Inden (1990), *Imagining India*, Cambridge: Blackwell, p.8
[15] Discussed in previous chapter.
[16] Khokar, *Op.Cit., pp.* 20-21

Queen of Kamrup", "The Queen of Chittor" and "The Dreamer Awakened".[17] These productions were not based on dance. Shankar's role in the first play was that of showing magic tricks and in the third play, which was based on The Arabian Nights, he played the role of Abu Hussain. The title itself suggested that the aim of the production was to showcase the *Glorious* East to the West. The second play, the Queen of Chittor, was to represent the valour of the Rajput warriors and the Princesses of the palace who chose to sacrifice their life in burning pyres after the invasion of Mohemmedan in the Chittor Fort. This can be viewed as an attempt to show the "powerful" side of the East or the Orient as opposed to the perceptions of "weak, defeated and effeminate" Orient which needs to be ruled under the imperialist Occident. Said had termed this to be "latent" Orientalism.[18] Also, as opposed to Ruth Denis's *Radha* which represented the sexuality of the goddess, The Queen of Chittor was meant to show the self-sacrifice of the Rajput women who just lost their husband in the war to save their honour from the invaders. Hence, Uday Shankar had got some idea from these themes and modes of representation of the Orient, which he used to present during his performances on the stages of the Occident. This view of showing the unknown powers of the East was well reflected in his performances which will be discussed further.

When Shankar worked outside the Pavlova company in 1924, initially to sustain himself he had to perform in small cabarets. In these small performances also

[17] Ruth K. Abrahams, 'Uday Shankar: The Early Years, 1900-1938', *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2007), pp. 363-426, Taylor & Francis, Ltd. pp. 372-374.
[18] Said, *op.cit.,* p.207.

he chose to dance on themes of *Sword Dance*, *Nautch, Hindu Dance,* etc. Shankars biographer, Mohan Khokar, had in the entire book emphasised on the point that Shankar had never tried to use "western art form" in his dance[19]. This had come upon Shankar more strongly when Pavlova had refused to teach him ballet and instructed him to discover the dance of India. It was not the first time that his mentors had advised him to study the Indian art. William Rothenstein had also advised Shankar not to follow the western model advising him to study ancient Indian arts and "recapture the soul of India".

Following this he and Alice Boner, his patron for the upcoming performances and a sculptress, visited India in 1930 to observe caves and temples. During their visit to Kerala, they witnessed Kathakali dance, which seemed to Shankar similar to his own dance technique. His encounter with *Nataraj* was much later when he found the copy of *Mirror of Gesture,* gifted by the renowned philosopher and art historian, Ananda Coomaraswamy during his Europe tour years between 1924-1925. By looking at this picture, Shankar had felt that the figure of *Nataraj* had held the mystics of dance and energy that he was searching for. It was from this realisation that in the next dance productions that he composed, the figure of *Nataraj*, *Shiva,* and his divine consort, *Parvati* had played a very important part in his mythological compositions, although their representations were not exactly like the ones depicted by the Bharatanatyam or Kathakali trained dancers. During his visit to Calcutta he had put up performances on *Shiva, Indra, Gandharva* and *Baiji*, for which Abanindranath Tagore, the

[19] Khokar, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

founder and representative of Indian Society of Oriental Art, had praised Shankar for his "originality" and for rescuing the "tradition" that was becoming obsolete[20]. In 1933, when Shankar had performed in the Madan Theatre in Calcutta, Rabindranath Tagore was present in the audience. In Santiniketan also Shankar gave a performance after which Tagore wrote a letter to him where he gave his opinion on dancing saying thus:

"…There are no bounds to the depths or to the expansion of any art which, like dancing, is the expression of life's urge. We must never shut it within the bounds a stagnant deal, nor define it as either Indian or Oriental or Occidental, for Such finalities only robs it of life's privilege which is freedom……Genius is defined in our language as the power that unfolds ever new possibilities in the revelation of the beauty and truth. It is because we are sure of your genius that we hope your creations will not be a mere imitation of the past nor burdened with the narrow conventions of provincialism."[21]

This letter gives the impression that the idea of "traditional" or "classical" Indian art was getting ground in the sub-continent. Tagore, who was himself in the phase of discovering dance as a means of self-expression, had appreciated Shankar's unique style. On the other hand staunch, criticisms came from the southern parts of India. For example, the *Triveni- A journal of Indian Renaissance*, had reviewed on Shankar on August 1933, suggesting him to stay in India and learn Indian classical traditions from masters like Narayanswamy

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[21] *Ibid.*, p.75.

Iyer, a Bharatnatyam dance expert, to revive the ancient Indian dance traditions. Also it remarked :

"…..In a matter like this ( that is representing India) the appreciation of the west is not everything, for the public there knows little about the genius and scope of our scope. Uday Shankar is ambitious, and complete success in the dances he attempts is possible if he equip himself with a thorough knowledge of the art."[22]

Another dance critic from Madras, G.K. Sheshagiri, had given similar reviews on Shankar's dance calling it "barely tolerable" because of its costume, décor and music.[23] To this Shankar had responded insisting that art should not be fixated to any one particular time period and that it should be ever changing.[24] Shankar's retaliation has been interpreted by Prathana Purkayastha as a "trajectory of experimentation"[25] and originality which defied the classicism projects of Indian nationalists. As mentioned earlier, Shankar's works were coincided with the nationalist movements in India, when there was a quest in the subcontinent to build up the nation's own unique cultural identity.[26] Partha Chatterjee had distinguished between material or political nationalism and spiritual nationalism. He argued that the spiritual nationalism had been always been inherent among the Indian minds which made their personal surroundings, like the

[22] *Ibid.,* p. 74
[23] *Ibid.,* p. 78.
[24] *Ibid.,* This entire criticism and Shankar's response was published by John Martin in *New York Times* in 1934, who had also supported Shankar's view point adding that dance should be open to general ranks and not confined in strict scriptures, so that it could be interpreted according to individual artists.
[25] Prarthana Purkayastha (2014), *Indian Modern Dance: Feminism and Transnationalism*, U.K: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.54-55
[26] *Ibid.*,p.55

family, religion etc., impenetrable by the colonial forces. Whereas political nationalism, stood at constant dualism between the people and the power. The spiritual nationalism had the essence what brought together the *imagined community* for the people[27]. Similarly dance and music were also build up within the space of spiritual nationalism. The Madras Academy of Music, for example, established in 1937, was conceived after the national meeting of the congress in Madras attended by ardent nationalist and amateur musicians. C. Rajagopalachari, in the opening speech of the academy, on the one hand, he criticised the appreciation of all things foreign by the "popular minds", on the other hand, admired them for their taste in the *swadeshi* music, making the revival in Indian classical music an important part of the twentieth century Swadeshi movement.[28] K.N. Pannikar had suggested that the cultural-ideological struggle in India involved the efforts to reform the backward elements of traditional culture and to resist the penetration of colonial culture. This struggle had made culture an important constituent of the popular consciousness[29]. But it was a struggle in the negative sense for it involved the creation of an alternative cultural-ideological system and a re-generation of the traditional institutions. It indicated a struggle opposite to evangelism[30]. The same could be said about the dance revivalism, put forward by various dance scholars, which reinstated the traditional

[27] Partha Chaterjee (1993), *Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Histories*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press,pp.6-9. Also see Benedict Anderson (1983), *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.
[28] Mathew Harp Allen (2008), "Standardize, Classicize, and Nationalize: The Scientific Work of the Music Academy of Madras, 1930-52", in Indira Vishwanathan Peterson and Davesh Soneji (ed.), *Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South Asia,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press , pp. 91-92.
[29] K.N. Pannikar (2007), *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*, N. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 48-49.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

dances, like *sadir*[31], but in a reformed style of *Bharatanatyam* to be practised by the "respectable women" of the urban milieu, as opposite to the "Oriental" dance. In this context, the classical dance forms acted as resistance towards the "modern Oriental dance", which was perceived as a product of colonial intervention.

Contrary to this were the views of Occident audience who invited Shan-Kar (this was the way Shankar's name were written in the pamphlets) with open arms. Shankar performed with his troupe, his prime partner was Simkie financed by Alice Boner, in Paris in 1930 October under the name of *La Campaignie d'Uday Shan-Kar Hindoue Danses et la Musique* (The Uday Shankar Company of Hindu Dances and Music) . In 1931 he performed in *Theatre des Champs-Elysee* with fifteen performances including *Indra, Wedding Dance, Temple Dance, Spring Dance, Tandava Nritya*, which, as Khokar stated, introduced the form of "Indian Ballet"[32]. It must be understood that, although the themes were taken up as *Tandava* and *Temple Dance*, these were choreographed as Shankar had understood them. Rene Daunal, a French scholar of Sanskrit and Indologist, who translated *Natya Shastra* had commented in *Hound and Horn* thus:

"During the last several years something extraordinary has occurred in various European cities….It was this: Hindu thought, alive, authentic, in flesh and bone, in sound and gesture, and spirit was presented, here in our midst. Nothing

[31] In the early nineteenth century when Bharatanatyam was practised by the temple devdasis, it was known as *Sadir.*
[32] Khokar, *op.cit.*, p.56

deformed it, which is a kind of miracle: neither stupid translators nor hypocritical interpreters, not even…Theosophy."[33]

Joan L. Erdman had explained this clash of interpreting the performance as "performance lost in translation".[34] Erdman had argued that Shankar's productions were presented in such a way that the essence of India, mostly the exotic and spiritual were able to mould itself into western style of dance-drama or Ballet, making the entire act 'readable' to the audience. This "essence" was an important element in Shankar's dance which attracted the Western audience. To make his acts "authentically" Indian, he chose to keep the costumes Oriental and for the music also instruments such as *tabla, jal tarang, sarangi, sarod,* etc., were used to form the orchestra[35]. Having the experience of Miss Comolota Banerjee and the criticisms she faced, Shankar got the idea not to change the base of music, though he introduced changes in its use. For example, rather than using the cyclic mode of *tala* (where the music begins at "one" and ends at "one") as is heard in the Indian classical dance music, he chose the western musical pattern of linear metric mode (where the music starts at one and ends at the last note of the sequence),which Erdman had claimed to be closer to the folk dancing of northeast, making it more accessible to the western audience[36]. Because of such cautious measures taken by Shankar in the presentation of his performances on the Occident stage, he was able to gain the popularity on the global stage.

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[33] *Ibid.,* p.57.
[34] Joan L. Erdman (1987), Performance as Translation: Uday Shankar in the West, *The Drama Review*: TDR, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring), pp. 64-88,
[35] *Ibid,* pp. 67-68.
[36] *Ibid.*

When Shankar returned India in 1938 with his ideas, instead of changing his style to the Indian way, he taught this technique in his Almora dance centre, Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre. In opening of his Centre, he got significant amount of funds from the Dartington Hall Trust, London. He gave equal importance to the training in classical dances by gurus like Shankaran Namboodiri for Kuchipudi, Amobi Singh for Manipuri, Kandapan Pillai for Bharatanatyam. Along with these classes, his special emphasis was on the "improvisation" class. The students in this class were encouraged to form their own style of dancing to any give theme. This was followed by a self-criticism to develop a health attitude towards art and towards one another.[37] This was the most important element of Shankar's technique. It can be, thus, argued that it was the popularity that he had gained in the west that brought him criticisms at home. Probably in Shankar, a person who can understand the mode of presentation on the global stage, his critics had seen in him a potential to be the carrier of the Indian classical dance, which Shankar had refused to be and, hence, it drew a retaliation towards him.

**Kalpana: The Artist's Imagination**

In his representation of India he had other plans. His concern for India was shown in his mega project, the one two hour long feature film *Kalpana*, released in 1948, written and directed by Uday Shankar and music by Vishnu Prasad Shirali. It was Shankar's most ambitious project. The dance sequences shown in this movie were completely different from the ones he used to perform on the western stages. Like Tagore, he chose to represent the social milieu on stage,

[37] Mohan Khokar, *Op.Cit.,* p.99

where the main target were the middle class nationalists. *Kalpana* was filmed during the time when India was in the process of a paradigm shift, with newly found Independence, partition, writing of the constitution, and integration of the princely states. Simultaneously, in the film industry of post-colonial India, the opening of Film Division in 1948 was aimed at re-inventing documentary films, disseminating visual representation of various aspects of India to its vast illiterate population.[38] For the specific re-presentation of art and cultural documentaries, Srirupa Roy has observed a particular pattern in showcasing the culture as "tangible objects located in specific time and space"[39], to be conceived as "non- urban" exotic other, especially the folk traditions, which were hidden cultures of the society. This kind of portrayal of the folk cultures brought out a sense of quest of "real culture" of India which was inevitably located somewhere else.[40] *Kalpana* was pictured in this similar sense of bringing the cultures of India out of the urban bourgeois milieu. The entire film was centred on the imaginary institute of Udayan, the male protagonist of the movie, played by Shankar himself. It represented Shankar's personal ideas on his Almora Centre, placed high in the foothills of Himalayas, where under one roof he wanted to bring the various dance forms of India from Kathak to the folk dances of Nagaland and other states.

Shankar might have found it to be a part of his responsibility to show his ideas on the formation of the new India to the people from the view point of an

[38] Srirupa Roy (2007), *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 35-39.
[39] *Ibid*, p. 43
[40] *Ibid.*

artist. It could also have been worked out as a retaliation to criticisms he had to face for not representing India in "the right way" to the outside world. In the matter of dance, though the deemed classical dances were depicted, more importance was given to the folk and tribal forms, which were alien to the audience. The audience in the movie, comprising of elites of the princely states, were not able to recognise these forms and questioned whether these were tribal dances of Africa. This made it evident that India still had the task to recognise these hidden non-Sanskritic dance, which Kalpana Ram had classified as "minor practices" along with *attam* dance, for these fall under the subaltern category[41]. In the entire film the most important parts of the dance-drama showcased were *Labour and Machinary*, the depiction of Bharat Mata, and *Young and Old*, which addressed the issue of education. The mythological plays were also included like *Shiva and Parvati*, the slaying of *Gaja-asura*, to portray the glorious pasts of the country. But in this chapter I would like to discuss upon the plays which were concerned with the socio-political scenario of post-colonial India, along with the artist's imagination.

In the introduction itself Shankar had made the aim of the film very clear. It read:

[41] Kalpana Ram (2011), "Being `*rasikas*': the affective pleasures of music and dance spectatorship and nationhood in Indian middle-class modernity", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 17, The aesthetics of nations: anthropological and historical approaches, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, pp. S159-S175, for a full study of the folk dances of India, see, Kapila Vatsyayan (1976), *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance*, New Delhi: Indian Book Company.

"……Some of the events depicted here will reel off at great speed and if you miss any piece…. You will be missing a vital aspect of our country's life in its Religion, Politics, Education, Society, Art and Culture, Agriculture and Industry."

Thus, he had insisted the audience to stay active during the projection of the film, as it touched on the various aspects of life with which each and every person was daily involved. But the reviews of the film had held a different opinion, for example, in *Filmindia*, praising the film it was written:

" 'Kalpana'…is a picture which…defies analysis and should not be analysed and dissected….That Uday Shankar's progressive vision has invested this beauty with a social purpose raises it to the level of great, inspired Art dedicated to the service of Humanity."[42]

The first production that I would discuss is *Labour and Machinery*. The central theme of the choreography was to show how, while working in the factories the people of the village, impersonating the machines, are forgetting their lives as agricultural workers and finally revolted against the factory owner. It was a subtle take on the growing capitalist industries and their state machinery, the police and law, to "keep the order". In the movie, the choreography was depicted in the backdrop of a meeting hall where several members of the bourgeois elite order of Bombay had gathered. Udayan, the male protagonist, had also attended the meeting in a bid to get financial assistance for his dance school, in a complete western attire. In between the conversation, in Udayan's dream/imagination the entire sequence of the choreography was presented. Within the choreography,

[42] Khokar, *Op.Cit.,* p. 121.

Udayan saw himself as one of the factory workers in tattered clothes. The binary between the two Udayans, one in western attire and the other in factory clothes, was clearly presented. The entire theme had given a simple message to its viewers, that the entire world of capitalism and the rising industries had turned the workers into machines and the middle class bourgeois had turned greedy, to care nothing about these workers. The result of such exploitation would be a revolt on the factory owner. But along with that it also gave a glimpse into the consequence of such revolt in the form of state repression by the authority of the police. In the midst of this, Udayan wakes up from his dream realising that he was still sitting in the midst of the meeting hall, after which he leaves the place critiquing the people for their show of wealth. Hence, the entire sequence was shown as a wakeup call for him which gave him a new motto of working with the poor and destitute around him and to take up their attire as well.

This dance pattern depicted in the movie was interpreted by different scholars, for example, Urmimala Sarkar Munsi saw the choreography *Labour and Machinery* as a piece that had achieved a beautiful balance in the dichotomy of agricultural and industrial world, and the resulting revolt which could happen if the balance is lost[43]. For this particular reason this choreography of *Labour and Machinery* had gained a special importance. The time frame within which it was presented, was the time of Industrial awakening of India. The migration

[43] Urmimala Sarkar Munsi (2011), " Imag(in)ing The Nation: Uday Shankar's Kalpana", in Urmimala Sarkar Munsi and Stephanie Burridge (ed.) *Traversing Tradition: Celebrating Dance In India*, N. Delhi: Routledge, pp. 136-139. Also see, Nilanjana Bhattacharjya (2011), "A productive distance from the nation: Uday Shankar and the defining of Indian modern dance", *South Asian History and Culture*, 2:4, 482-501.

from the rural areas towards the urban areas gave the cities its labour force because of which the law and order of the state, protecting the capitalist interests, assured of suppression of the labour unrest. Because of the fact that this growing industrialisation led to the rapid expansion towards the countryside in the early twentieth century, Bomb had come up as a major hub of textile industry in India[44]. Hence the location of this imagination was carefully chosen.

In continuation to the depiction of the poor state of the marginals of the society, the next choreography represented the image of *Bharat Mata*. She was depicted in a very poor state. It was the result of being broken into narrow provincialism of various states which found their own history in their different national icons which now became state icons. It was also a subtle take on the "nationalists" and politicians, who were seen giving out slogans on the history of the country and a cry of hail to the mother. In the midst of this scenario, *Bharat Mata* was depicted in agonising pain to put a stop on these slogan chanting which she said had "halted at the lips of the nationalists". This was followed by a monologue on the cry to make the nation united again, to gain freedom from the caste and class politics of the society which can affect the minds of the children as well. This depiction of the Bharat Mata was also very important. In the colonial period the most famous depiction of India was of Abanindranath Tagore in 1905. He had painted her in a serene nature holding book, grain and cloth, draped in saffron cloths and representing qualities which

[44] For a full discussion on the emergence of Bombay industry see Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (1994), *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India Business strategies and the working classes in Bombay, 1900-1940*, Cambridge University Press; Dipesh Chakrabarty (1989), *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal,1890-1940*, Princeton: Princeton University press; Samita Sen (1999), *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry*, Cambridge University Press.

the middle classes anticipated for.[45] In the late twentieth century, that is in the later phases of nationalism, Bharata Mata was always depicted within the presence of the lions on both her sides, sometimes surrounded by the leaders of the national movement like Bhagat Singh, Netaji, Gandhi, etc. In the nineteenth century there were images in circulation in Chromolithography where she was represented in tattered cloths and mourning in 1873[46]. But these imageries were depicted during the colonial rule. What made Uday Shankar's imagery interesting was that the artist showed that the *Bharat Mata* was still in despair because of the wrong done to her, that is dividing her into states, and she was afraid for her children who were still holding on to the past glories while ignoring the problems at hand, that is poverty.

The third important choreography was the depiction of state of education and the future of the youth of the country. In this choreography the young graduates, male and female, were seen walking across the stage with their graduation robes and their degrees. The background commentary accompanying it explained that the education had become a part of the knowledge gaining programme only, devoid of moral and ethical education. The parents of these students, the older generation, on the other hand, were waiting to receive their children to use their degrees for their own desires. For the women, the parent's comments were that, with this degree they could get suitable bridegroom for their daughters, whereas for the male students, the degree would give them the opportunity to

[45] Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelberger ed., (2008), *Bharat Mata: India's Freedom Movement in Popular Art*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 38.
[46] Christopher Pinney (2003), "'A Secret of their own Country': Or, how Indian nationalism made itself irrefutable", in Sumathi Ramaswamy ed., *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 124-125.

ask for a lump sum for dowry. The end of the play showed a big question mark at the back of stage to which the students pointed to denote their future. The end remark of the play was to give importance to the institutes like Kalakendra by Udayan, which can house a number of training schools, like gymnasium, drama club, dance club, etc., which can give an overall physical and mental education to the youth of the country. This kind of institute could build an all-round personality of every student through dance, music and art. In the artist's imagination, India needs to get such kind of institutes for their younger generation who are in a pursuit of a "true" education. It can be seen as a pure promotion of Shankar's own Cultural Centre, but the depictions made were absolutely accurate.

Through these three acts, it can be seen that the film's primary concern was to show the divide in the twentieth century society. These binaries had existed in every field, like the young and old, and the poor and rich. Through his *Kalakendra*, Udayan was seen trying to minimise these binaries. A significant example could be cited was the scene in the movie where the guests were entering into the hall of performance for the annual day function. Among the guests, the princes of various princely states were also invited. For entering the hall each of the guest had to enter through a very low gate because of which the princes had to take their crowns off to steep very low on ground. The reason behind this action was that every guest, irrespective of their dignity and status, had to bow their head in front of the art. Thus for that significant moment every guest had to go through the same custom.

Apart from these depictions of dance, Shankar had also emphasised on the part of the new "box office" industry. The film starts with a sign "Box Office is our God" to show the office of a producer of the film industry. An old man, Udayan, had approached him asking him to read his story. At the end of the movie again the old Udayan was shown who got rejected because his movie plot lacked a "Love story". It was said that the film could not make a good profit in the Box office. The film ended with a cry of the artist to the audience about this lack of social responsibility among the new age industrialist, who were only hungry for profits, ignoring the social values, fearing that the *Kalpana* of artist would remain a mere imagination and cannot be presented to the Indians.

These were the effects of "privatisation of the media" which had affected the global media in the twentieth century. Edward S. Hermans and Robert McChesney gave a thorough view on how the rise of Transnational Companies (TNCs) in the post- World War II era, which were and still are getting a hold of the media has turned it into an entertainment industry which adversely affects the public sphere. This public sphere can go through a dichotomy of 'public service programs' and that of 'light entertainment', out of which the commercialised media would always prefer 'light entertainment'. The main threats of this public sphere to provide 'public service' were explained to be Government censorship, which includes the influence of the ruling political party giving threats to the

journalists, and the private systems of controls involving self -censorship[47]. In the interest of the film *Kalpana* the latter threat was presented. This threat includes the factor of increased commercialisation of the media and their hunt for advertisements from the corporate world. Hence, criticisms of the same corporate media could not be produced in the public spheres which in turn affects the main ethics of public service that is information to the public. So, as an alternative to that the media shifted their attention to contents of violence and 'love stories'.[48] The Bombay film industry had also faced similar consequences. The halls where these movies were set up were filled with tired office workers and labour class people who only wanted entertainment in the end of the day, which brought in the women entertainers into the industry in an over sexualised presentation which was highly criticised in the public opinion.[49] In contrast to this, in the choreographies of *Kalpana*, the women, in one scene, were portrayed as walking with an air of dignity and broad chests, casting away the questions of the society on their morality. For the lack of this kind of 'entertainment' and the satire made on the behaviour of the wealthy princes, representing the capitalist classes , the film producer throws out Udayan with his script and gets the advice to open his private studios to shoot his desired film.

Through this film, it can be argued that Shankar had opened up a new scope into the world of "contemporary" dancing. The main objective is to point to

[47] Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney (1997), *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism*, London: Cassel. Pp. 4-8.
[48] Kaustav Bhaumik (2001), *The Emergence of Bombay Film Industry, 1913-36*, Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford. Pp. 83-84.
[49] *Ibid.*

the society, represented by the audience, who were mostly of middle class background, their realities and flaws from the artist's point of view. I saw the film as an effort made by Shankar as an answer to his critics who accused him of not representing India properly. But, despite of such great efforts put up by Shankar the reviews from the southwere not positive. In *Cine Times-Madras* the film was regarded as of "mediocre variety" and that it was devoid of any aesthetic perception.[50]

Throughout the whole movie, he had shown in various ways the conditions of the society, be it village, the young generation and education or the partition and mother earth, shown in tattered clothes. Apart from that the film was an effort to portray his own institute, the Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre at Almora. Unfortunately, it was because of the shortage of fund in the period of World War Two this centre did not last long, and had to shut down. Moreover Shankar had staked his everything for his film project because of which most of his associates had abandoned him.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have tried to discuss how Uday Shankar had tried to portray the nationalist image of India to the Occident. Before Shankar, the dance represented by the Western artists like Ruth St. Denis, had shown India as an exotic land with mythological figures being devoted to a male God, mostly *Krishna*. This perspective of the Occidental artists had created an image of India as a land of orgasmic mysticism which is approachable for spiritual fulfilment. This image

[50] Khokar, *Op.Cit.*,p.122.

had appealed to the Americans especially for their quest to find a spiritual realm outside their materialistic world. In this scenario Uday Shankar's dance and his re-presentation of the Orient was absolutely different. He had tried to portray India in a way of "real land" where people's struggles were real. He gained his initial experience in such an endevour through his father's production in 1922 *Glorious East in the West* through which the valour of the Rajputs were portrayed. His association with Anna Pavlova had further polished his take on dance, after which he choreographed pieces which were themed around sword dance, *nautch*, etc. Along with it, through his study of the Indian artefacts and temple reliefs during his visits in the 1930s, he had developed ideas of the Indian mythology. The most famous amongst which was his dance ballet *Shiva Parvati*. Although he had found his similarity in style of Kathakali of South India, he did not adopt its pure form. Like Tagore he wanted to experiment with various forms to create his own choreographies. For his Indian audience, he had different plans. He wanted to give them a view of their society interspersed with mythological themes, as a glimpse of the ancient past, best exhibited through his most ambitious project, *Kalpana*, a film released in 1948, immediately after the Independence. I have argued that this film had acted as an answer to the critics of Shankar who had presented their dissatisfaction against him for not representing the "classical" or the true dances of India. From this movie I have discussed three of his most important choreographies namely *Labour and Machine, Young and Old*, and another on the depiction of *Bharat Mata.* Along with a subtle criticism of the present situation of India, it

also showed the growing "Box Office" culture of the film industry which has gone down to selling art and gaining profits from the bourgeoisie. With these choreographies I have tried to show how relevant these were when compared to the situation outside the staged hall.

Although I have mentioned here that it was a part of the new "contemporary" dancing, Projesh Banerjee had argued that Shankar's dance can be considered as a part of "classical" dancing in the sense that Shankar's style had kept the distinctiveness of the classical dances from where he adapted, especially *Kathakali,* in his new creative dance which were used to present the 'actual' world as well as mythological theme. Hence, if classical dances were developed by decorating the folk and primitive dance, then Uday Shankar's dance qualified in creative beauty, but only lacked in being 'ancient', can also be categorised in 'classical'[51]. But in my opinion categorising Shankar's dance within classical would not be sufficient. The term "classical" itself would narrow down Shankar's work into the traditional boundaries of dance with fixed forms. On the contrary Shankar had always invited improvisation from his students which he willingly incorporated into his technique. Because of this Shankar was able to gain recognition in both the stages of the Occident and the Orient. Still his form was an exposure of a new Indian essence to the rest of the world.

[51]Projesh Banerjee, (1982), *Uday Shankar and His Art, 1900-1977,* Delhi: B.R. Pub. Corp. pp. 113-114.

## Chapter III

## Adaptation, Co-ordination and New National Forms: Mrinalini Sarabhai and Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar.

After Uday Shankar the trend of modern dancing was taken forward by the late twentieth century dancers and choreographers, accompanied by the criticisms of the classicists. But unlike Shankar, these new dancers like Mrinalini Sarabhai and Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sirkar had initially taken their training in the Indian classical dance forms. They stood out in the sense that they did not remain static in one particular form, but improvised within the classical forms which invited criticisms from the traditionalists. Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sirkar had explained that *Nritya* , that is the traditional dance, need not be given up completely for "modernisation" which would only encourage adoption from the West leading to "cultural colonialism".[1] Hence, it needs to go through evolutionary changes like shaping the *nritya* in a psycho-emotional context to keep the narrative for the audience simple/readable to understand the production. [2] It can be argued that the dance styles of the two artists had opened the road to the postmodern turn in dance, which saw its full body in dancers like Chandralekha (1928-2006).

To understand the dance themes of these new dancers as a re-interpretation of the modern, it is important to briefly study the concept of postmodern art. The postmodern art, as defined by Jean-Francois Lyotard, referred to questioning of

[1] Manjusri Chaki Sarkar, "Tagore and Modernisation of Dance", in Sunil Kothari (ed.) *New Directions in Indian Dance*. p.35.
[2] *Ibid.*

the pre-existing "rules" set in arts to present the 'unpresentable'[3]. It is different from 'realism', described by Lyotard as a means to keep the factual image of the society "to preserve various consciousness from doubt"[4] . In other words, 'realism' establishes a specific norm of 'beauty' for the eyes of the audience by the state which the postmodern artists need to re-evaluate. It includes questioning their predecessors from whom they learnt the art, as well as the known truth so as to re-discover the "true art" which questions everything in their surroundings.[5] For performing arts, Sally Banes has described postmodernism in dance as "….historical movement in dance, the present moment in dance, and a method of analysing dance."[6] The new choreographers of the postmodern dance, she argued, were trying to inject their political identity and breaking barriers in their cultural strata. Thus it would be safe to argue that, this shift to postmodernism by the dancers had to come through venturing out of the "tradition"[7]. Shreeparna Ghosal, being a Bharatnatyam dancer herself, had explained that the inherent *guru-shishya parampara*, the master-disciple relationship, had required a full submission to the masters. It maintained an authenticity of the art and also created a comfort zone for the artist. Because of this, the concepts of "tradition" and "purity" were strongly etched in the psyche of the dancers so much so that it became an ego problem for them who were not able to accept the new

[3] Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979), *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 81.
[4] *Ibid*, p. 74.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
[6] Sally Banes, (1994), *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism*, University Press of New England, Hanover, p- xii.
[7] "Tradition" here is kept in quotes because it has been considered a very loaded term. According to Rustom Bharucha, tradition has two meaning. Ontologically, tradition refers to anything which has been passed on into generations. On the other hand, in the methodological sense tradition refers to opposite of modernity. Because of the unending changes which happen within 'modernity', tradition also shows its own dynamism. See, Rustom Bharucha (1990), *Theatre and the World:Performance and the politics of culture*, London: Routledge.

genres. Paradoxically, she gave an example from the *Natyashastra* which suggested that "dress and speech should confirm to the regional usage of the spectators; the actors and producers should observe the local modes of speech and manners and conform to them…"[8]. This kind of indication gives a performer ample space to improvise. For the postmodern performers, these "observations" can be done on the local societies where the performances were to be given and on the kind of audience who would receive it. Peter Burger had explained in his avant-garde definition of art, that in the bourgeois society art gained an autonomy status where it was to be pursued as a space away from the bourgeois praxis of life which represented a "means end rationality". The avant-garde movement was against this. It wanted art to be assimilated into a *new* praxis of life derived from aestheticism. Thus, it was a critic against art being used as an institution for the bourgeois self-representation.[9] Lyotard, defining postmodern art, had called it to be 'trans-avant-gardism' arguing that capitalism can 'de-realise' the social values to such an extent that the presentation of the 'familiar' would work only as a nostalgia or mockery. Therefore, for such an "ill community" the artists must work as a "healer" which makes it necessary to develop art as a separate institution.[10]

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[8] Ghosal, Shreeparna, "The Problematic of Tradition and Talent in Indian Classical Dance." In Pallabi Chakravorty and Nilanjana Gupta ed., *Dance Matters: Performing India*, 2010, Routledge, New Delhi, pp 56-59

[9] Peter Burger , (1984), *Theory of Avant-garde,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 49-51. Because of shortage of space, I chose to incorporate here the arguments concerning the avant-garde and the change in perspective or purpose of art when it came in the bourgeois society , gaining an autonomous status, from the courtly art, when art was used for representational purposes of the courtly culture. The bourgeois art, on the other hand, was meant for self-representational purposes.

[10] Lyotard *Op.Cit.,* pp.73-74.

In analysing this postmodern dance, Jacque Derrida's theory of 'deconstruction', that is questioning the imposing objectivity and turning more towards subjectivity of any theme, can be helpful. Ann Cooper Albright, in her analysis of *Choreographies*, an interview of Derrida by Christie Mc. Donald, had put forward the idea of "theoretical possibilities of a form of communication predicated on the instability of the body and the resultant displacement of meaning" [11]. Albright had emphasized on the 'reading' of the body in motion rather than concentrating on the written words which makes the observer aware of the kinaesthetic as well as the visual and intellectual implications of dance. Being a feminist and a dancer, she saw the body of the dancer as representing the moral values of the society. Explaining this phenomenon , she wrote:

"Dancers….. can consciously engage in a physical training that seeks to resist oppressive ideologies concerning women and their bodies in performance, effectively challenging the terms of their own representation. Because dance is at once social and personal, internal and external, a dancer can both embody and explore gendered images of the body— simultaneously registering, creating, and subverting cultural conventions".[12]

By these observations it can be argued that the dancers of the twentieth century chose to represent their bodies as it is to the observers which bring the aspects of presenting the female and male bodies on stage. The arguments put forward by the performers is that the process of building their bodies for a particular

[11] Ann Cooper Albright, (1997), *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, p. 123
[12] *Ibid*

dance form takes years of practice. It would be unfair for them then to hide it behind their *pallu*, which is considered to be an important part of the classical dance clothing, and so discarding it during the performance is justified. Pallabi Chakravarty has classified this thought as 'innovation in dance.'[13] She had cited the example of Aditi Mangaldas, a renowned innovative dancer of Kathak genre, who "… sported all the hallmarks of urban grandeur"[14] (hallmarks here referred to new urban brands).

In Derrida also we can find a hint of an escape from the conventional stereotyping of the feminine and masculine roles. He stated thus:

"As I dream . . . I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices. I would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of blended voices, the mobile of non- identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, and multiply the body of each "individual" whether he can be classified as "man" or as "woman" according to the criteria of usage."[15]

In the current chapter I will try to incorporate these theories into the new trends in dance, especially with the break away from the previous classical mode of dance, to a development of the art in the Indian bourgeois society and how, as Lyotard as described it, these new dance forms worked into being the critique of the bourgeois "praxis of life".

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[13] Chakravorty, Pallabi, (2008), *Bells of Change: Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity in India,* Calcutta, Seagull Books, pp. 85-86

[14] Cited by Pallabi Chakravorty from Shani, (1998), in Ashish Khokar (ed.), *AttenDance,* New Delhi: The Mohan Khokar Dance Foundation. p. 85-86

[15] Mc. Donald, Christie V. and Jaque Derrida, "Choreographies", interview in *Diacritics*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Cherzhez la Femme Femminist Critque/ Feminine Text {Summer, 1982}, p. 12; In the interview Derrida's frequent references to "Dance" and "Choreography" denoted to the feminist movements, to find the true meaning of the 'matrix', because in French dance is a feminine term. In my view, this kind of analogy brings in the constant change and motion associated with a 'movement' like that of dance. Derrida had argued that, in the chorus, for a choreographic text, polysexual signature or sexual neutrality is very essential.

**The Western Dance Innovators**

Before going into the discussion of the Indian performing artist's changing the perspective of dance, it is important for this study to briefly look into the Western world, where a similar movement was led by the American artist, Isadora Duncan (1877-1927). Duncan, or Dorita, her short name, was against the idea of ballet because in it she saw a forcible rigidity of the body, with straight backbones and pointed toes. Whereas for her, dancing was meant to give the body a freedom on stage. [16] In a search to start a new renaissance in art she adopted Greek goddess like features such as "white little tunic", bare feet, relaxed body postures and movements. She did not categorise her dance under any "system" and explained it as following her fantasy and teaching "any pretty thing" that came in her head.[17] To make her dance understand to the audience she had to give long speeches after her performances, but nevertheless, was received with much applause. Because of this, in her early days in the career, Duncan used to perform only for an elite audience of Europe. In their "sophisticated" backdrop too, she chose not to change her style and felt comfortable to perform barefoot. Apart from the physical freedom, she was also in a quest to find divinity in her expressions, contrary to the "mechanical" expressions of Ballet which were 'taught' by the teachers, making spiritual search of the soul important for dancing.[18] In one of her performances Eugene Carriere, a French

[16]Isadora Duncan (1927), *My Life,* with an introduction by Joan Acocella in revised edition, 2013, New York: Liveright Publication, p. x
[17] *Ibid.,* p. 13.
[18] *Ibid.,* p. 60.

Symbolist artist, had praised Duncan's sense of dancing which revived the Greek dancing and found its expression within herself and submitted entirely to it, along with the submission of the audience to their own sub-consciousness.[19] Duncan's main inspiration for being such "freedom fighter" came from her readings of Ernest Haeckel, a German philosopher who was banished from Kaiser for his free thinking. In one of her performances where Haeckel was present, he admired her performance which he felt was intended to search the universal truth in nature and an expression of "monism", that is directed towards one source of evolution.[20]

Along with Duncan, Ruth St. Denis was following the same path as that of Duncan, but in a more oriental perspective. In the previous chapter, I discussed the theories of oriental dance and its reception in Indian and Oriental audiences. Denis's dance came under the category of Oriental dancing for the themes she chose, the most famous being *Radha* in 1906 and *Nautch* in 1909. From here I would draw the discussion towards the "freedom of the body" which both Duncan and Ruth St. Denis had made a priority through their dance movement. It was inspired from the Francois Delsart, a French Philosopher who wanted to craft a system to free the body. Elizabeth Kendall had traced the popularisation of this system in America with the introduction of the *corp de ballet* in a very casual form in the late nineteenth century, which provided a "secular example of a disciplined feminine hierarchy"[21] identified with grace. But the American "modern" dancers wanted to express themselves by coming out of

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.
[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.
[21] Elizabeth Kendall (1979), *Where She Dance*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., p.10.

their ballet body disciplines behind which their mother's ideal played a significant part. For example Isadora Duncan's mother, Mary Dora Duncan, had raised her daughter with European training and almost in a courtesan way to lead a life like bohemians. This explains her boldness on stage and having a certain defiant belief on "inner independence", a spiritual realm which goes beyond the confinement of the body. Coming to the Delsarte system, it was a spiritual codification of the human body according to certain zones. It was mostly meant for the theatrical stage to help the actors express themselves. In America, this system became associated with the health and hygiene concerns for the women in corset, which called for a dress reform convention in 1874 in Boston. In this convention the women doctors had prescribed for looser garments and skirts till the knees for maintaining a healthy body for the women. In Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, these same ideals were reflected on stage. [22] This conception of freeing the body is what had formed "true dancing" in the post-Civil War America, as Duncan had described it to be representation of the human body in its most natural form, out of the tight body in the corsets.[23]

Another dancer in similar quest was Martha Graham (1894-1991), who had her training under the Danishawn school of dance (that is under Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn). Martha Graham had established herself as a dancer during the Cold War period of the 1950s America, which made her the cultural ambassador to various states. Graham was inspired by the abstract modern art and

[22] *Ibid.*,pp. 23-25.
[23] *Ibid.*, p.60

wanted to incorporate the same ideals into dance. She explained that like modern art dance also should discard its decorative elements, which made it "pretty", to project the "real".[24]

Here I would like to briefly discuss about how diplomacy was integrated into dance through a dancing figure such as Graham's. In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had made an announcement that it was a need of the hour for America to demonstrate its cultural progress to the world. It was aimed against the Communist propaganda charges that the United States has no culture of its own and that the industrial development is only directed towards war.[25] The grant that was sanctioned made way for the President's International Funds for International Affairs, under which the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the State Department worked to publicize American dance, theatre, music and sorts abroad. The State Department and the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA), under the category of the Dance Panel, had chosen Martha Graham to tour in 1955 and again in 1974 to Asia for the same purposes of propaganda for American Culture. For Graham too had recognised that her works had "entered a field where greater and more meaningful things are expected of it" making it a public property[26]. Between 1955-56, Graham's company had travelled through Burma, India, Pakistan, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaya, and Ceylon, all those geo-politically pin-pointed Asian Countries where the Communist influences were holding a strong ground.

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[24] Martha Graham (1991), *Blood Memory: An Autobiography,* New York: Doublebay, p.99.
[25] Naima Prevots (1998), *Dance for Export : Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War Studies in Dance History*, New England: Wesleyan University Press, p.11
[26] Victoria P. Geduld (2010), "Dancing Diplomacy Martha Graham and the strange commodity of cold war cultural exchange in Asia, 1955 and 1974", *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Martha Graham: Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century, Taylor and Francis Ltd., p.53.

**The Indian Scenario**

In India, similar movement of "freeing the body" from the rigidity of the classical dances had started in the late twentieth century. Distinguished from the West, here the first attempts were made keeping the dance form within the ambits of classical dances, dominantly within Bharatnatyam, Kathak and, occasionally Kathakali. As I am getting Kathak training myself, I can experience that a person learning the classical dances have to "unlearn" everything from his past. The body have to adapt to the new training in walking, standing and looking in a particular way, which takes years of practice. Although not bound in corsets, the bodies of the dancers are to be confined in a static movement which is supposed to be passed through generations from the *guru* which works as "spiritual corsets", that is keeping the body bound into the "spiritual techniques" of dance.

Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918-2016) was one such dancer who had tried to improvise the classical dance of Bharatanatyam to incorporate themes on socially relevant issues which can throw a mark upon the audience. She claimed that within the Indian philosophy, the traditional dances of Bharatnatyam and Kathakali provide ample scope for the creation of movements.[27] In acquainting Mrinalini with the social and political situation of the country, her mother, Ammu Swaminathan had played a significant role. She was described by Mrinalini as a strong supporter of the Women's right movement, who got her inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. She joined the Congress in 1930, and became

[27] Mrinalini Sarabhai (2003) "Traditional Dance and Contemporary Choreography" Sunil Kothari ed. *New Directions in Indian Dance,* N. Delhi: Marg Publications, p. 45.

the president of All India Women's Conference. So, from her early childhood days, Mrinalini had the opportunity to observe the works of various organisations in which her mother was a part of, like the Theosophical Society, where the mother visited frequently taking her daughter along, and the Chennai Corporation, where the mother was the chairperson of the Committee for Education between 1934-1939.[28] Because of her mother's active political participation, her house, Gilchrist Garden in Chennai, was frequently visited by personalities like Sarojini Naidu, Margaret Cousins who were all associated with the contemporary women's movement.[29]

Along with the political exposure, Mrinalini got her Bharatanatyam and Kathakali lessons from Kalakshetra, founded by Rukmini Devi. She took admission in Shantiniketan in 1938 that gave her the opportunity to improvise within the form to adapt to the poetic dance drama style. Her first choreography there was for *Chandalika* where she was assigned in the lead role. She presented it in her own style of Bharatanatyam but sans the traditional music, that is the temple music and the costume because they were not available to her in Shantiniketan . But later in her own choreographies she willingly broke away from the traditional costumes which had become her signature style. She used similar methodology in *Memory- A Ragged Fragment of Eternity*, choreographed in 1958. It was presented as a protest against domestic violence for reasons of dowry on women, the news of which she used to get from the newspaper reports in Ahmedabad. This was presented onstage in simple costumes consisting of a

[28] Mrinalini Sarabhai (2004) *The Voice of the Heart: An Autobiography*, N. Delhi: HarperCollins, p.40
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 43

simple skirt and veil, with no traditional heavy *ghunghroos* or bells worn on feet. Because of such simplicity in the performance, the dance was perceived as "dance for the village streets"[30].

In 1979, she choreographed another piece called *Aspirations.* It was aimed in support of the resistance put forward by the people against the construction of a dam in Kerala which would have caused deforestation. It was presented in front of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, in New Delhi, making an impact on the audience which led to the cancellation of plans of construction.[31] In mythological themes too she looked for subjects which could go aptly with the current society and which could appeal to the audience. For example, in the choreography on Shakuntala, titled *Curse of Durvasa,* in 1949, she explained relating to mythological themes thus:

"I am not averse to dancing to mythological themes or stories from the puranas in order to innovate. It depends upon an interpretation that has contemporary relevance."[32]

Mrinalini Sarabhai gave numerous examples of her visit to the European countries, with an overwhelming feeling of representing the country. In these trips she presented her works like *Manushya*, that is not the "traditional" Indian dance attire but her own version of Kathakali, with simple attire and was well received. For example, in1959 after her performance in Paris's Theatre de Champs-

[30] *Ibid,* p. 229, This review had come from Amrita Rangaswami in the *Indian Express* as an analysis of the performance of the *Memory.*

[31] Nida Najar (Jan 27, 2016), " Mrinalini Sarabhai, Indian Classical dancer and Choreographer, Dies at 97", *The New The New York Times,* accessed through *www.nytimes.com*. For a detail study of Mrinalini Sarabhai's such productions see Mrinalini Sarabhai (1986), *Creations*, Ahmedabad: Mapin.

[32] Mrinalini Sarabhai (2003), "Traditional Dance and Contemporary Choregraphy", in Sunil Kothari ed., *New Directions in Indian Dance* , Delhi: Marg Publications, p.48.

Elysees, her performance was regarded as the only authentic Indian Ballet to be presented[33]. To these performance tours Mrinalini went as an independent troupe through impresario. After getting positive response on her events the Government of India, under Jawaharlal Nehru, who was also impressed by her innovation in technique, had commissioned on Mrinalini a "goodwill tour" to Eastern Europe, converting the artist to an ambassador[34].

Like Mrinalini Sarabhai, Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar (1934-1999) also wanted to break away from the clusters of traditional conservative dance forms to form her own resistive body against the patriarchal society. Prarthana Purkayastha had traced her inspirations coming from her experience of witnessing partition, when her family was displaced from Pabna in Bangladesh, where she had spent her childhood, to Calcutta in 1947[35]. This mass migration had brought with it the stories of violence and large scale riots across the border areas, especially in Noakhali, Tippera and Calcutta, by the refugees.[36] Gargi Chakravarty had argued that the refugee women who entered Bengal, in search of an identity and employment, had to break the boundaries of the *andarmahal*, introducing themselves in the new realm of theatre and other public domain, which she argued had changed the social milieu of Bengal. This resulted in the incorporation of women in the folk theatres or *jatras*, where till nineteenth and early twentieth century female personifications were used.[37] Having to witness these changes and the partition, her dance themes were also inspired by the same, for example

[33] Sarabhai, *Voice of the Heart.,* p.209.
[34] *Ibid*,211
[35] Prarthana Purkayastha (2014), *Indian Modern Dance Feminism Transnationalism*, U.K.: Palgrave Macmilan , pp. 109-110.
[36] See Joya Chatterjee (2007), *Spoils of Partition : Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, Cambridge University Press.
[37] Gargi Chakravartty, (2005) *Coming Out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal*, New Delhi: Bluejay Books.

*Yugasandhi* in 1996 which represented the horrors of the riots. Apart from this, Dr. Sircar had also shifted to America with her husband and her daughter Ranjabati which gave her a different experience altogether. As is discussed in the previous chapter, America had respectfully opened its stage to the exotic presentation of dance, especially of India. Dr. Sircar saw this perception of the exotica in the following terms:

"No cultural product of the Third World gained popularity in the West. During my long stay of 14 years, I came to realize that only a minority of Americans were drawn to Indian dance, music, and culture. For the majority, whether they are the Middle American conservatives or the Progressive Radicals, the Third World Culture implies nothing beyond distant exotica"[38]

For this particular reason, Dr. Sircar, was commonly viewed as " veritable Radha"[39] and in many of her concerts she was asked to perform in pure classical forms, as against her preference to display her own forms of experimentation with dancing. In such experimentation and re-interpretation of Tagore, one can find the influence of her study of feminism in various Indian rural societies as an anthropologist. For example in her study of the Meiti women of Manipur Valley she had observed women priestess, even though this society also had its impacts of "Sanskritisation" according to Hindu rituals, the intersexual dependence of the two sexes in the rituals, like Lai Harouba, and in

[38] Cited in Aishika Chakraborty (2014), "In Leotards Under Her Sari: An Indian Contemporary Dancer in America", *Congress on Research in Dance*, pp 39-51 doi:10.1017/cor.2014.6, p. 44.
[39] *Ibid*

economy was considered to be very important.[40] These observations had helped Dr Sircar in differentiating herself from the traditional artists.

The dance style adopted by her and her daughter, Ranjabati Sircar, assistant choreographer of Dancer's Guild, Sircar's school established in 1985, was called *Navanritya.* Ranjabati had explained this dance as a way of developing social and political consciousness, to deconstruct the classical dance tradition to express the modern concerns, which should come from the roots of these classical forms.[41] But in *Navanritya,* the dance had to be practiced in its own right and not as something subordinate to the music rhythms (*tala*).[42] The practice of such a dance movement, therefore, had to be different from the *guru-shishya parampara*, translated as colonisation of the art, requiring a training of a more aware body which can reflect to its social and political environment. Unlike Mrinalini Sarabhai, who used only Bharatnatyam and Kathakali, Manjusri Chaki-Sircar used Bharatnatyam, Manipuri, Mayurbhanj Chau, the martial arts like Kalaripayetu, Thang-ta, Sri Lankan Kandiyan dance etc., and incorporated them harmoniously to suit the body. This technique helped in representing any theme in such a way that every part of the body gets attention and not only the *hasta mudras,* which would highlight on the growth of dance expression. In her autobiography *Nrityarase Chittamama* (2000) she acknowledged her source of inspiration to Tagore, for his modern take of dance and the concept of using different dance forms in modified yet harmonious way, and his dance dramas

[40] Manjusri Chaki-Sircar(1984), *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley,* Delhi: Shakti, pp. 7-9

[41] Aishika Chakraborty (2008), *Ranjabati, A Dancer and Her World: Selected Writings of Ranjabati Sircar,* Kolkata: Thema, pp.58-59.

[42] Manjusri Chaki-Sircar (2003), "Tagore and Modernisation of Dance", Sunil Kothari ed., *New Directions in Indian Dance*, New Delhi: Marg Publications, p. 37.

which portrayed the women characters in a strong willed personalities like in *Chitrangada* and *Chandalika;* and to Martha Graham, whose dance she was able to witness in the 1955 concert held in New Empire Theater, Calcutta. But more than the western dancers, it was Tagore that fascinated Dr. Sircar and her daughter Ranjabati Sircar the most.

Ranjabati, in her essay *Tagore and Dance* had given a full explanation of her choice of Tagore. According to her the dance of Tagore was losing its essence with the over-popularisation of it amongst the ordinary people who use Tagore as a "finishing school". As a result Tagore's dance was diminished to work as "visual adornment to distract the listener's eye away from the harmonium bellows".[43] Citing examples from the West on their re-construction of the classics like *Swan Lake*, she insisted the contemporary dancers to understand the fluidity of the *Rabindrik* dance-form, and not to bound Tagore in the garbs of conservation which can only cause fossilisation which cannot be a sign of respect.[44] Explaining this she wrote in *Dance Unbound* thus:

"While the preservation of what was done in Tagore's time is undoubtedly a task of value in the interests of historical study, to cling to this as a 'tradition' is indeed a kind of cultishness that ignores the vitality and strength of Tagore's own vision It amounts to a reductionism, an attempt to encapsulate within finite boundaries an aesthetic which was free, dynamic, and living. To do

[43] Aishika Chakraborty ed., (2011), *Ranjabati: A Dancer and Her World,* Calcutta: Thema, p. 73.
[44] *Ibid, p.76*

justice even to this aesthetic, it is necessary to move beyond….what Tagore accomplished in his own lifetime."[45]

Hence, Tagore had given ample opportunity to Dr. Sircar and her daughter to experiment and implement their *Navanritya.* For the lack of space here I would like to keep the focus of the study to their re- interpretation of *Chandalika* as *Tomari Matir Kanya* in 1985. This re-presentation of the play had become important because of the social context it was staged in.

The foundation of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) in 1942 was one of the major factors. This organisation was a part of the Communist Party of India, Marxist (CPIM) cultural quest to represent the labour classes in the art and culture of India. According to Sudhi Pradhan, one of the leaders of IPTA Bengal, although the leaders of the working class and reformist leaders, and the non-party members were all communist sympathisers, she had argued that this was a non-party organisation. It had inclination towards the left Marxist in a sense that it believed in using the source of art for mass-mobilisations.[46] Making this organisation a call against the Fascist forces of the West and the Imperial powers at home, which became important during the eve of independence and World War II, its resolution stated:

"It is…the task of the Indian People's Theatre Movement…to portray vividly and memorably through the medium of the stage and other traditional arts the human details of these important facts of our people's rights and nature and solution of the problems facing them. It is the task of the Movement to

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[46] Sudhi Pradhan, ed., (1979) *Marxist Cultural Movement in India,* Calcutta: New Rooplekha Press, pp.xiii-xiv.

enthuse our people to build up their unity and give battle to the forces ranged against them with courage and determination with the progressive forces of the world."[47]

The most famous of such drama produced by IPTA member was *Nabanna* by Bijon Bhattacharya, directed by Shambhu Mitra in 1944, in the context of the famine struck in Bengal because of the War. In the post partition scenario, the movement was taken in the realm of the movies, which provided even bigger audience. The production of the films like Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955) on the economically poor and labouring classes of the rural bengal, Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960) which dealt with the refugee crisis in the urban background received wide audience and recognition.[48]

Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, through her choreographies incorporated the women's question. Aishika Chakraborty had argued that *Navanritya* represented women's body against the patriarchal society and "eroticization of the female dancers".[49] In the technical aspect of the dance Dr. Sircar, thus, had emphasised the straight position of the spine to symbolise the "presence of spine" in women.[50] The most iconic was the re-adaptation of Tagore's *Chandalika, Tomari Matir Kanya* developed between 1984-1985, where the desires and life of the untouchable women were portrayed. Her inspiration for the experimentation in the *Rabindrik dance* came during her Presidency days, with her association with Debabrata Biswas, a *Rabindra sangeet* singer associated with IPTA, who was also working towards changing the style

[47] *Ibid.*,p. 131.
[48] See Gargi Chakravartty (2005) *Coming Out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal*, New Delhi: Bluejay Books.
[49] Aishika Chakraborty (2011), Performance, Modernity, Gender: Paradigm Shift(s) in Indian Dance, in Simonti Sen ed., *They Dared: Essays in Honour of Pritilata Wadder*, Kolkata: Gungcheel, p.3.
[50] *Ibid.*, p.20.

of *Rabindra sangeet*. Having to observe as an anthropologist various tribal community women in work in India as well as in Africa, she had put the characters of Prakriti and Maya in a domain away from the Brahminical society, amidst other untouchable women. She placed the characters in the central space of the stage not as isolated women but within a collective community, making it a representation of the entire community.[51] Unlike Tagore's version of the dance drama, that is the spiritual and moral 'cleansing' of Prakriti from worldly desires, Manjusri's Prakriti and Maya had three main objectives: to endorse women's agency for social change; collective power within a community; the focus on ritual ceremonies outside the Brahminic paradigm[52]. For achieving these objectives, Manjusri had interspersed the dialogues of the play with the dance-drama to overcome the space of 'private' to involve the social/political milieu.

For Ranjabati, who acted as Prakriti, it was her chance to look at Prakriti afresh. After an intensive reading of the play as well as of the dance-drama, and influenced by her mother's experiences of working with the tribal communities, she saw *Chandalika* as a "transformation, where Prakriti, caught in a conflict of opposing forces, finds resolution in her selfhood"[53]. Rather than showing guilt for the her deeds for putting Ananda through agony, Ranjabati had found no remorse in Prakriti, who in a way justified her act. Hence, she saw it necessary to represent her in strong physicality, with excessive usage of her

[51] Aishika Chakraborty (2018), Writing her Dance, Writing her *Self:* Auto-Choreographs From Bengal, Urmimala Sarkar Munsi and Aishika Chakraborty ed., *The Moving Space: Women in Dance,* Delhi: Primus Books., p.172. .
[52] Aishika Chakraborty (2006), "Navanritya: Her Body, Her Dance", *Sephis,* Vol.2, No.2, pp. 7-11, p. 9
[53] Aishika Chakraborty, *Ranjabati,* p.80.

limbs in jumps and quick movements to represent her agony and impatience of her passions, as opposed to the soft movements of the *Rabindrik* style.[54] Thus, it can be argued that, in re-interpreting Tagore, the politicisation of his women characters as well as the community which they represented had become a necessary step for Dr. Sircar and her daughter.

**Conclusion**

In briefly looking at the works of these artists we can see that their perspectives were somewhat similar, that is moulding the traditional dances to the rhythm of the contemporary issues at hand. Along with these changes in the physical appearance of dance, there were certain sociological changes taking place around these dancers which helped them to take a different perspective towards the way they performed.

Understanding these choreographies, one question that arises is for whom were these works really targeted? In 2018, I had attended the International Dance Day on 29th April in Rabindra Sadan stage, Kolkata, where I observed a certain pattern in the presentation of the dances. There were many presentation of performances, which comes under the category of the modern or contemporary dances, amongst which *Chronchakatha* by the Dancer's Guild of Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, was also presented. Intercepted within these performances were the classical performances mostly on the theme of *Krishna* and *Radha*. What I observed was that the themes of the performances which were of the modern genre were all preceded by a two minute speech about the social context against which such choreographies were produced, whereas for the classical

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

performances only an introduction of the dance troupe and their form of classical dance was sufficient. As this function was open to all, the audience present were also taken to be coming from different social and political backgrounds. The introduction given on the performances and on the choreography containing themes on social and political realities can be argued simply as the need for the audience to understand the production better. The classical based performances with simple choreographies, on the other hand, were more easily understood by the people. I would argue that, although these productions were meant to portray the social realities, the complexities of these choreographies were not meant for "everybody". Malini Bhattacharya, in her study of the IPTA movement in Bengal,[55] especially of the play *Nabanna,* a play that was meant to be portraying the famines caused by the colonial government in the rural Bengal. The demands of staging the play on a revolving platform and the difficulties it faced when presenting the play in the makeshift stages in the rural parts, made it evident that the play was better accessible to the urban middle classes of Calcutta than the rural masses, who were represented in the play[56]. Some of the critics of the postmodern dance movement have pointed out that the quest of presenting what is "real" on stage has compromised with the relationship between the artist and the audience. As the former choreographs a particular production as a way of freedom for its own body, the latter, on the receiving end is left on its own to interpret it, making a clear divide between the audience and the artist.

[55] Malini Bhattachrya, (1983) 'The IPTA in Bengal', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 2: 5–22.
[56] *Ibid.,* p.8

It is therefore easy to see that such choreographies gains its audience in the urban intelligentsia, or as Moinak Biswas had put it, the "*Neo-Bhadraloks*"[57]. Biswas had described them as products of the new consumerist culture who are in search of their own identification through the new media culture of representation of the urban scenario and life. This can be held true for the audience who sit through such performances trying to analyse their own position in the urban milieu. But then the question remains on the "other" part of the audience outside of those commercial stages, who are more comfortable in understanding the classical dance presentations, on how these post-modern dance choreographies are perceived by them? Or whether these art forms reach them? Samik Bandhopadhayay had described the artists as "struggling minority" devoid of an intelligentsia to support them, finding their space in cultural centres of foreign diplomatic institutions or universities[58]. As a result of this, these artists got a reputed recognition on a global stage. The autobiography of Manjusri had also mentioned the reception of her choreography in foreign countries very satisfactory as she said in an interview with *Sruti,* in Cuba, for example 'Toman Math Kanya' was "appreciated as the rebellious expression of the oppressed"[59]. It can be argued that, in these global prosceniums the context of dancing had gained more importance than the form of dancing, whereas on the Indian stage the situation was completely the opposite. It gave these dancers the required space to improvise and experiment. On the other hand, as

[57] Moinak Biswas (2011), Neo-Bhadralok Darpan (Mirror of the Neo-Bhadralok), *Baromas* (Bengali), pp.255-260.
[58] Samik Bandhopadhyay (2018), The Politics of Space, U. Sarkar Munsi and Aishika Chakraborty eds., *The Moving Space: Women in Dance,* Delhi: Primus Books, p. 216.
[59] Leela Venkatraman (2014), "An Interview with Manjusri Chaki-Sircar", *Sruti,* accessed through www.sruti.com.

Urmimala Sarkar Munsi had argued, it was this acceptance on the global stage, confirming the capitalists ideas of popularity, that made them acceptable on the home stage.[60]

This brief discussion on post-colonial dance in India through the works and ideologies of the two dancers, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, I was able to observe a similar pattern that worked into their production. Both of them were trained in a specific genre of "classical" dance, understanding which they wanted to work out of the rigidity and expressed "internal colonialism of dance". They were to open its doors to "contemporaneity". The most common problem which these dancers faced was the criticism they got from different classes for borrowing their ideas from the western world. But as the study of Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham etc., have shown that their take on dance was absolutely different. These artists wanted to take themselves absolutely out of the traditional 'ballet' genre, to free the body of the corsets at the same time creating a new genre of dance on their own terms. The Indian dancers, on the other hand, wanted to de-mystify dance from its religiosity and its allegiance to the higher authority, at the same time incorporating the issues of gendered identity and social crisis into the context of dancing. In their performance abroad, these dancers found it necessary to change their genres for their foreign audience, who are known to draw towards the imagery of "exotic India" and found appreciation for the Indianess of the dance as well as the social context within which these were themed. Although in the present chapter I have

[60] See Urmimala Sarkar Munsi (2008), Boundaries and Beyond:Problems of Nomenclature in Indian Dance History, in Urmimala Sarkar Munsi ed., *Dance: Transcending Borders*, Delhi: Tulika Books

placed their dance in the context of post-modern art, these dancers, especially Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, always claimed to be representing “contemporary” dance. The dancers who evolved after them, took their ideas further into post-modernism of which Ranjabati Sircar could have played a major role.[61]

[61] This idea was discussed with Aishika Chakrabarty in personal conversation.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, the central study has been around the development of the concept of "modern" dance in India between1926-1985. The concept of "modern" dancing in India had evolved as breakaway from the classical genre of dance. In the twentieth century the reformed classical dance genre were considered to be the sole representatives of the National Culture. With the process of institutionalisation of the classical dance like under Rukmini Devi Arundale's *Kalakshetra* in 1936 for Bharatnatyam, and Leila Sokhey's "Menaka Hindu Ballet" in 1934 for Kathak, the marginalisation of the hereditary dancers, the *tawaifs/devsasis,* became common. For the incorporation of the upper class women, who were starting to participate in such classes, it was perceived as a necessary step to distant dance from the "disreputable" *nautchs*. Amidst this social milieu had evolved Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan in Bengal and its dance and music departments. In 1926, the first organised dance-drama *Notir Pujo* was staged in which Gauri Bose, the daughter of Nandalal Bose, had played the role of the court dancer. In its initial days, it was Manipuri dance which had dominated the dance scenario in Shantiniketan as the slow and elegant pace of Manipuri was considered to be suitable to accompany the songs of Tagore. In 1936 when the dance-drama *Chitrangada* was staged, it can be considered to be the mature phase of the development of the dance. By the time of *Chitrangada,* the students of Shantiketan like Shantidev Ghosh, Srimati Devi, and Tagore's daughter-in-law, Pratima Devi, had started to show keen interest in the dance styles of other countries like Sri Lanka, Java, Bali

etc., . These were also incorporated in the curriculum along with other folk and classical dance of different parts of India like *Kathakali*, *Garba* dance of Gujrat, Mayurbhanj Chau, etc. The Western dance was also introduced to its students, not the rigid forms of ballet, but the new "Free Movement" of dance which was introduced by Isadora Duncan. Pratima Devi and Srimati Devi also played a huge part in introducing the Western modern concepts of dance and dance-drama through their training at the Dartington Hall in London in 1931. Incorporating these ideas, Shantidev Ghosh had formulated his theory of Modern dance through a harmonious amalgamation of the various Indian and Asian forms. This idea of formulating the "Indian Modern" dance genre had gained popularity in the subsequent years. This went hand in hand with the idea of evolution in the themes in the dance drama from the mythological genres of *Radha and Krishna* to portraying the issues of social and political changes in the society, which was also a necessity in the wake of the Indian National Movement in the twentieth century. I have analysed this evolution in the changes of genres through the three Tagore dance- dramas, *Notir Pujo* (1926), *Chitrangada* (1936) and *Chandalika* (1938).

This concept of dancing out of the tradition was taken a step further by the next artist, Uday Shankar, who unlike the dancers of Shantiketan had no formal training in the Indian dance forms. Shankar's exposure to dance had taken ground when he joined the famous Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova in 1923. After getting the initial ideas of dance drama productions through Pavlova troupe, Shankar started to work on his own and chose to re-present the

Orient on the Occident stage. In doing so, he sought a different approach than his predecessors like Ruth St. Denis, who presented India as an exotic land replete with mythological figures with sexual desires. Shankar on the other hand, wanted to re-present India on terms of "reality" with his dance themes like the bravery of the Rajput women. This kind of portrayal of India went completely opposite the Imperial perceptions of India as a weak and "effeminate" nation. For his plans on the Indian stage, Shankar had chosen to show his vision of the new India as an imagination from an artist's point of view. This was perceived as a necessity for him as India was standing on the eve of Independence. With this view he had formulated his most ambitious project *Kalpana* in 1948, a film that dealt with issues of the social and political crisis. Some of the important choreographies explained in the chapters were *Labour and Machinery, Rhythms of Life, Old and New,* the imagery of Bharat Mātā etc. Shankar was heartily accepted in the West for his unique style, but was equally critiqued at home. It especially came from the Southern States of India, for not following the Indian "traditions" and thus for presenting the Indian dances in a wrong light.

In the post-colonial India, the perspective of modern dance changed with dancers like Mrinalini Sarabhai and Dr. Manjusri Chaki-Sircar. Unlike the previous dancers, these artists were trained in the classical dance like Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, etc. Mrinalini Srababhai had remained within her traditional forms, but chose not to adorn the traditional attire. Her choreographies were based on themes which were to represent the social evils,

especially atrocities on women. She found it appropriate to present these topics in simple *saree* and *dhoti* without ghunghroos. For Manjusri on the other hand, she was in a quest to re-invent within the classical forms of India. Her ideas took the shape in her new dance or *Navanritya,* which saw a combination of a multiple forms of Indian and Asian forms and could incorporate the entire body to define an emotion. These new artists were inspired by the political and social changes which were happening around them. For example, Sarabhai had an exposure to the political world through her mother who was actively involved in the various organisations like the Theosophical Society of India. Similarly, Manjusri had made her significant contributions in the Indian People's Theatre's Association through her women centric dance.

By re-forming their dance forms these artists had one particular agenda in common, which was to distinguish them from the "modern" dance of the West. In the west, modern dance had evolved as a break away from the stiff movements of Ballet into free body movements. For the Indian dancers, on the other hand the modernisation in dance had evolved from within the classical forms, breaking the popular notion among the Indians that "modern" is to be associated with the West. This idea had opened up the roads to the postmodern turn in dance which could have been taken forward by Ranjabati Sircar, daughter of Manjusri. But due to her untimely death, this could not be taken forward further.

This study in modern dance has held its relevance in the process of cultural identity formation in the nineteenth and twentieth century. During this period

the cognitive revolution amongst the middle classes had given the ideas of cross-culturalism. This had helped in the adoption the western philosophical ideas into the Indian culture in the political/material domain of the people. Simultaneously, there was also the process of national identity formation which was to take place from within the spiritual domain of the nation, which was considered as the sovereign territory. Here, the latter was represented through the classical dance, while the former was represented through the modern dance genre. The ideas of modern dance, thus, had developed in between such dichotomy of cultural identity formation. This can be seen as a reason for retaliation towards modern dance by the classical dance practitioners.

Through an extensive study of the development of modern dance, I can come to the conclusion that the modern dance has also played a significant role in the national and cultural identity formation. Through the reformed dance-dramas, the portrayal of the real on stage has played a crucial role in building the consciousness of the middle classes of the society. This thesis is also an attempt to answer the stereotypes around modern dance, which are still prevalent today, amongst the classical dancers of the country.

# Illustrations

Fig. 1, A scene from *Notir Pujo,* Source: Utpal K. Banerjee, Tagore's Mystic of Dance, p.39

Fig. 2, Tagore watching a performance, Source: Utpal Banerjee, *Op. Cit.,* p.173.

Fig.3, Some paintings of Rabindranath Tagore showing dancing figures, Source: Utpal Banerjee, *Op.Cit.*, p.205

Fig. 4, Uday Shankar in performance, *Source*: https://youtu.be/kr4-BPx7MaU.


Fig. 6, A poster of Uday Shankar's Film *Kalpana,* Source: Google images.

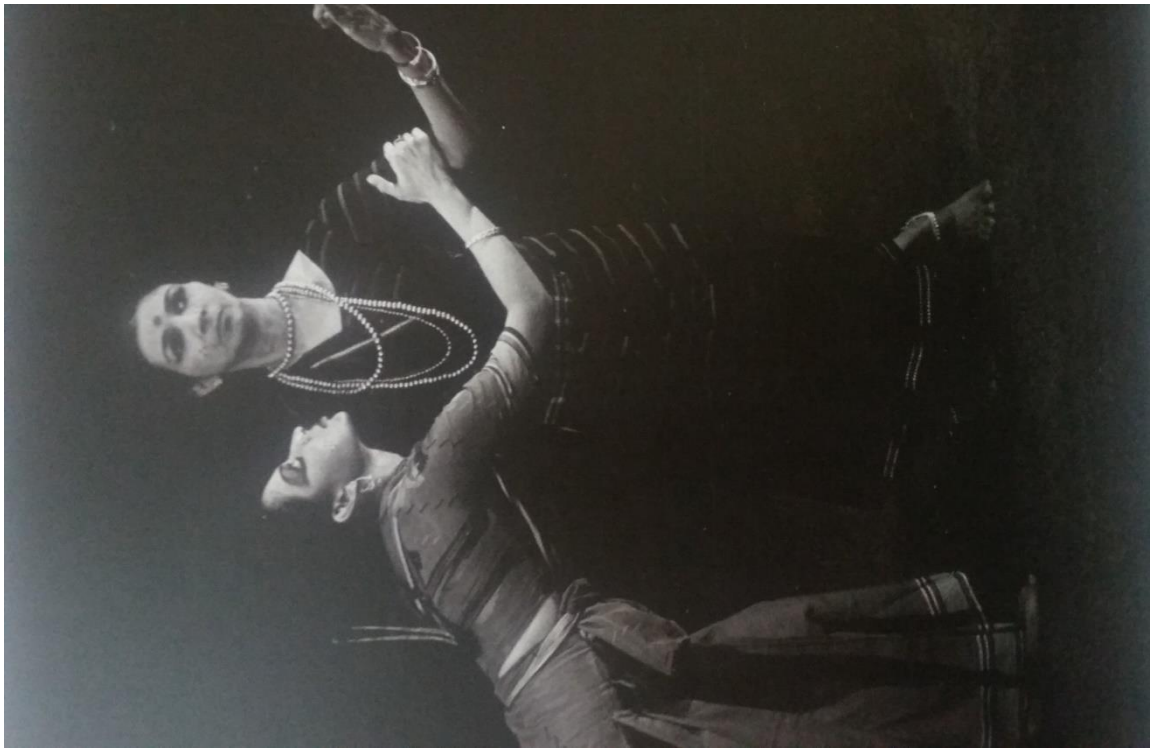

Fig. 7, Mrinalini Sarabhai as *Maya* in *Chandalika, Source:*Utpal Banerjee, *Op.Cit,* p. 149.

Fig. 8, Mrinalini Sarabhai in *Memory*, Source: Mrinalini Sarabhai, The Voice of the Heart, p. 228.

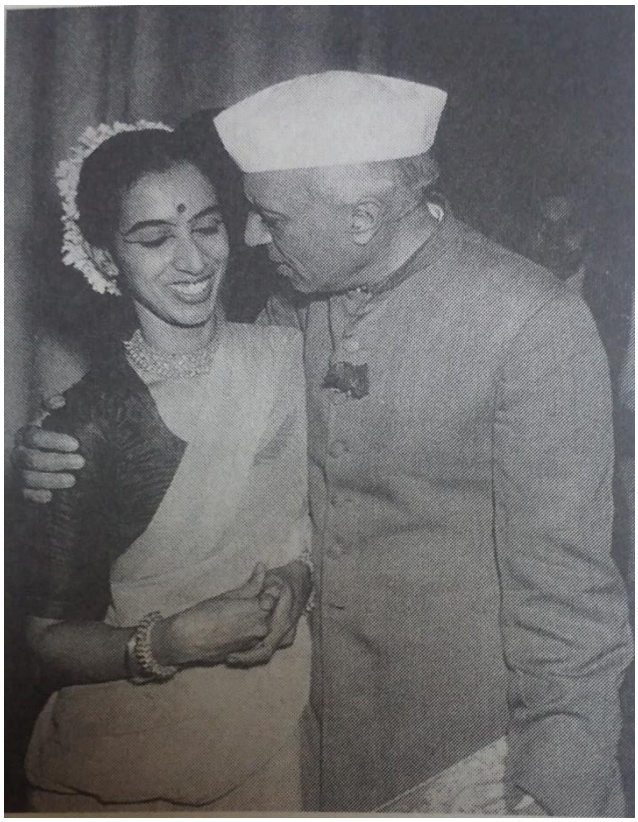

Fig. 9, Mrinalini Sarabhai with Jawaharlal Nehru, Source: Mrinalini Sarabhai, *Op.Cit.*,p. 228.

Fig. 10, Mallika Sarabhai in performance in *Memory*, *Source:* www.youtube.com

Fig. 9, Manjusri Chaki-Sircar and Ranjabati Sircar in Tomari Matir Kanya, Source: www.youtube.com.

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