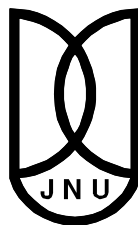


**BALLET IN INDIA: ITS ABSENCE,
CONTEMPORARY EMERGENCE, AND THE
CONSTRUCTION OF AN INDIAN BALLET BODY**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

MEGHNA BHARDWAJ



**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND AESTHETICS
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA**

2012



School of Arts & Aesthetics
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi- 110 067, India

Telephone : 26742976, 26704177
Telefax : 91-11-26742976
E-mail : aesthete@mail.jnu.ac.in

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.Phil Dissertation entitled "**BALLET IN INDIA – ITS ABSENCE, CONTEMPORARY EMERGENCE AND CONSTRUCTION OF INDIAN BALLET BODY**" submitted by Meghna Bhardwaj, M.Phil Student (Theatre & Performance Studies), School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi is in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of the University. To the best of our knowledge, this dissertation in part or full has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University and is her own work.

We recommended that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


(Dr. Bishnupriya Dutt)
Supervisor


(Dr. Urmimala Sarkar Munsri)
Co-Supervisor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been possible had it not been for Dr. Urmimala Sarkar Munsii, who was always there by me as my Teacher, my Mentor to enrich and encourage my naive ideas with her knowledge and brilliance. She taught me not just how to think but to think courageously and positively. It was her overwhelming support that took me to the prestigious Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan, for a month long dance workshop; an experience that is going to stay with me for the rest of my life; for it truly rooted my interest in Ballet, both as a dancer and a researcher. Thank you so much Urmi Ma'am. I am blessed to be your student. I would also like to thank Dr. Bishnupriya Dutt for sharing with me her intense thoughts and expression, and selflessly putting herself through immense labor for the betterment of all the students of Theatre and Performance Studies. Thank you Pia ma'am...

Very special thanks to Vidyarthi Sir for taking care of the administration of the School of Arts and Aesthetics. Sir, your efforts really count a lot.

The person, without whose efforts, I could not have ever realised my dream for dance and dance studies, is Ashley Lobo. It is the realisation of his dream for western dance in India, in the shape of The Danceworx that got me into the most beautiful world of dance. I would then like to thank my teachers from the Danceworx, Anthony Noa, Tino Sanchez, Gabor Sziracky, Sheila Coleman, Heemanshu Sharma, Ragini Bhajanka, Amith Kumar, Shohini Dutta, and Pankaj Guglani who nurtured in me my passion for dance.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends, Priyam Tripathy and Kaustav Ghosh for always being there whenever I was in need, my mother, my father, and my sister for standing by my side through all thick and thin, believing in me, loving me, and keeping me strong. All you guys are truly special.

Thank you Fernando Aguilera, Galina Lyakhova, Tushna Dallas, Yana Lewis, Mandeep Raikhy, Gilles Chuyen, Sanjay Khatri, Ranjana Nag, Surbhi Sachdeva, Sasha Shetty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1-20
Rationale	3
Methodology	15
Chapter 1 Constructing Ballet's absence: Nationalisation and contemporarisation of dance in India	21-46
1.1 Ballet resisted: Analysing through the lens of Indian Nationalism	21
1.2 Constructing the 'strangeness': How could have Ballet been absent?	35
1.3 Setting the stage for Ballet's arrival: The socio-cultural context	40
Chapter 2 The patrons, the academies, the students: Teaching and learning Ballet in India	47-79
2.1 Patronage	47
2.2 The courses available: Case studies of Delhi-based Ballet academies	54
2.3 Teaching and learning Ballet in India: Maintaining and contesting the Tradition	62
Chapter 3 Accepting Ballet: Performance and identity construction	80-111
3.1 Ballet performed and viewed: the recitals, the movement, and the look	81
3.2 Is Ballet really there?- Assessing its acceptance	106
3.3 Seeking a source of Universalism	108
Conclusion	112
Bibliography	113

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 Classical Ballet Group A class being taught by Gabor Sziracky on April 4, 2012 (Photo credit: Gabor Sziracky)	65
Fig. 2 Repertory Ballet class at IFBC, 2012 (Photo credit: IFBC)	70
Fig. 3 & 4 Floor barre exercises, being practiced by a dancer at The Danceworx,(Photo credit: Shifali Gupta).	74-75
Fig. 4 IFBC's dancers performing The Nutcracker at Siri Fort Auditorium, Delhi, 2012 (Photo credit: IFBC)	83
Fig. 5 Sziracky's choreography at <i>The Chrysalis Project, 2011</i> , (Photo credit: Heemanshu Sharma)	88
Fig. 6 IFBC dancers performing at the Launch of OMEGA Ladymatic, Delhi, 2012 (Photo credit: IFBC)	96
Fig 7 'Breakpoint' by Mandeep Raikhy at <i>The Chrysalis Project 2011</i> . (Photo credit: Sangeeta Bannerjee)	102
Fig. 8 'Phylogeny' by Amith Kumar at <i>The Chrysalis Project 2012</i> . (Photo credit: Ashmit Malik Photography)	104

INTRODUCTION

“The millennia-old heritage of 'nritya-abhinaya' in classical dance and mainstream cinema helps Indians understand the language of Ballet”- members of the Grand Moscow Classical

Ballet at Sreyashi International Dance Festival, Times Of India, Feb. 2011

My deep interest in the contemporary dance practices, and simultaneously changing conception of dancing body, both as a young dancer as well as a researcher has brought me to look at the slowly emerging, under-acknowledged practice of Ballet in India. What is most intriguing about this subject is that one cannot simplistically put its study within the historical paradigm constructed to theorise and analyse the effects of western imperialism on Indian art. Ballet does not appear within the Indian dance history as a colonial left-over. It arrives at those historical moments which may be seen as the beginnings of experimentation within Indian dance, and figures within the contemporary dance circuits of India today. It has to be understood as a modernist endeavour, reflecting, as Marion Kant suggests, the '*modern ideas*' appearing in the present times of the Indian society.¹

When the members of the Grand Moscow Classical Ballet suggest a comparison of Ballet with the *“heritage of nritya-abhinaya and the mainstream cinema”*, what they are clearly referring to are the elements of *Ballet de cour*, which as Marina Nordera defines, is a *“composite theatre performance made up of instrumental and vocal music, texts declaimed in verse and prose, stage design, scenic accessories, costumes, masks, and not the least, dance”* (Nordera in Kant, 2007, pg 19). Yet, while talking about the emergence of Ballet in India,

¹ Kant in his introduction to his collection of essays, *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, presenting the evolution of Ballet, regards Ballet as a symbol of the age in which it arises, reflecting as he says, *“modern ideas of various times”* (Kant, 2007).

one may be referring to what has been historicised and canonised as Western Ballet, constituting the cultural ideals and aesthetics of the European society, and rising historically to define the cultural ideals and aesthetics of the societies world over.

One might be in a position to say that just as in the case of western imperialism, revolutions within and against Ballet have merely ended up strengthening it further, making it more adaptable, culturally neutral (Kant in Kant, 2007; Foster, 1996) practice of dance.

Thus, why Ballet remains 'absent' from the history of Indian dance scene during as well as post-colonial rule is the most central question to this dissertation since it marks the starting point of all crucial debates that this dissertation shall attempt to introduce. Moving on from there, one has to look at how, the conceptual understanding of Ballet as a storytelling with movements, first starts appearing in the works of the pioneers of modern dance in India, like Uday Shankar, Rabindranath Tagore, and continues to be used by Bharat Sharma, Astad Deboo, Vijai Shankar, many contemporary dance choreographers and dancers of present generation (Coorlawala, 1994). It is only far later that the practice of Ballet technique gets introduced in India with the individualistic efforts of some experts who begin to teach the techniques. As one sees it today, some use of Ballet technique may have emerged as a means to “*expand the vocabulary*” (Munsi in Chakravorty & Gupta, 2010)² of the existing dance by some practitioners. The biggest chunk of the Ballet practitioners is constituted by the dancers coming from numerous western dance academies emerging in the metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, most of whom use Ballet as an alternate technique, to develop an internationally appealing dance body, with an aim to improve their performance in the dance form they would like to specialise in, and not necessarily to become a

² Urmimala Sarkar Munsi, in her essay, 'Another time, another space, does the dance remain the same?', studies the contemporary changes within dance in India, and observes, “*a dancer's urge to express new things, perform for new audience, experiment with movement patterns, expand the vocabulary, and make his/her product marketable*” as the emerging tendencies.

ballerino/ballerina. One may be in a position to assume that Ballet, for the most part, has remained subservient to all other dance forms in India, to 'support', to 'supplement', and clearly has not been able to stand on its own as a mainstream dance form. Even with the few Ballet academies that exist in India, it remains to be investigated, if at all and to what extent Ballet, as a complete form of dance, can be considered an option for the dancers in India.

As much as this dissertation attempts to understand and theorise the marginality of Ballet in India, it seeks to record and analyse Ballet as an important aesthetic and socio-cultural change. Ballet, and the Indian engagement with it, has to be conceptualised into two broad, yet overlapping categories, Ballet as a new corporeal practice, Ballet as an artistic import/development, and Ballet as a trend. Ballet, like any other dance, has to be understood as a body-practice, the embodiment of which has to be examined from the point of view of change in the training, expression, performance, and the audience-reception of the dances and the dancers, and thus as a significant source and illustration of changing conception of self and identity. I wish to conduct a study based on extensive fieldwork in the Ballet and Western dance academies located in the city of Delhi, wherein my research questions would hold relevance for three broad areas, namely, the artistic developments in the world of dance in Indian context, body as a social text, and interface of cultures, that is, understanding the notions of appropriation, assimilation, and representation emerging in the context of transnational migration of dances.

Rationale and Research questions

Ya-Ping Chen, in her essay, 'In search of Asian modernity, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's body aesthetics in the era of globalisation' (Butterworth, Wildschut, 2009) argues,

“The concept of 'Asian modernity' is intrinsically defined by the dynamics of dialectic dualism- national/individual identity quest, colonial/post-colonial power structure, modern/traditional polemics, globalisation/indigenisation impetus, among others.... It is the constant need to be in active interaction with its Western counterpart on the one hand and the incessant internal adjustments in response to historical conditions [pressures of the colonial past and resultant national-identity crisis] on the other that make Asian modernity a unique and vibrant phenomenon.”

It is the above conceptualisation of Asian modernity that is likely to guide this study, as to understand any cultural flow that may be categorised as western, it may be judged on the basis of its two contradicting elements, its 'Foreign-ness' and 'Indigenisation' (Deshpande, 2004).

It is truly an intriguing site to see an Indian dancer perform clean *fouette en-tournant*³, fly into a 180 degree *jete*⁴ from a *chasse-pas de bourree*⁵, or pose *en-pointe*⁶ in a high *arabesque*⁷ with arms in fourth showing clean lines, that in a perfectly suburb auditorium, located in the heart of the metropolitan city of Delhi; the auditorium whose stage, for the longest while has been dominated by traditional (sometimes 'contemporary') Kathak and Bharatnatyam bodies, laden with the markers of their Indian-ness. As Sanjay Khatri, the

³ A *Fouette* is a short whipped movement of the raised foot as it passes in front of or behind the supporting foot or the sharp whipping around of the body from one direction to the other. When this movement is performed while turning, it is called *Fouette en-tournant*.

⁴⁴ A jump from one foot to the other in which the working leg is brushed into the air and appears to have been thrown.

⁵ Slide of the feet on the floor into a walk on the point of the feet to build the momentum for a jump

⁶ Balancing on the toes

⁷ One of the most important poses in Ballet, Arabesque is the position of the body, in profile, supported by one leg, straight or bent, with the other leg extended behind and at right angles to it, and the arms held in various harmonious positions, making the longest possible lines from the fingertips to the toes.

oldest student of the Delhi-based Imperial Fernando Ballet Company (IFBC), and now the director of Mumbai-based Central Contemporary Ballet (CCB), performs one of the classics, *Swan Lake*, the queries that his audience, and he himself, are likely to have are, most importantly, how close is it to the 'original' *Swan Lake*? Does he have the same graceful lines that a ballerino from New York Ballet Academy is going to have? And finally, how Indian should he/should not look while dancing a western classical dance?

To reduce such a site to a mere 'Cloning of the West' would mean to ignore the nuances of the cultural complex that it exhibits. Also, by merely juxtaposing this new Ballet body with a Kathak or a Bharatnatyam body would limit the intricacies that a comprehensive study focusing on its cultural specificity may reveal. The study of the Ballet body in the Indian context, has to be situated against the backdrop of the assumption that there are distinctive traditions of embodiment in different cultures, which indicate different traditions of corporeal experience and expression. Different socio-cultural traditions produce different types of embodiment. In turn, different forms of embodiment reinforce different cultural traditions. This assumption is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'Habitus'. He understands 'Habitus' as a set of socially learnt dispositions, skills, and ways of acting that are often taken for granted, and which are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu, 1993). He further explains its dependency on history and human memory, that is to say, how a certain behaviour or belief becomes part of the society's structure when the original purpose of that behavior and belief can no longer be recalled as it becomes socialised into individuals of that culture. It is in the light of this theory that this dissertation seeks to predict and assess the 'naturalisation' (Yangwen in Kant,2007) and 'formalisation' of Ballet in India.

This notion of culturally-separate bodies is also deeply connected to the notion of national cultures becoming hybrid and thereby embracing different body techniques as a consequence. Appadurai, in his theories on 'Globalisation' gives the concept of 'ethno-scapes' (Appadurai, 1996), which may refer to, “*changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity...As the groups migrate, regroup in new locations, and reconstruct their histories..*”. Paula Saukko extends the list of Appadurai's '-scapes' and uses the notion of 'bodyscapes' (Hammergren in ed. Foster, 2009) to understand the intercultural flow of corporeal practices like dance, in her accounts of the reception of Ram Gopal Verma's Indian dance in Sweden. From this perspective, the migration within the realm of dances becomes an important site of the mixture of body cultures. Thus, this body has to be examined by looking at the context of its production and reception, which is not limited to the theatre space, but extends outside it.

The context of its production and reception is characterized by two important trends, on the one hand it is the urge to break the 'tradition' and search for the 'creative freedom' which is being expressed within the realm of Indian classical dances, on the other hand, there are an emerging images of the 'perfect' or 'desired' body, constructed and circulated by media and other forums, which represent the capitalist ideologies, giving rise to the culture of body consumption.

These two parallel ideological trends come together to determine how Ballet gets practiced within the studio spaces provided by the Ballet academies. There are quite a few Ballet academies in India today. The first among those is Mumbai-based *School of Classical Ballet and Western Dance* founded by Tushna Dallas in 1966. There is *The Lewis Foundation of Classical Ballet*, Bangalore, founded by Yana Lewis in 2005-2006. In the capital city of Delhi, there are three important names that dominate the Ballet and western dance scene, namely, *School of Russian Classical Ballet* at Russian Centre of Science and Culture running

since 1982; aforementioned *India Fernando Ballet Company*, founded in 2007 by Fernando Aguilera, and *The Danceworx Performing Arts Academy*, founded in 1998 by Ashley Lobo. These academies follow different training patterns and syllabi, and have significantly different ways of functioning.

Ballet continues to be learnt and performed, quite consciously as the dance of the 'West', with an urge to seek an Indian representation in a so-called 'international' form of dance. This dissertation is an attempt to look at the extent, to which these schools succeed in matching up to the 'Ballet norms', and in the process how these norms are bent, and new norms may be created. According to Janet Wolff, "*There is no body outside discourse*". By bringing in Parveen Adam's argument, she suggests that, "*We never have an unmediated experience of a pre-given body..*"(Wolff in ed. Desmond, 1997, pg 93). Hence, this dissertation traces the grammar of the Ballet that emerges as the Indian dancers try to inculcate a standardized, codified, already modeled Ballet body into their own conditioned and marked bodies coming from a very specific cultural habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1993). In other words, if we were to create a scale for these bodies, starting from attempting Ballet to performing Ballet in its most 'authentic' representation (which may direct us to question the 'authenticity' of a dance form, possibility or impossibility of its 'representation'), where would these bodies figure? In the end, does their training and performance, with all its cultural peculiarity, creates possibility for the codification of an Indian Ballet body?

What one observes in these academies are different ways of negotiating with the set of ideals comprising Ballet and its technique, which often lead to the reworking of the markers of identity, power differentials, and social relationships. This process gets complicated as certain group of people from a larger social consciousness, with its own diversities, engages in foreign practice of homogenization of bodies. The questions that arise then are, how do these

dancers deal with the bilingualism inscribed into their bodies, wherein one language is that which they have imbibed due to their membership of the institution of family, religion, marriage, etc., and the other comes from their membership of this subculture formulated by the very direct origin as well as product of any culture, that is body. Do they try to assert their identity through natural ways of personalization⁸? Does this lead to a break in a codified, reproducible model of body, giving it a new shape in a new cultural context? Can these processes then totally rupture the idea of one 'Ballet body' and assert that body is never as passive to be inscribed upon without letting its own subjectivity intervene?

Another very important commonality across these academies is that they do not limit themselves to Ballet, but also teach and perform other western dances, such as modern and contemporary dance, Jazz and Broadway dancing, Tango, Salsa, and a few others, amidst which Ballet appears as one of the choices for people to 'buy' it in the form of dance/hobby classes. As far as the dancers learning Ballet are concerned, since most of these dancers have not started Ballet at an early age, they do not seek a career only as a concert Ballet dancer, primarily because of the physical limitations that a late start may impose. From this perspective, they find it much more feasible to explore these dances, which are technically not that challenging as Ballet, and which as they commonly believe, give them more space to express through their bodies. Their training in Ballet then becomes a tool to improve their flexibility and posture, which shall improve their performance in the other dances, like a daily physical diet that a Jazz dancer may need to excel in his moves on stage, and to increase his knowledge about his own body.

⁸ Hamera (2007, pg 13) quotes from Peggy Phelan in 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at *Choreographing Writing*' : "In its journey from disappearance to representation, the body does not 'belong' to the subject who wears it, who dances in and through it- Rather, the represented body comes into Being as it is apprehended within the frame of the representation,"

Thus figures the idea of seeking a Ballet-base, which becomes important for them to seek an aesthetic seriousness for that which they believe gives them much more freedom of physical expression. Now this idea constitutes an ideological contradiction which this dissertation proposes to investigate. On the one hand, by learning Ballet only to be able explore the corporeal possibilities of these other dance forms, which are hyper-physical and 'erotic', they reflect a consciousness of not letting their bodies get caged with the limitations of the 'classical', and just use the 'classical' as a heuristic device. On the other hand, their desire to get acknowledged as an artist for which they want to build a foundation of classically-trained body, ropes them back into the paradigm they want to rupture, for the classical does tone down the 'erotic', by, for instance, limiting the 'pelvis' and getting the posture straight up with the butt pressed in, as the Ballet muscle memory takes over. Such contradictions, as they get reflected in the training and performance of these dancers, have important implications pertaining to the status of Ballet in the Indian context as a classical dance form.

Apart from the contemporary dances, most of these practitioners share the idea that, the western show dances can be economically more rewarding since the audience is more familiar with Jazz movements due to its influence on Bollywood dancing. So, a dancer's aligning with Ballet, is perceived not as controlling of the body, rather as enlarging (lengthening) of the body, which would add to the 'glamour' and thus, the commercial appeal of its performance. The questions that, thus, arise are, what direction do they give to their training in Ballet, to what extent does Ballet have to be embodied and showcased?, is Ballet itself commercially viable?, and if not, are its codes and structures bent to make it commercially viable?; the answers to which will have important implications for the relation that can be drawn between body expressivity and socio-economic interests, vested in the import of a foreign form.

As one looks at the coexistence of these other dance forms with Ballet, one can observe a constant stress on what Susan Foster conceptualises as the 'Hired Body':

“The hired body has been shaped partly by contemporary practices of physical education, whose goals for such activities as sports, aerobics and individual exercise programs.. have been set by the scientization of the body's needs.. This body, a purely physical object, can be made over into whatever look one desires.” (Foster in ed. Desmond, 1997, pg255)

This concept can be applied to the apparent stress on 'versatility' in the contemporary practices of dance, which as Foster suggests *“requires a new kind of body competent at many styles”*. While in Foster's conceptualisation this kind of body is critiqued for being distanced from the self, this dissertation takes into account the affinity of the arrival and practice of Ballet with the modernisation and contemporarisation of dance in India, and thus attempts to grasp the ways in which Ballet in India may be associated to the the values of individualism and personal ownership of the body, which is directly connected to the question of the extent to which Ballet can get structured and its structures be made visible in the performance of it.

This dissertation attempts to investigate the nuances of India's socio-cultural engagement with Ballet; taking into account the juxtaposition of it being a classic case of 'foreign culture' with its apparent de-classicalisation in India. The spaces of Ballet practice and performance shall be classified as *'Zones of cultural debates'* (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1996) wherein one will try to read into them the markers of 'authenticity' and 'assimilation'. Pallabi Chakravorty in her study of the intercultural influences on nationalist characterisation of Indian classical dance, brings in Uttara Coorlawala' argument:

“Say that Indian dance (Classical) is an image reflected in two mirrors opposite each other- the 'East' and the 'West'. As the image multiplies into variations of itself, it becomes

impossible to determine which mirror it is in. When one image is exclusively selected, it usually reflects the perspective and the image of the one who is looking." (Chakravorty in ed.

Carter & O'Shea, 1998, pg 275)

This argument can be used to suggest an emergent Indian representation of Ballet, which is one of the central questions that this dissertation puts forth, that is, can there be an Indian Ballet body? By looking at the training and choreographic processes and performances incorporating Ballet, this dissertation will delve on the question of the factors and the features that come together to formalise and structure the form of a dance.

Chapterisation

Chapter I

The first chapter is an attempt to conceptualise and theorise an 'absence' of Ballet during and post-colonial rule in India, thus creating a historical paradigm to understand how and at what moment Ballet begins to appear as an independent form. It presents a historical overview of the nationalist phase around early twentieth century which marked the revival of Indian Classical dance and conceptualised 'Dance' into a bearer of Indian National identity, which as Pallabi Chakravorty demonstrates was itself a construct of the colonial regime. Thus, by such a reading of the history of Indian dance, one creates the tension resulting from, and grasping the 'strangeness' of the 'absence' of Ballet in India, and attempts to direct the reader to the question, why Ballet never appeared during that time.

A comparison with the Ballet in other South-east Asian countries, where Ballet arrived long back, and has been accepted as an important form of dance, becomes crucial at this point. It

must be mentioned that the intention of such a comparative analysis is not to essentialise the practice of Ballet in Asia, what Janet O'Shea refers to as '*tokenisation*' (O'Shea in Carter & O'Shea, 1998), rather, it is to create an understanding of problems pertaining to the synchronisation of a foreign artistic articulation with the ideals of the native culture (Yangwen in Kant, 2007; Desmond in Desmond, 1997).

Tracing on from there, India's opening-up to the world, in the 60's, the years marked by the waves of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation, leads the study to look at the emerging emphasis on acquiring a 'global identity' instilled by the 'blurring of the national boundaries' (Appadurai, 1996, Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1996, Pinny, 2001). It is at this moment that one begins to see the processes of 'contemporarisation' within Indian dance. The understanding of this contemporarisation is significant to this study since it assumes that Ballet arrives in India as part of this contemporarisation. The dissertation attempts to define this 'contemporarisation' by investigating the experiments performed by contemporary dancers and choreographers to analyse the nature of their breaking away from traditional structures of Indian dance. At this point, taking into account the appearance of 'dance styles', becomes important, for Bollywood emerges as a space where dancers begin to engage with foreign dance forms, and create an audience for it. Here, one shall attempt to further peculiarise the 'absence' of Ballet, by establishing how Jazz, and other show-dances begin to bear their influence on Indian dance, while Ballet remains absent.

Chapter 2

This chapter introduces the readers to the Ballet academies namely, School of Classical Ballet and Western Dance, Mumbai; The Lewis Foundation, Bangalore; and the Delhi-based School of Russian Classical Ballet, Imperial Fernando Ballet Company, The Danceworx Academy of Performing Arts. This comprises an investigation of the socio-cultural backgrounds and the

motives of the founders of these academies, through which one tries to establish the diasporic nature of these dance academies, and attribute to the Ballet community a status of sub-community or foreign-community, considering the Catholic, Parsi, absolutely non-Indian classical, and many a times non-Indian backgrounds of its founders.

Further, the chapter presents an ethnographic study, based on extensive field-work in the academies in Delhi, namely School of Russian Classical Ballet, Imperial Fernando Ballet Company, and The Danceworx Performing Arts Academy. While the former two is one of the very few Ballet academies in India preparing its students to become professional Ballet dancers, the latter had started as a Jazz and Contemporary Dance academy. Two years back it introduced Ballet classes for its repertory company, and only recently has opened a Ballet wing, apart from Jazz and contemporary classes.

One begins with examining the available Ballet courses and Ballet-syllabus taught in these academies, in comparison to the so-called 'real' Ballet. Primarily focussing on the aspects of body-training in Ballet, as is happening in these academies, this chapter highlights the ways of appropriation of Ballet technique, which may lead to its disintegration into a process and a product, categorising its practitioners as teachers, dancers, sellers, and buyers.

This chapter also explores the training of the non-professional Ballet dancers, to develop an understanding of Ballet as a 'trend'⁹. For instance, the beginners who attend community classes in Ballet, or many young as well as middle-aged women who intend to learn Ballet with an intention to reduce weight, in other words, to pursue the popular notions of a 'desired' body; body which is saleable and constitute the capitalist, postmodernist aspirations and imagination of its urban audience like many new practices of embodiment promoted by fashion, media, and forces of globalization. Hence, the second chapter, while looking at the

9

functioning of the Ballet academies, and their methods of training bodies, also attempts to classify these academies as an urban phenomenon.

Chapter 3

Moving on from the level of 'training' and its spaces explored in the second chapter, the third chapter looks at the processes and aspects of the incorporation of Ballet into dance performances and the spaces of the productions of such dances. This includes a study of not just Ballet choreographies or pure Ballet classics, but also many show dances and contemporary dance choreographies which may use Ballet-trained bodies, and exhibit Ballet movements, Ballerina's look or versions of them. Here, what one aims to understand is the distance, if there exists any, between the meanings that Ballet acquires during the trainings of the dancers and the meanings that are imposed on it when it is choreographed into a set of movements, woven around certain themes, and presented in a certain context.

While looking at the performances of classic Ballets, such as *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, or *Giselle*, one tries to examine the nuances of the abstraction of these classics from their original contexts, and in what ways their classicism gets appropriated by the practitioners and the audience. Then are the popular dance forms, wherein Balletic movements may just be inserted or pasted, from the perspective of enhancing their entertainment value. By looking at the contemporary choreographies, which are not Ballet choreographies but exhibit Ballet elements and appropriate Ballet bodies, one hopes to bring out the neutrality of Ballet as mere technique. This comparative analysis is then connected to the examination of the extent to which the Ballet performances or its glimpses in popular and contemporary dance performances, are able to capture the 'imagination' of the audience, adhere to or subvert the social values and respond to their immediate surroundings, which has a direct bearing on the availability of the national as well international market for these dances. This analysis also

becomes an important commentary on existing 'nature' of the presence and practice of Ballet in India.

A study of the 'spaces' in which these dances are show-cased reveals a great deal about their audience-ship, and hence their popularity and understanding. Observably, most of the Ballet recitals are performed in posh auditoriums, the access to which is usually seen to be limited to the elite litterati classes, as against the popular dance spaces like commercial shows, which attract 'masses'. The study of such spaces aims to suggest the easy access to and popularity of the show dances, over Ballet, and also brings out its limited awareness in India.

What one hopes to conceptualise through the interventions made by these chapters is the changed dancing body on the basis of its adaptation to Ballet and other foreign dance forms. By mapping the progress made by the academies in spreading Ballet in whatever possible ways, one may be in a position to predict the future of its formalisation and structuralisation in India.

Methodology

Dance studies, which has, as Janet O'Shea (O'Shea in ed.Carter & O'Shea, 1998) argues, "*positioned itself as an interdisciplinary field*" by borrowing as well as lending significantly to the other disciplines such as anthropology, ethnography, philosophy, and history, provides the lines of inquiry of this project, to enable a comprehensive analysis of embodiment of Ballet in India, as a socio-cultural development.

Linda J.Tomko (Bennahum, Judith, 2005), in her proposed framework of dance history pedagogy, gives four lines of inquiry namely: (1) "*Scrutiny of Bodies as they enact what*

societies variously call dance and movement practices"; (2) "*Compositional strategies of the movement practices*" determining "some kind of lexicon, or movement vocabulary, and some syntax or sequence"; (3) "*Representations forged*" that is, identifying "*the signifying capacities of movement structures, how the significations operate[d], how they address[ed] the embedded situation of being, knowledge, and power in the cultures where they circulate[d]*"; (4) "*Modes of support*" asking "*how the fashioners of dance in movement practices subsist[ed]*", in simple words, who creates the dance movement, who funds it, in whose hands its ownership lies. Clearly, what Tomko provides is an over-arching model of inquiry which may be applied directly to this project for the purpose of defining and determining its areas of interrogation, while also addressing the problems that the 'writing' and 'recording' of the untangible body, movements, and experiences (Shelly C. Berg in ed. Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999, Mc. Fee Graham, 1992, Rubridge in Campbell, 1996), may pose.

The project mobilises dance studies as its research tool, by aligning itself with the investigation of broader societal changes at one level, and the transformations within the choreographic constructions on the other. There has been generated considerable amount of work on the embodiment of dance as culture within Western dance scholarship. Collections of essays such as *Moving Histories /Dancing Cultures*, edited by Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright, and Jane C. Desmond's *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, both the collections feature essays constituting not just important arguments, but also methodological paradigms investigating dancing bodies as sites of socio-historical and cultural experience. Alexander Carter and Janet O'Shea's *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* tracks and generates important approaches to dance studies.

Marion Kant's collection of essays, *Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, come together to guide the understanding of Ballet's evolution as a dance form, from romantic to classical to contemporary, and its spread across the world. Carol Lee's *Ballet in Western Culture: a history of its origins and evolution* not only addresses important historical issues emerging out of the codification of Ballet technique.

Global and Local Dance in Performance, edited by Mohd. Anis Md Nor and Revathi Murugappan, enriches the theoretical base of this research; in that, essays such as Cheryl Stock's *The Cocacolisation of Difference: Homogenized Diversity in the 21ST Century Cultural Practice*, Sadanand Menon's "Passport, Please!" *Border-Crossings in the Invented Homelands of Dance*, Urmimala Sarkar Munsri's *Acculturation and the Repertoires of the Traditional World: Post Colonial Development within the Indian Context- Pressing Need for Documentation*, Adrienne L. Kaeppler's *Dance, Dancing, and Discourse*, Vivienne Rogis' *Same but Different: Globalisation and Identity Negotiated Through Inter-Cultural Dialogue in Dance*, constitute important perspectives on inter-cultural processing of dance and dance language, and the resultant influence on the cultural and aesthetic lives of the global societies.

Indian dance scholarship brings out important reflections on the nationalistic conceptualization of Indian dance, while exploring the processes of experimentation and contemporarization within Indian Classical dances, tribal and folk dances. For instance, important studies such as Pallabi Chakravorty and Nilanjana Gupta's *Dance Matters: Performing India* look at the debates emerging on the Indian dance scene, around new themes and foci affected by the forces of globalization and mediatization. There are studies that attempt to bring in the question of global-cultural exchange of dances across national boundaries such as Uttara Asha Coorlawala's *Classical and Contemporary Indian Dance: Overview, Criteria, and a Choreographic Analysis*, which throws light on the inspiration

drawn from Ballet and American Modern Dance by looking at the choreographic processes and performances of dancers like Vijay Shankar, Astad Deboo, Bharat Sharma, and a few others. Urmimala Sarkar Munsri's collection of essays, such as *Dance: Transcending Borders*, and *Time and Space in Asian Context: Contemporary Dance in Asia*, reflect on the notions of hybridity, representation, and marketability in the context of world dances.

A collection of essays, *Researching Dance: International Conference on Dance Research, 2009*, provides significant reflections on the Indian dance scenario and its study. For instance, Tiziana Leucci's *A Neglected Chapter in the History of Indian Classical Dances: The East-West Interactions (1889-1947)*, gives detailed findings on the role played by the West in the 'classicalisation' and 'definition' of Indian dance. Shrinkhla Sahai's *Reading Dance, Performing Research: Meaning, Interpretation, Context, and Recontextualisation in Dance Performance and Research*, raises important questions on the constitution of Indian dance, while critiquing the methodology of Indian dance studies.

A text worth a mention here is Sondra Horton Fraleigh and Penelope Hanstein's *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry*, as it is one of the most comprehensive texts informing the methodological outline of this dissertation. This text brings together all critical approaches to the understanding of dance research, and proves to be an effective guide in formulating the theoretical paradigm of this research.

The first chapter attempts to generate a historiography of the absence of Ballet in India, from the purview of nationalisation of Indian dance during the colonial period; wherein the understanding of the process of 'nationalisation' is derived from Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A derivative discourse*, wherein he identifies and critiques nationalism as a colonial construct. The second and the third chapter undertake

the investigation of the construction processes, including the training, presentation, and commodification of Ballet. The arguments pertaining to the process of 'commodification' are justified in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'cultural product'. The methods employed in the first chapter are largely a mix of textual analysis, ethnographies, with some fieldwork, to guide an introduction to the new dance styles and Ballet and the emerging dance academies promoting them. The second and the third chapter are entirely guided by fieldwork and participant observation, wherein the findings analysed and interpreted by theoretical engagements.

This project is based on an extensive fieldwork in the city of Delhi, wherein one explores the above mentioned academies, that by using the method of observation-participation, including, conducting interviews of dancers, choreographers, and audience, observing and taking notes from live and recorded performances. The other secondary sources of data, such as brochures, newspaper reports, etc., also lead to important reflections.

Being a dancer myself, my positioning in this project necessitates the employment of what Deidre Skylar calls "*empathetic kinesthetic perception*", that is using "*body and feelings as a research tool*" (Frosch, ed. Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999) in attempting a dance ethnography. A discourse on dance as a practice of embodiment calls for a participation in the dance classes, workshops, etc, and intends to make fruitful borrowings from my personal training in Ballet and membership of the one of the academies under study, to be able to fully grasp its corporeality.

Yet, it is not just the bodily engagement but also the meanings embedded in my very act of an intellectual engagement with a not-yet-registered, not-nuch-spoken-about dance practice in India, that come together to enable a full grasp of its corporeality.

Yet, given the indicated amount of 'personal engagement', the intention is not bring out any expert opinion, but indulge in the exchange of ideas and perceptions with the subjects, and generate interpretations based on self-reflexive observation of Ballet in India.

Chapter 1

Constructing Ballet's absence: Nationalisation and contemporarisation of dance in India

To be able to grasp and establish an 'absence' of Ballet, a 'Western/Colonial', 'Classical' dance tradition', in India, one needs to delve into a study of the nature of India's response to, and intake of colonialism and its influences. What this would lead to is an understanding of the socio-cultural and political ideologies ruling the Indian mind-set, during colonialism (the period which comprised in it the obvious possibility, as it were, of an emergence of Ballet), the choices and the rejections made, influencing and reflecting in what dance in India was to mean and cater to. On the basis of this understanding, one would be able to conjecture over what could or could not have led to the emergence and acceptance of Ballet in Indian context.

What one wants to pinpoint within in the following study are the sources and reasons for the resistance posed to Ballet, measuring its intensity by bringing out the strength of Indian nationalism. At the same time, what also has to be identified are the factors that could have created a fertile ground for Ballet but did not, the strangeness of which would get further highlighted as it is connected to the examination of the context of the Ballet's contemporary emergence in India.

1.1 Ballet resisted: Analysing through the lens of Indian Nationalism

In the nineteenth century India, the indigenous traditions and customs were being evoked to build a quintessential Indian-ness to be safeguarded from dying a colonial death, and were

being looked upon as the 'objects' of nation's pride. This was a time to build India as a 'singular', 'unified' entity which demanded a flattening of all differences, and it was Hinduism (orthodox or purified!) which was raised as that 'unifying force', and represented before the world as the symbol of an Indian identity. In other words, Indian nationalism was to be identified with or at least partly inspired by the 'Hindu religious norms' and "*Hindu way of life*".¹⁰

Given the fact that nationalism has been identified and critiqued as a construct of colonialism itself, what is ironical is its constituent ambition of either totally condemning the Western influences, or diplomatically balancing the inflow of ideas of Western modernism with an emphatic appraisal for the 'indigenous', so as to refrain from giving in to Western totalitarian structures; yet both of them aiming to achieve an autonomous sense of Indian-ness¹¹.

¹⁰ *"If an alien, imposed modernity was represented as a series of deprivations, then nationalism could situate its emancipatory project only by enclosing a space that was still understood as inviolate, autonomous. Much of nineteenth century nationalism identified this space as the 'Hindu way of life'. The fundamental distinction between reformers and Hindu nationalists of the nineteenth century did not lie in the fact that the former were less patriotic or that the latter were more rooted in indigenous tradition. It stemmed from two different readings of Hindu domestic practices and custom. While liberal reformers described them as a distortion of earlier purity and a major symptom of present decay, Hindu nationalists celebrated them as an excess reserved over and above colonisation, any change in which would signify the surrender of the last bastion of freedom."*- Sarkar, Tanika, Hindu wife, Hindu nation, (2001) pg 36

¹¹ *"Eastern Nationalism has appeared among peoples recently drawn into a civilization hitherto alien to them, and whose ancestral cultures are not adapted to success and excellence by these cosmopolitan and increasingly dominant standards. They too have measured the backwardness of their nations in terms of certain global standards set by the advanced nations of Western Europe. But what is distinctive here is that there is also a fundamental awareness that those standards have come from an alien culture, and the inherited culture of the nation did not provide the necessary leverage to enable it to reach those standards of progress. The 'Eastern' type of nationalism, consequently, has been accompanied by an effort to 're-equip' the nation culturally, to transform it. But it could not do so simply by imitating the alien culture, for then the nation would lose its distinctive identity. The search therefore was for a regeneration of the national culture, adapted to the requirements of progress, but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness."*-Chatterjee, Partha, Nationist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?, (1986), p2

Nationalising 'Indian' dance¹²: Could Ballet fit in?

Amidst the nationalist agendas, dance had come to be viewed as a 'visual element' through which the Indian culture could be projected, and was characterised by the elements of 'antiquity' and 'Hindu spirituality'. It must be noted that the pioneers or torchbearers of the nationalist movement of dance in India had had an English education and extensively travelled across the world. So, assumably, it was such exposure to the west which could have brought into them a Victorian sense of 'pure' and 'impure' and influenced their conscious decision to 'not be Western'.

There were primarily two kinds of treatments given to dance by the nationalists, one keeping in sync with the Western imagery of 'exotic' India, and other rebelling against this image with a rather evolved yet 'Pan-Indian' construction, but both falling within an 'essentialist' paradigm. First was by purists such as Rukmini Devi Arundale, second by modernists such as Rabindranath Tagore, both to be understood as characterising the Indian artists' common reaction to their interaction/association with the West. The political and cultural ambitions of both Arundale and Tagore, who have been regarded as the most revolutionary names in the history of Indian dance, had been impacted by their association with the West yet their reworkings of Indian dance appeared to be quite different from each other. Arundale and Tagore's formed two dominant approaches defining the ways and intent with which Indian society was inculcating Western ideas in the realm of dance on the basis of which one could contemplate if it could possibly create a room for a purely Western tradition of Ballet.

Rukmini Devi Arundale's attempts were puritanist in nature, aimed at a revival of dance from its original 'sadir' style, prevalent among the temple dancers, Devdasis, into an ideologically refreshed and reformed Bharatnatyam, which was to be a bearer of “*complete Sanskrit Hindu*

¹² Chakravorty, Pallabi in ed. Alexander Carter and Janet O'Shea (2010) p.277-281

woman”¹³, the face of 'Mother Nation'¹⁴ in front of the rest of the world. Arundale's ideologies were simultaneously constructed by her own Hindu upbringing as well as grooming with the Theosophical society between 1920-1933 and her travels across the world. On the one hand, she worked on removing the extraneous *sringaar* and erotic elements from the dance, in order to sanctify the art form. She also pioneered the establishment of '*Kala-Kshetra*', institution of dance and music in Madras, organised along the lines of the Hindu temple structures. On the other hand, she consciously exceeded her own puritanist limits as, “*she used stage lighting, imported from the British stagecraft, recostumed, restaged, and theatricalised dance in the manner of Isadora Duncan.*”¹⁵ Thus, what she exhibited in her efforts was a vision for a rather trans-nationalist expansion of Bharatnatyam and aimed at achieving a 'global' position for the same.

In 1928, Arundale came in touch with Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova when she went to see her path-breaking Ballet, *The Dying Swan*. Later, she has been reported to have taken lessons in western Classical Ballet from Cleo Nordi, a member of Pavlova's troupe. As much as Arundale's exposure to Ballet could have encouraged her to explore this form further, and even led her to 'patronise' it in India, if one were to speculate, it is only said to have rekindled Arundale's interest in her own classical dance traditions¹⁶. In other words, it had an 'Indianising' effect on her, resulting in her viewing of Ballet as the 'model international

¹³ Chakravorty in ed. Carter and O'Shea (2010) p.278

¹⁴ From the perspective of *résistance* posed at Ballet, these images of dance were much more political, and thus could be the driving force for the Indian audience in the struggle for independence, as against the romantic, fantastical images of Ballerinas who would play, “*faries, swans, and innocent peasant girls in the classical repertoire*” (Wolff, Janet in ed. Jane C. Desmond, 1997, p95). Such difference in the imagery of Bharatanatyam and Ballet shows how the conception as well as its socio-cultural import of dance in the Indian context was much different as compared to that of Ballet in the West.

¹⁵ Meduri, Avanti, “Bharatanatyam as a Global Dance: Some Issues in Research, Teaching, and Practice”. *Dance Research Journal*. Vol 36. No. 2 (2004): p14. Congress on Research in Dance

¹⁶ “*I would like to revisit the well known anecdote that Anna Pavlova was instrumental in getting Rukmini Devi to learn Bharatanatyam, instead of studying Ballet. In Rukmini Devi's own words, 'Pavlova once said to me you can learn Ballet but I think that everyone must try to revive the art of his own country.'*” - Rampal, Veena in Avanthi Meduri, (2005) pg 255

Classical dance tradition' against which one needed to establish 'India's own classical dance tradition', which was entrusted in the practice and spread Bharatnatyam.

Not a dancer himself, Rabindranath Tagore, is remembered as an exemplary name in the history of Indian dance. He re-invented the traditional dance-dramas, inspired by the idea of inseparability of music, dance, and theatre, as advocated by the masters of dramaturgy of ancient India. His three most renowned dance-dramas *Chitrangada*, *Chandalika*, and *Shyama* were composed specially for dance and emphasised on 'singing' and 'dancing', more than 'singing' and 'acting'.¹⁷ His dance-dramas incorporated both Classical techniques such as Manipuri, Kathakali, and Kathak, as well as folk dance styles, thus, bringing together dances from across India. At the same time, having been regarded as the pathfinder of modern Indian drama, Tagore never hesitated from blending these traditional Indian techniques with the western techniques of stagecraft and production. Massey observes, "*His songs and plays related to modern India, and the dance style had to adapt ancient techniques to suit contemporary ideas.*"¹⁸ Tagore drew inspirations from both spiritualism and naturalism professed by Hindu religion¹⁹, and Western universalism and empiricism, reflecting in the aesthetic and ideological structures of his dance dramas.

Tagore's dance-dramas significantly borrowed from various vocabularies of dance, ranging from Indian Classical, folk traditions, western modern dance, to free-style movements. As Chakravorty suggests,

"In his early compositions of Balmiki Pratibha, Falguni, and Arup Ratan, spontaneous movements were woven into an operatic structure, where dance came as mere embellishment

¹⁷ Banerjee, Projesh, *Indian Ballet Dancing*, (1983), p115-116

¹⁸ Massey, Reginald, *India's Dances: Their History, Technique, and Repertoire* (2004), p186

¹⁹ Tagore strongly condemned the orthodoxies of Hinduism and advocated its spiritual cleansing. Kopf suggests, "*He made it clear that status-quo Hinduism, filled with defects and abuses, must be altered in such a way that it reflected the 'inner Hinduism', that is, the true Hinduism.*" – Kopf, David, *The Brahma Samaj and the shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, (1981), p.302

to the songs (Sircar 1986; Chaki Sircar n.d.). Later, however, he was forced to find a vocabulary to shore up the metaphoric and dramatic imagery of his songs and dance dramas. Hence began his ceaseless search for new forms, new ways of approaching the body...Tagore was equally fascinated by the masculine vim and vigor of Mayurbhanja Chau and Raibeshey (Ghosh 1983). Twice he brought south Indian teachers to introduce a Southern dance style to Shantiniketan (Devi 1949). In 1927, Srimati Tagore went to learn modern dance. She was asked by Tagore to choreograph his poem Jhoolan with her newly acquired expressionist style....(Ghosh 1983). Pratima Devi, Tagore's daughter-in-law, influenced by Classical Ballet, choreographed a group dance based on collective synchronisation.”²⁰

Thus, clearly, unlike Arundale who aimed at bringing back to Indian dance 'what it had lost', Tagore's prerogative was to 'modernise' the same. Yet what brings both Arundale and Tagore on the same ideological plane was their efforts at mobilising Indian dance as a medium of expression for 'respectable' women from good families, and to be watched by educated and informed audience²¹, attributing to it a critical socio-political function at the helm of Indian nationalist uprising. Even though one may be able observe the opposing tendencies of classicalisation and modernisation (also bearing an imprint of their advocacy for revitalisation of Hinduism) in the nationalist endeavors of Arundale and Tagore, it could be argued that these two tendencies were together leading towards clearing the 'sabotaged' image of dance to be rooted as 'Indian, as both of them were directed towards seeking global attention for it, while defining what dance was in their respective ways. As much as Indian dance had become an exemplification of their intercultural inquiry, a symbol of their ambition to achieve a mediation between the East and the West, it directly, as in case of

²⁰ Chakraborty, Aishika in ed. Pallabi Chakravorty & Nilanjana Gupta (2010) p190

²¹See O'Shea, Janet in ed. Meduri, (2005), p231; and, Chakravorty, Pallabi, Dance Matters: Performing India on Local and Global Stages,

Arundale, or indirectly, as in case of Tagore, only ended up as the 'East' in an under-construction East-West polarisation.

Both the processes of purification (read Indianisation) of Indian dance, to be critiqued (read reinvented)²² by its 'modernisation', together constituting the nationalist paradigm, implied its tradition-boundedness; the purists with their confirmation of the tradition, while the modernists with their cosmopolitanisation of the same. It is clear how both the patronising and modernising 'acts' within dance in India, came together to snub the possibilities for the spread of a stringently Western (opposing) dance tradition in Indian context, as the former urged for a memory-erasure of a colonial past, as if it had never happened, and the latter utilised the Western influences to reverse the effects of colonialism to place India at par with the West, while maintaining the “*difference*”²³.

Non-nationalist 'modern dance': Uday Shankar's failure

Uday Shankar, regarded as the father of modern dance in India, nurtured an ambition for Indian dance, quite Euro-American in nature, owing to his long stay in Europe, that was of pursuing a 'break-out' from the traditional structures towards achieving 'free-flowing' body. Like Tagore, he adopted Western theatrical techniques and choreographic methods, and worked them into his borrowings from various Indian classical and folk traditions into creating new forms of dance, which came together to win him the title of a 'modernist' claiming for a certain kind of culturally defined modernity for Indian dance. Using a new

²² Vivienne Rogis argues that the moments of transformation also become the moments of reiteration, an argument that echoes in the works of most contemporary dancers in the postcolonial India, as documented in the work of Coorlawala. See Rogis, Vivienne in ed. Mohd. Anis Md. Nor and Revathi Murugappan, (2005), p.336

²³ Rogis in ed. Mohd. Anis Md. Nor and Revathi Murugappan, (2005), p.336

dance vocabulary that he created on his own, Shanker made significant departures from traditional classical dances and their portrayals with his modern themes such as *Labour and Machinery*, *Rhythm of Life*, and *Nirasha*, intending to reach out to the urbanised Western audience. At the same time, he consciously kept revisiting the notions of *Bhakti* in his dances, such as the *Tandava Nritya*. Just like Arundale's, Shankar's dance-career bore a huge impression from his association with Pavlova, with whom he created dances based on Hindu-themes such as *Radha-Krishna* (1923), the dances that he thought could 'represent' India on the world-stage.

As much as Shankar rose as an important face of Indian dance in the West, his style never seemed to have been fully embraced in India. Chakravorty argues, “*Shankar invented a new dance form in the first part of the twentieth century that was popular in the West, but widely rejected by Indian critics because it did not neatly fit the nationalist categories of 'classical' and 'folk'.*”²⁴ Shankar saw a hard-hitting critique in G.K Seshagiri from the South Indian magazine, *Sound and Shadow*, which Jeyasingh talks about in her essay, *Getting off the Orient Express*. She argues, “*When the rehabilitation of the classical technique finally got underway, it judged Shankar harshly: 'Uday Shankar's dance, considered as some kind of dance, was tolerable. But considered as Indian dance, as Bharata Natya...it was absolutely unconvincing except for the costume, the decor and the music' (Seshagiri in Sound and Shadow)*”²⁵.

Shankar's style, which was, for the most part, bracketed as *bourgeoisie* had clearly failed to connect to the general Indian audience; the failure which became overtly visible with a complete shutdown of *Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre* at Almora within four years of its establishment and a simultaneous dispersion of its students, such as Guru Dutt, Narendra

²⁴ Chakravorty, Pallabi in ed. Isabelle Clark-Deces (2011), p.139

²⁵ Jeyasingh, Shobana, in ed. Carter and O'shea (2010), p.182

Sharma, Zohra Sehgal, and others. Douglas M. Knight argues, *“The school trained more than a dozen celebrated dancers of various practices...but it did not become a resource for the perpetuation of these traditions.”*²⁶

One must observe that what actually led to the perceived failure of Shankar in India, that in his dejection as a 'Westerner' by the Indian nationalists, was not so much his dances, which for the most part did exhibit his closeness with Hindu mythology and Indian classical themes, but his deep-rooted association with the West²⁷. Ironically, both Arundale and Tagore on the one hand and those called the modern dancers of India, like Uday Shankar, on the other, were perpetuating 'authentic' or 'representative' images of dance, outlining not just the 'ideals' of dance but the 'ideals' of Indian culture (sanskriti), the former in the name of nationalism and the latter with its exemplification of orientalism²⁸, yet both having been equally framed by colonialism. But, as it seemed, the development of Shankar's dances in the West, rendered them a status of a Western in-flow which could not have matched up to the 'indigeniety' of the tradition being nurtured within the geographical boundaries of India. In fact Shankar's rejection turned out to be a clear case stemming from was the demarcation drawn between the 'modern' (or the rhetoric of the same) and 'Western', wherein 'modern' had to necessarily be accountable to the 'nation' and its 'tradition' while maintaining and reiterating the 'othering' of the Euro-American.

²⁶ Knight, Douglas, *Balasaraswati: Her Art and Life* (2010), p114

²⁷ Most of the writings on Uday Shankar account for Shankar's extensive stays and performances in Europe. He worked with huge number of foreign artists such as Swiss sculptress Alice Boner, who toured with him as his manager, and with whom he also founded his dance company in Europe; and Simone Barbier, a Frenchwoman who was one of the principal dancers in Shankar's troupe.

²⁸ “Uday Shankar was carefully singled out as a person with significant individual talent who exoticised India's image abroad but had no discernable dance technique, and was essentially a master presenter who impressed his audiences by using stray elements from the various Indian dance forms. While the Indian elite had no problems with the use of newly innovated elaborate costumes, brought in as part of the image of an exotic, beautiful, and diverse India....yet the very same people criticized Shankar for selling an 'oriental' image of India to the West”, - Munsji, Urmimala, in ed. Urmimala Sarkar Munsji (2008) p87

Ballet's political irrelevance to Indian Nationalism: A comparison with Chinese and Japanese Nationalism

By presenting the case of other south-east Asian societies like China and Japan, where Ballet lives on as one of the most 'naturalised' foreign practice, as much as one intends to ask why not in India?, one needs to consciously investigate the particularised responses that these societies would give to the effects and in-flows of colonialism, owing to their individual history and ideologies. As India's 'resistance' is pitted against China and Japan's acceptance of Western Classical Ballet, such a comparative analysis could not only bring out the obstinacy of the traditionalism constituted in Indian nationalism, but also direct this research to pick on the forces that could make possible for an Asian colony, to find a magnificent representation, in fact an identity of its own, within a dance tradition that has been considered a cultural 'artefact' of its colonisers, illustrated by Chinese and Japanese Ballet.

What it largely took in these cultures was the individual efforts, made by foreigners as well as the natives that could mobilise a Western art form like Ballet over weighty indigenous traditions and turn it into a patriotic force. Ballet had entered Japan during the Meiji period but remained quite un-influential²⁹ till the time Japan witnessed a rush of visits paid by known Russian artists like Nadejida Pavlova and Eliana Pavlova (1922) around the time of Russian revolution, who patronised Ballet with the setting up of a school in 1927. The school attracted many natives like Chieko Hattori, Yuhsaku Asuma, Akiko Tachibana, and many others to acquire training in the Western Classical tradition, thus sowing seeds for an indigenous establishment of Ballet in the form of Tokyo Ballet Company (1946). In the case of China, it were the influential natives like Yu Ronglin, daughter of late Qing diplomat, and Wu Xiaobang, now known as the founding father of Chinese Ballet, who brought to their

²⁹ Havens, Thomas, Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avante-Garde Rejection of Modernism, (2006) p21

homeland their experiences and training in Ballet from around the world³⁰. Anna Pavlova's *The Dying Swan*, and the performances given by foreign dance companies like Denishawn only further provided an impetus to a Western dance revolution that was already in force, encouraging indigenous artists to explore the western art and dance.

For any foreign trend or art form to reach its naturalisation in the indigenous culture, what it takes is its union with the ruling socio-political ideologies of that culture. Japan's mission to rid itself of the status of the 'oriental' and rise as a Euro-American counterpart in the East, had made Japan much more receptive to Western standards of art, and thus to Ballet. In China, Ballet assumed a propagandist form extolling the virtues of communism, the political ideology which till date rules the Chinese. Such politics coupled with spread of Christianity and Confucianism, and the growing fascination for technology in these two countries, came to encourage a Euro-American rationality, and thus, a Westernised aesthetic sense. For most Japanese and Chinese reformers, West became synonymous to future, and Western art, the medium to express the modern sentiments which the indigenous art, though deserved to be preserved, could not express anymore. What one saw was a phenomenon of *anti-Western Westernisation*³¹, growing sentiment of competing with the West, only by adopting themselves the Western principles. Clearly, the Chinese and Japanese nationalism, which arose during the world wars, (China's defeat by Japan, Japan's rise, and then fall after the World War II, unlike Indian nationalism did not thrive on a denouncement of the West and revivalism of the 'lost' ethnicity, but a desire to be "*implicated in the ubiquitous West...[to not be] seen as outside of the West.*"³² What followed was the founding of many schools

³⁰ "Mainland historians credit the introduction of Ballet to Yu Ronglin, daughter of the late Qing diplomat Yu Geng and sister of author Yu Deling. Born in 1882, Ronglin followed her father to Japan where he served as China's ambassador in 1893. She was exposed to and began to learn Ballet....She also began to use Ballet techniques to choreograph Chinese dance; this can be considered to be the beginning of the naturalization of Ballet in China"-Yangwen, Zheng in ed. Marion Kant (2007) p.256-257

³¹ Yahuda Michael in ed. Michael Leifer (2000) p26

³² Havens, Thomas (2006) p13

imparting education in Western art and music, starting as early as in 1920's. With an institutionalised Ballet practice of their own, these two countries also influenced the spread of Ballet to other South-East Asian societies like Philippines and Malaysia.

Despite a huge similarity visible in the ways the Indian artists like the Chinese and Japanese artists got exposed to the Western art forms, including Ballet and modern dance, that is during their own visits to the West and the visits of venerable artists to India like Pavlova, St. Denis and Shawn, along with the huge pressure of raising the traditional culture which was being faced by the artists and reformers across the three countries, it is only strange how Ballet found an acceptance, that which could later culminate into a 'need' for Ballet in China and Japan, counter-posed to its complete and curious absence in India. As one looks at this comparison coupled with hitherto talked about nationalist pervading through the re-workings of Indian dance (Arundale and Tagore) and the criticism posed at any digressions from the same (Shankar), one can easily sense the obsession with the 'Indian-ness', defined as that which was not 'Western', which, if one were to speculate, is precisely what could have stopped any attempts, if at all were or could be made, to spread Ballet, by individuals, and hence has to be understood as the force breeding in Indian society, a repudiation of Ballet.

Why did the colonialists not spread Ballet?-Resistance posed from the outside

It must be noted that the 'East-West' othering, as has been conceived as an embodiment of Ballet's absence in Indian context, was operating both within and outside India. A complete

lack of attempts made on the part of the colonialists to spread Ballet³³, could be understood as a projection of the colonialists' separation of themselves from their 'oriental' other (also the primary originator of the existing tradition-boundedness amongst the Indian nationalists). Coorlawala suggests, “*The criteria, classifications and words that describe and inscribe the Indian dances today reflect those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century European and British writers who distanced exotic colonized cultures from their own (superior) aesthetic and creative ventures.*”³⁴

As the above argument suggests, 'othering' was being perpetrated in two ways, 'exoticisation' and 'marginalisation' of the colonized, and both could be seen to have considerably encouraged Ballet's absence in the Indian context.

Marginalisation

Ballet's arrival in the non-European societies, like the United States was not unmarked by the politics evoked by its racial denial to the so-called 'colored' people. The colored bodies were too big (big hips), and thus 'naturally' unfit for Ballet³⁵. This 'denial' is what had called for the Modern Dance revolution, which claimed to have given a voice to those who formed the lowest rung of the society, including the 'colored', the women, and the homosexuals. Still the non-whites, including the Asians struggled for representation even in Modern dance, despite its egalitarian claims. Priya Srinivasan argues:

“..Americans, in defining themselves, were increasingly turning to Asian goods, philosophies, arts, and cultures, even as they selectively denied Asian people, including Indians, the rights

³³ In Japan, Ballet was patronized by foreigners, while in China it was primarily the natives, who had travelled and got exposed to Ballet abroad, who took the initiative of popularizing Ballet in their own country.

³⁴ Coorlawala, Uttara, Classical and Contemporary Indian dance: Overview, criteria, and a choreographic analysis, (1994) p203

³⁵ Gottschild, Brenda, Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts (1996), p65

of citizenship. It became very clear between 1917, when immigration law barred all Asians from immigrating to the United States....although the US needed Asian labour, philosophies, and culture to create a unique identity for itself, it did not want Asian bodies in the long term.”³⁶

Thus, from the given political/racial logic, it becomes understandable how Ballet, an art-form which had come to acquire the status of a 'high art', and which the Modern dance movement had only further 'classicalised', remained inaccessible to the Asians. While the Japanese and Chinese nationalism constituted itself in revolting against the imposition of such an inaccessibility as stated above, Indian nationalism nullified it as it aimed at situating its dance-models parallel to the western models.

Exoticisation

One must note that the 'primitivism' which was being 'cleared' through modernisation/classicalisation of Indian dance by the nationalists was in fact being reinstated as the 'mystique', providing for the modern dance innovations of the West, which would mark their 'progress'/'freedom' from the monarchy of Ballet.

The above argument clearly directs one to the realisation of how the world politics of dance, the emerging divide between Ballet and modern dance, was thriving on the East-West 'othering'. Hence, it may well be assumed that the dismissal that Ballet was facing in the West was most likely to influence its spread world-wide. The torchbearers of modern dance, like

³⁶ Srinivasan, Priya "Dancing Modern/Dancing Indian/Dancing...In America: The myths of cultural 'purity'", Ballet dance magazine, criticaldance.com, April 2004 <www.Ballet-dance.com/200404/articles/asiandance/html>

Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and Anna Pavlova³⁷, were emphatically incorporating inspirations from Indian mythology into their dances, and therefore seemed to have played the role of the revisionists of Indian dance, than the pioneers of a Western tradition as was in the case of China and Japan, where their visits had been instrumental in drawing the attention of the native artists to their Western classical as well as modern dance performances. In fact there are accounts of Pavlova having motivated Rukmini Devi and Uday Shankar to strengthen their 'own' technique³⁸. One could hardly sense any foreign or indigenous initiative towards the spread of Ballet in India. In fact one could observe, how the idea of finding 'freedom of expression', remained the ideological force behind both the modern dance revolution in the West, and an Indian dance revolution in India, the former being a direct revolt against the binding tradition of Ballet, while the latter becoming repelling it in its efforts to find a 'voice of its own'³⁹.

1.2 Constructing the 'strangeness': How could have Ballet been absent?

Having developed an elaborate expression of Ballet's resistance existing within the models of Indian nationalism, one has to acknowledge that this expression still remains inadequate in

³⁷ Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn visited India in 1926 and choreographed 'The Cosmic Dance of Siva' based on their travel experiences. Anna Pavlova came to India in 1928, and danced many concerts in Mumbai.

³⁸ Pavlova had influenced Rukmini Devi Arundale and Uday Shankar in remarkable ways. According to most accounts, she was the one who had encouraged Arundale to not just learn but revive Bharatanatyam. In case of Shankar, he became a dancer only after having danced in Pavlova's Ballets. It was Pavlova who suggested Shankar to return to India to learn Indian dance techniques, which he would use to create his own vocabulary. See Meduri (2005), Munsri (2008)

³⁹ *"The very same forces and tendencies that were pushing India to construct a tradition were simultaneously pushing the west towards constructing the modern"*-Menon, Sadanand in ed. Mohd. Anis Md. Nor and Revathi Murugappan, (2005) pg 37-38

explaining, rather, justifying, what was so stringent a force that could have caused the Indian dancers (the Westward looking modernists) to completely overlook or refrain from a ubiquitous dance tradition such as Ballet. This is because as much as one can reason why Ballet's colonial development was or could have been avoided, one can also present a counter-narrative stating the premises which could bring out the 'strangeness' of the same.

East-West confluence and the elements of 'Anglicisation'

One must problematise all that had come to symbolise 'Colonial modernity'⁴⁰ for as much as the West was being denounced, it was also being looked upto as 'progressive'. The 'Westernisation' of the colonised Indians had found layers of its cultural expression. There were not only clear signs of the self-acclaimed 'inspirations' drawn from Western rationality echoing in the reflections of the nationalists, as has been talked about already, but also those suggesting a fascination with and consequent emulation of the 'Western' by many Indian elites, who had come to be identified as the 'anglicised' Indians.

Western imports

The 'Westernisation' had its markers appearing across all arenas, politics, education, Indian art, including theatre, music, dance, and literature, purported to have been led by the growth of urban cities such as Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. The spread of English education with the establishment of many missionary schools, and national-level universities like Calcutta University, Bombay University, and Madras University, led to the spread of British ideas,

⁴⁰ Colonial modernity has been conceptualised in the works of Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, and other sociologists from the Sub-altern studies, who have tried to understand the paradoxical reception of the European Enlightenment by the colonized, wherein the colonized attempt to retain their historical agency in their pursuit of the modernity constructed by their colonizers.

tastes, values, and morals among the Indian intelligentsia, which rhymed with an increasing inclination towards British aesthetics. Many have accounted for the use of Western instruments like violin, and piano, within Indian music as a modernising colonial borrowing⁴¹. Literature and theatre remained the two areas where colonialism showed the most lasting effects. The knowledge of English language was expanding with missionary schools and English literature having been introduced as a compulsory subject up to university level in all educational institutions⁴². The greatest impact on Indian literature and theatre was that of the English actor, playwright and drama producer, William Shakespeare. Within theatre, Parsi theatre blended European practices of stagecraft and commercial organisation with Indic, Persian, and English stories, music, and poetry. Indian English drama was rising with names such as A.S.P Ayyar, Bharati Sarabhai, and J.M Lobo Prabhu during the pre-independence era. There was a clear merger between the western aesthetics of dance and that of 'classicalising' Indian dance with the rise of concert performances also leading to changing relationship between audience and performers. Those who socialised with the colonial elites and frequented English gatherings, even got exposed to opera and ballroom dances⁴³.

The Anglo-Indians

As has been indicated above, the Anglo-Indians showed maximum impact of Westernisation visible in their imperial preferences. For example, as per Auerbach

“Anglo-Indian scholars began to show interest in British artists in India, as opposed to indigenous Indian art...Guided by Evan Cotton and William Foster, two prominent art critics,

⁴¹ Weidman, Amanda in ed. Richard Wolf (2009), p49

⁴² Purohit, Vinayak, Arts of Transitional India 20th Century. Vol-1, (1988) p336

⁴³ Masani Zareer, Indian Tales of the Raj, (1987) p67-68

wealthy Bengalis modelled themselves on the British aristocracy, furnishing their houses in European style and building up large collections of paintings by artists such as Daniells.”⁴⁴

Blunt gives an extensive account of how the Anglo-Indians, pronounced their British ancestry and identified 'Britain' as their homeland, thus inculcating a British lifestyle,

“Unlike other Christians in India, the European ancestry of Anglo-Indians- reflected by cultural markers such as language, dress, and eating habits- continued to shape a distinctive community identity that was bound to Europe, and particularly Britain, as home...Anglo-Indians aspired to reproduce the domestic life of the middle-class, imperial elite in British India.”⁴⁵

Clearly, there was a sense of custodianship for western cultural heritage pervading the Anglo-Indian society.

But the contention here is, amidst the processes of such hyperwesternisation and denationalisation, also becoming the expression of desire to acquire British mannerism and sophistication, one fails to find any evidence documenting even a bleak presence of Ballet, where in fact it could have found not only its ardent torchbearers but also a favourable socio-cultural environment to flourish. Why did it not? The question remains unanswered.

Why not Ballet? The questions raised...

As much as one has observed the intense 'Indianisation' of the dance traditions in colonial India, there were also, at the same time, glimpses of an increased exchange between the

⁴⁴ Auerbach, Jeffrey in ed. William Roger Louis, Elaine M.Low , Nicholas P.Canny, Peter James Marshall (1999) pdccxi

⁴⁵ Blunt, Alison, Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spacial Politics of Home, (2005) p203

Indian and the Western artists, seen in the case study of Arudale, Tagore, and Uday Shankar, with the same ardent desire to seek global recognition for themselves as artists, as was being expressed in other Asian colonies such as the Chinese and the Japanese, and later were to be voiced by the artists of the 21st century India. It is only peculiar to see how Ballet could find followers in other Asian societies going through similar colonial turmoil, and then among the present day Indian artists working towards achieving a 'unique-Indian-identity', which even the artists in the colonial India also, seemed to be wishing for.

The question have to raised despite all explanations suggesting a political inconsequentiality of Ballet compared to Indian dance traditions' position within the nationalist regime. If there could be incorporated Western theatrical techniques, or stage-craft, even ideological frames, then why not Ballet? If Bharatanatyam could travel across the world creating for itself a global audience and dancers in the West could experiment with the so-called spiritual images from Indian dance traditions, how could Indians remain seemingly completely uninfluenced by the dance of the West, the Classical Ballet? In this context, one must highlight the fact that while the word 'Ballet', was being used for Shankar's and Tagore's dances, the 'musicals' they created conflating music, dance, and theatre, the Ballet technique, rather, Ballet as a Western Classical genre of dance remained under-explored. The question is why?

At the same time, if one defends Ballet's absence in India by suggesting/constructing a reluctance for the same among the colonialists themselves, stating their underlying purpose to maintain a superiority over their 'oriental' colonies, the question is why this logic should only be applied to indifference towards spreading Ballet but not the missionary education, English language, or technology, on the part of the Europeans? And if the Indians could respond favourably to the missionary's civilising and emancipatory attempts, while many (the Anglo-

Indians) could attune themselves to nearly everything Western as has been accounted for, then how could there be no trace of their encounters with Ballet?

1.3 Setting the stage for Ballet's arrival: The socio-cultural context

The historical absence of a Ballet 'past' is felt and realised against the contemporary existence of Ballet teaching academies in the metropolitan cities of India like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, and Kolkata, which urges one to find out the socio-cultural forces which are actively causing and supporting the apparent inclination towards learning and practicing Ballet among the Indian dancers. Observably, Ballet arrives in two shapes, as an 'aesthetic/artistic' change, and as a 'commercial' product. Hence, the two most prominent factors that set the context for an 'acceptance' of Ballet, within the present-day Indian society are:

- Contemporary dancers' open-ness towards new forms, and situating themselves between 'indigenous' and 'foreign'.
- Dance turning into a 'commodity', that which can be bought and sold.

Contemporarisation of dance

The years between the 60's and the 90's marked India's opening up to the world, with the waves of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation setting in, emphasising on acquiring a 'global identity' instilled by the blurring of national boundaries⁴⁶. It is at this moment that one

⁴⁶ Appadurai 1996, Appadurai and Breckenridge 1996, Pinny 2001

begins to see the processes of 'contemporarisation' within dance in India. The study of this contemporarisation is significant to this study since it assumes that Ballet arrives in India as part of this contemporarisation. The concept of contemporarisation has been used in the discourses on Historiography, suggesting that a certain history may be written to understand and document the contemporary circumstances. It is the same concern, that is of bringing dance in dialogue with the contemporary ideologies of 'individualism', 'democracy', 'secularism', and 'cultural pluralism', the ruling organising-ideals of the urbanising Indian society, that characterises the shift in consolidation of dance, as a singular category of 'Indian dance' to a much more open 'dance in India'. What comes first is the construction of 'dances of India' impelled by the Nehruvian aspiration of 'Unity in Diversity', providing recognition to the regional classical and folk dances seeking to coalesce into a mosaic of a multi-ethnic India. But this research suggests its sense of objectivity and cultural reflexivity by using the phrase 'dance in India', as it brings into consideration the diversification of pre-set categories and coexistence of new, sometimes undefined dance genres while investigating the acculturation of a foreign tradition in the Indian context.

The contemporarisation of dance is characterised by the pressures to transgress the Indian Classical traditions, pushing their boundaries from both within and outside. The works of contemporary artists like Chandralekha, Kumudini Lakhia, and many others, reflect their attempts of deconstructing the tradition with an intention to recreate it, rather validate it, as per the sensibility of its present-day audience, as the larger paradigm within which they operate remain purely Classical. Then there are dancers such as Bharat Sharma, and Astad Deboo, who want to de-idolise their training in a certain technique in the dances they create as what they intend to avoid is being seen as advocates of any formalised structure but movements that are born from the processes of improvisation and individual experience. The former league of artists extract the movement vocabulary out of the Classical traditions, as

they shed down the lavish costumes and the sets, even the heavy facial expressions, leading to a heightened visibility of just the 'body'. The latter experiment to create movements that are not to be read into any form loaded with pre-conceived historical and cultural meanings, thus, equipping the audience with the ways of perceiving the 'unfamiliar'.

Yet what they encapsulate is the growing inclination towards 'de-contextualisation' in the realm of dance, amongst the dancers as well as their audience, who wish to find their own individual resemblance, in other words, a direct relevance to their everyday lives in these dances, rather than only a communal attachment instilled by the religious symbolism embodied within the conventional Classical dances. Such a tendency towards 'de-contextualisation' may cultivate ground for Western Classical Ballet, as it may be perceived in isolation from its Western origin, narratives, and socio-cultural biases, as a heuristic movement vocabulary, which may be used not as an 'expression' but as a mode of expression, to express that which may not be sufficiently translated into typical Indian movements, gestures, and bodies. Also, the idea of acknowledging the 'body' comes along with an emphasis on what all the body can 'do' and 'achieve', how can it cross all its physical limitations, and acquire the quality of the 'spectacular', which then directly links itself to the call for a technique as physically challenging as Ballet.

Commodification of dance

The processes leading to commodification of dance are those implying a conversion of 'aesthetics' into saleable products, to be bought and sold in the commercial setting of a market. Dance has assumed the form of a 'cultural good'⁴⁷ available for circulation amongst the masses, sometimes consumed in a 'museaumised' form, as 'pure' cultural traditions, and sometimes in the form of hybrid mixtures, popularly called the 'fusion' dances, being

⁴⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre; Johnson, Randal, The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature (1993)

produced by the so called entertainment industry. The central idea here is, in the words of Miles, “*The product that artists produce is (will) inevitably be tempered by the demands of consumer capitalism...Creativity is inevitably tempered by the demands of the marketplace.*”⁴⁸The capitalist scrutinisation of dance may motivate a trade for both its 'authenticity', with an increasing number of takers/buyers seeking 'exclusivity' as well as a 'dis-embeddedness' with a-particular culture which may render it a multicultural value.

Ballet in a 'museumised' form

Considering how Indian dance had already made its international appearances, due to Arundale and Shankar's nationalist/modernist propaganda during colonialism, Western Classical Ballet sees its first staging in India only in the wake of the formation of a globalised world, and must be assessed on the basis of its attributed post coloniality. Parallel to the contemporary trends of international consumption of Indian classical dances packaged as per the Western demands for 'authenticity', one gets to see the organisation of Classical Ballet concerts in India, also packaged and promoted as stereotypically Western. Bolshoi Ballet tours India for the first time, in 1986-87, and Indian audience witnesses Ballet classics such as *'Spring Water'*, and since then it has toured India in 2009 making classics such as *Don Quixote* huge hits with the Indian audience. The Grand Moscow Classical tours India in 2011 and presents capsules from the classics such as Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. These performances have to be examined from the perspective of their political connotations as well as how much effect they may hold in leading to a conversion of a culturally impersonal 'spectacle' into an acquired 'practice'.

While looking at the nature of the events as part of which Ballet performances arrive in India, the Soviet Union Festival in 1987-88, or as an individualistic effort backed by private

⁴⁸ Miles, Steven, Consumerism as a Way of Life, (1998), p121

organisations (Mr. N. Ramji, Managing director of Travel Masters Entertainment India P. Ltd.), one has to take into consideration how they may politicise/encash the precise foreignness of Ballet. Within the context of the former, the performance gets marked as an agent of strategic cooperation between two nations, than being an agent of its art per se. Its manifest purpose is to re-induce the nationalistic spirit in its participants as it is staged as a 'representative' art, and create a space of cultural confrontation with artists of one culture (Russian) exposing themselves to the interpretations of the audience of another (Indian). In the latter context, Ballet undergoes a similar kind of exoticisation, as it is turned into something as transitory and saleable as a tourist attraction. It is essentialised as something 'never-been-seen-before', which only reiterates its non-belongingness, its impermanence in a foreign land. It may be sold as an 'authentic' expression of a 'distant' culture, and witnessing it may symbolise for the natives an opportunity to access the culturally 'inaccessible'. Yet, it is the same sense of fascination which is called for Ballet in both the contexts which directs one to ask if it could grow to a level that it would create a desire to 'be' those bodies as one witnessed them on stage; to not match the image of 'us' by the 'other', but be the image of the 'other' imagined by 'us'.

Dance in films and television

Chakravorty, in order to substantiate her understanding of global dancing, highlights Appadurai's arguments as follows,

“Arjun Appadurai (1997) has recently observed that the main feature of globalised public culture in India is the explosion of print and electronic media. Emphasising the role of film, television, and video technologies that lie at the heart of the transformation of India's public sphere, he has described the rise of a culture of celebrity and consumption inextricably linked to the economic reforms of the mid-1990s. Implemented under the banner of

'liberalisation', these reforms have opened up a consumption-led path to a transnational culture saturated with media, images, texts, and oppositional ideologies (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995).⁴⁹

It is in the light of the above argument that one may take into account the commercialisation of dance in India, being produced and reproduced by Indian films and television. What is being pointed at are the numerous 'dance styles' emerging as a result of the refashioning of the old classical as well as folk forms, and their conglomeration with the western genres. These dances comprising indigenous versions of a pirouette, a lay-out, a plie, in Hindi cinema⁵⁰ and television dance reality shows have created a space where dancers begin to engage with foreign dance forms, and create an audience for it. What it evokes is a demand for globally appealing aesthetics, as the actors and the dancers become globally mobile themselves. One may be able to point out the imitations/resemblances of *Jazz*, and other kinds of show dances like *Cha-Cha*, *Jive*, *Disco*, *Rock n Roll* and *Hip-hop*. Even though it does not directly circulate any typical Ballet images, it makes foreign corporeal practices 'identifiable' and 'accessible'. As much it strives to achieve a distinct Indian representation internationally, it also generates the aspiration to achieve the 'foreign', the 'distant', with its romantic presentations of the same.

The common motivation behind these kinds of inclinations is to question the hegemonic compartmentalisation of categories, enter the fluid in-betweens of the Indo-Western, yet be

⁴⁹ Chakravorty in ed. Isabelle Clark-Deces (2011), p137

⁵⁰"Bollywood dance can be seen as flourishing from practical, ideological and aesthetic links between NRIs in the United Kingdom, Unites States, and Australia in particular, and the new middle classes in India. The growing importance of dance in films has also both fed into fed off these trends, as have the big, live, star shows. In particular, it was Yash Chopra's 1997 Hindi film *Dil To Pagal Hai* with choreography by Shiamak Davar telling the story of a love triangle of Fame type Jazz dancers that can be seen as the point of critical mass which saw Bollywood dance become 'a rage' in India (interview Shiamak Davar 30 April 2006, Mumbai)"- Morcom, Anna in ed. K. Mot Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake (2009) p127

perceived as “*not Westernised*”⁵¹ even as they repeatedly exhibit the use of western choreographic methods. The conflation of techniques signals the urge to widen the horizons of expressivity of dance, and an undermining of the hitherto offered resistance to culturally distant techniques, which such a tendency to 'conflate' may allow for. These phenomena clearly come to constitute the 'indigenous-foreign' continuum, characteristic of what Ya Pin Chen conceptualises as 'Asian Modernity', which may lead one to simply hypothesize a clear possibility of an interaction with an internationally overarching dance style such as Ballet. And, one has to study it not just as the other end of a binary, as an ideal type, but also in terms of atypical treatment/transformation that it undergoes in an Indian context.

⁵¹ *“The movements evoke associations with criteria for correctness that these choreographers may ignore in their determination to not be westernized”*, - Coorlawala, 1994, p227

Chapter 2

The patrons, the academies, the students: Teaching and learning Ballet in India

The most significant manifestation of Ballet's appearance and emergence in India is the recently established Ballet-teaching academies, with the efforts of certain individuals sharing a futuristic vision for an institutionalisation of practice and performance of Western Classical Ballet and Western dance in the country. This chapter, by presenting detailed case studies of these academies, attempts to investigate the causes that lead these individuals to patronise a cultural 'other' and hitherto unexplored form of dance and what are the socio-cultural 'needs' that Ballet has come to cater to, with an underlying hope to see the colonial absence of Ballet in India having been constituted by the absence of these causes and needs in the past. The fundamental questions raised here are, in what ways/forms is Ballet taught? and, how and what for is it learnt?, the answers to which can generate an understanding of the models of 'inculcation' and 'appropriation' of Ballet technique, and thus of India's specific socio-cultural engagement with Ballet. In this chapter are included, out of necessity of this research, quotes from the leading people from these newly founded institutions, talking about three important elements, i.e. presence, performance, and perpetuation of the form in India, that they were responsible for, or having been trying to achieve. It also includes voices of some students who talk about making a choice of learning the form.

2.1 Patronage

There are quite a few Ballet academies in India today. The first among those, *School of Classical Ballet and Western Dance* was established in Mumbai in 1966, and continues to

train its students in the syllabus based on that of *Royal Academy of Dance*, London. There is *The Lewis Foundation of Classical Ballet*, Bangalore, which started working around 2005-2006, and then there are quite a few academies in Kolkata teaching Ballet. In the capital city of Delhi, there are three important names that dominate the Ballet and Western dance scene, namely, *School of Russian Classical Ballet* at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture running since 1982; *Imperial Fernando Ballet Company*, founded in 2002, and *The Danceworx Performing Arts Academy*, founded in 1998.

The common feature of these academies is their Anglo-Indian/foreign foundership/patronage, with individuals having acquired their training from dance schools abroad and assumed the role of the ambassadors of western dance in India. Tushna Dallas, and the founder of *School of Classical Ballet and Western Dance (SCBWD)*, is a woman of Parsi origin who graduated from the London College of Dance in 1962, where she secured her college diploma with a Distinction in teaching. She later obtained her fellowship with Honours in the Classical Ballet branch of the *Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing*, London, and returned to Mumbai to establish SCBWD. As per Dallas and her daughter Khushcheher, who also teaches at the academy,

“There was no Ballet teaching academy in India before SCBWD was established. Thus, we had the honour to give to the dancers in India, for the first time, such a glorious form of dance, the Classical Ballet. What we aspire our students to achieve is a desired career in Western dance.”

Similarly, the founder of the Danceworx, Ashley Lobo, is a Mumbai-based catholic, who trained himself at the *Bodenweiser Dance Theatre*, and *Sydney Dance Company*, Australia, in not just Classical Ballet, but also other styles such as Jazz, Funk, and Contemporary dance for over 5 years, and performed in several musicals such as *The Nutcracker*, *The Wiz*, *West Side*

Story, etc. in Australia, before he came to India to set up the Danceworx. Born to one of the very few *opera* singers in India, Celia Lobo, and brought up in an 'artistic environment', Lobo had been exposed to western theatre, dance, and music right from his childhood and had already worked with directors and choreographers of English theatre such as Alyque Padamsee, Krishna Bhargava, Salome Roy Kapoor, and many others in his teens. He says,

“Having been born into a family where my mother, a trained opera singer, sung us arias instead of lullabies, I grew up in anything but a regular 'Indian' household. My peers would be whistling the popular Hindi songs and I would be staring at them as the only tunes went through my head were Broadway musicals. Here I was an Indian- same color, same schooling, but a cultural misfit.

As I grew older I realised that dance was what I wanted to do. I soon found out, however, that training in Western dance was not readily available. The only oasis at that time was a sweet old Parsi lady, Tushna Dallas, who ran a Ballet school with 20 odd students. So, at the age of 15 I decided to give it a go. I trained with her for a while and then felt the need to move to Australia for a better training. I had a sister living there, so Australia became the first choice. All this had happened at a time when India had only one TV channel run by the national network- there was very limited exposure to international cultures. So the choice of studying western dance was unheard off!

My zeal to spread the awareness about Western dance in India came from the hard-ships I had to face to gather funds to make possible my training in a foreign country. That is when I thought, I would like to work towards availing similar dance programmes in our country, so that the following generations could fulfil their dance dreams. Of course, the biggest hindrance I had to fight against was the hegemony of classical and popular Bollywood dance in Indian cities. For example, in Delhi, where I was hoping to find takers for Ballet and Jazz,

all people were going gaga about was 'Bhangra' and 'Bollywood'. That is precisely why I decided to begin with Jazz as it could be easily popularised due to its similarities with Bollywood. At the same time, it could be a medium to introduce people to the lines of Ballet. Ballet, on the other hand, in my opinion, would have been a huge shift from what people already knew and had been doing. So what I thought would be appropriate was to slowly pave a way for Ballet through Jazz. The idea was to make 'popular' also 'credible'. My real intention was to break the pre-conceived notions people had about 'Western dance', due to which anything un-artistic, coming from a lack of training, could be called 'Western dance'. I felt knowing what really Western dance was, it was my responsibility to change this perspective. One and half years from then, I introduced a class in Classical Ballet for my senior students to see how it would be accepted. I was extremely pleased to see that they responded with much enthusiasm. The journey had now truly begun!"

At one level, Dallas and Lobo's concerns may be perceived as reflections of their anxiety to cut through the diasporic marginalisation of practices they may regard as their own 'communitarian heritage' with a desire to make it a part of the mainstream Indian culture, and through that seek a cultural autonomy for themselves, while at another they may just be the expression of their 'business' goals of marketing in 'public sphere' what till now were only private indoor practices appropriated to reiterate a certain cultural identity; the same business goals which have led many persons of non-Indian origin to come to India fishing for a market for Ballet.

Yana Lewis, the founder of *The Lewis Foundation of Classical Ballet* (TLFCB), was born and brought up in UK, and started dancing at the tender age of 2 in London. Having been practicing *Iyengar Yoga* for 20 years, she came to India in 1998 on the occasion of her guru, Shri B.K.S Iyengar's 80th birthday, “a visit that marked the beginning of her lasting

relationship with India”, says Lewis. Lewis, who has played principal roles in Ballet classics such as *'Sleeping Beauty'*, *'Coppelia'*, and *'Swan Lake'*, says,

“I had come to India to learn more about Yoga and Indian culture. But then I realised there was a huge possibility to find an alliance between Yoga and Ballet, and took on myself to discover the same, in the form of my dance company. The focus of my academy is to lay the foundation for Classical Ballet in India, train interested and gifted dancers, sponsor exceptionally talented dancers for full-time vocational dance training abroad, and bring dance to less privileged street children in India.”

Fernando Aguilera, an Argentinian Ballet dancer, from *Instituto Superior de Arte del Teatro Colon*, Argentina, had come to India only as a tourist in 1996, when he decided to stay to teach Ballet as he sensed a *“demand for it among the modern Indian youth”*, during his travels across big cities. According to Aguilera,

“I had never thought my visit to India, which was going to last for few months actually has lasted for over 15 years now. When I came here, I was already running a successful Ballet academy, Les Lions Ballet, back home in Argentina. As I got exposed to the dance culture in India, at first I found it strange to see why girls in India were not seen dancing on pointe, because that was the dance performed in nearly all nations across the world. But after participating in many Indian dance workshops such as Chhau and Kathak, I realised there was huge scope for Ballet to grow here.

I observed how dancers here worked with just the same amount of devotion and discipline as is required in Classical Ballet. Gradually, I also started receiving a lot of offers to teach Ballet classes at places like British School, American Embassy, and many others. In 1998, I decided to set up my own academy looking at the increasing interest for Ballet, among both

kids and adults. These were the people who seemed to be friendly with foreign television, movies, and over all foreign ways of life. They could all speak in English and were open to the idea of 'trying' a new form of dance.

In the beginning, I organised performances with the help of a few dancer friends in Delhi, and opened them to all kinds of audience free of cost. The idea was to promote Ballet among those who previously had had no clue about it. Then was the time for me to actually formalise and expand my academy. I met Mohammad Rafiq in 2000, who showed keen interest in lending his hand for the administrative work at IFBC. He also came to Argentina with me to learn about management and business in dance. And since then, 2002 to be precise, IFBC has been growing at a fast pace.”

Clearly, what commonly runs through the individualistic ventures discussed above is their strategy to first project Ballet as an epitome of the 'international', recreate a sense of its 'unavailability' and then correspond it with the ambition of achieving its present possibility. The aspirations that constitute these ventures quite effectively, echo with those of the big multi-national companies situating their prospects in India and promoting themselves to be yielding 'opportunities' in exchange of profits. On the face of it, they may appear to be falling within the bracket of postcolonial imperialist gimmicks of the West aimed at uniting the 'backward' east with the rest of the world, but then, at the same time they must be analysed as significant attendants of the ideologies of consumerism, and as important players in the emerging dance market in India.

Posited against these privately owned Ballet teaching academies is *The School of Russian Classical Ballet* (SRCB) being run as an 'activity club' at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture, New Delhi, which, owing to its location and organisation falling under the office of the Russian consulate could have been reduced down to a mere embodiment of a strategic

step taken towards preserving and promoting Russian cultural presence in India, than an effort focussed at 'spreading' Ballet. But, as per Galina Lykhova, who has been teaching at the school since 2000, and is the sole faculty, it's a different story,

“The school was started around 1982 by a Russian ballerina, wife of a Russian diplomat⁵², who sought Russian centre's sponsorship to teach classical Ballet and started the school in its premises with around 10-15 students, nearly all of them coming from foreign families residing in India. While the school was still at a naive stage of its development, she had to leave for Russia without any promise to return. As she left, the classes also stopped.

I came to India around 2000 to learn Kathak. Having studied Classical Ballet back in my country, I was curious to know what Indian classical dance was like. I did a 3-years long course in Kathak and then had to discontinue when I received an offer from the Russian Centre to restart the Ballet classes. That is when I decided to settle down in India. Because my husband was Indian, the decision came pretty easy to me.

When I started teaching Ballet here, I wanted not only the Russians to come to my classes but also Indians. This is because I have always believed that Ballet has no nationality. Today, most of my students are actually Indian and I think all of them are doing very well. As I have observed, Ballet has become really popular in India now.”

What may differentiate SRCB from the privately run academies like IFBC or the Danceworx is the extent to which marketing and advertising strategies⁵³ may be employed to 'localise' Ballet. One can assume that having been provided for, both monetarily and infrastructurally by the Russian Centre, SCR B does not display the in-built systemic reliance on 'profits'

⁵² The name of this teacher could not be determined. Neither Lyakhova nor any of the students could give information about her. The Director of the Russian Center remained unavailable for any comments.

⁵³ Compared to Danceworx and IFBC, SCR B does not advertise in the newspapers etc. It does not have a website of its own and only appears as one amongst many other activity clubs on the website on Russian Center.

earned by 'selling' Ballet, and thus appear to be less market-oriented, yet one cannot deny the inherent sentiment towards availing Ballet to all, in a democratic way, by calling it a culturally-inclusive practice, that would obviously entail passively aiming for a consumerist distribution of Ballet.

2.2 The courses available: Case studies of Delhi-based Ballet academies

This study develops out of an extensive fieldwork conducted at the Delhi-based SRCB, IFBC, and the Danceworx, offering courses in Vaganova style of Classical Ballet, with levels ranging from kids beginners to advance Ballet for professional Ballet dancers.

School of Russian Classical Ballet

Running along the lines of a “complete” Ballet school, SRCB offers a 9 years long certificate program in Russian Ballet, wherein each year is equivalent to one class. The enrolment is determined both by age and talent. Selection happens every July, before the academic year begins in August and goes on for about 9 months till next year's April. There are separate classes for kids and adults at the beginners' level, which begin to merge as students progress to advance levels. While for the kids, the only condition for selection is the age-limit, the adults, none of them above the age of 25, usually have to appear for auditions, in which they are judged on the basis of their flexibility, sense of music, and what Lyakhova calls “*their natural knack for Ballet*”, and accordingly selected at a level that fits their capability. Lyakhova tells,

“I start taking in kids falling within the age-bracket of 6-8 years. This is similar to the Russian system of enrolment. Earlier, the classes were open to anyone who wanted to join. Now, because its become more popular and we have so many students, so we are selecting only 30 out of every 100 applicants. I also welcome adults who would like to learn Ballet but only on one condition, that is, if they already have learnt some kind of dance form, like Indian classical dance, or Jazz, etc. Their bodies have to be flexible enough. If they want to 'start' dancing at the age of, lets say, 20, it will be difficult because the body will not be ready. It will not register anything. If they want to learn Ballet for hobby's sake then it is okay, but from the point of view of taking it up professionally, it is too late.”

At the end of the academic year, there is no written examination but what many students call, an “*exam class*”, in which the Director, RCSC, important guests at the embassy, along with the parents of the students are invited as audience. The students are supposed to perform all the combinations on their own, sometimes, even explain what a particular movement is called and how it is supposed to be done, and on the basis of their performance, their result stating whether or not they are ready to proceed to the next level is decided by Lyakhova.

It must be noted that not all the students, specifically the adults, have to necessarily start at beginners level; if they are talented they are straightaway put at advance levels. Sasha Shetty, 17, a student from SRCB, shares her story,

“Galina ma'am is always looking for talented dancers. When she feels a dancer has the ability to cope up with advance Ballet syllabus, she does not make them wait at junior levels. This is how even I was promoted. I used to be in the second year then. One day our class had been cancelled due to some reason, but I did not get any information so I went. When Galina ma'am saw I had come, she decided to accommodate me in the senior class which she was

teaching then. Later, I was told that I had been promoted to that class because Galina ma'am, after observing my performance, felt I was quite ready for it. I was really happy with my surprise promotion!"

The school, which started with a bunch of 29 students, today boasts of a total of about 100-150 students. But clearly, even though there is a promise of a 9-year long structured Ballet course and the academy's affiliation to the Russian Centre may be seen as a marker of its credibility, SRCB is yet to expand enough, in terms of its number of students, faculty, and infrastructure, for it to enable an 'institutionalised' training of Classical Ballet in India.

Imperial Fernando Ballet Company

IFBC, successfully running a total of 9 studios at different locations in Delhi, can easily boast of having created India's one of the few repertory Ballet companies, of about 20-30 members, all trained by Aguilera, in a span of 10 years. With a student base of 800-900, the Ballet training program at IFBC is stratified into 6 levels, differentiated on the basis of age-limit and/or one's level of exposure to Ballet; which are, KG Ballet for the kids in the age bracket of 4-6 years, Ballet beginners level-1 for the kids in the age-bracket of 7-12 years, Ballet level-1 intermediate with no age specification but based on one's ability/progress as a dancer, Ballet adult beginners level-2, offered, effectively, in the form open classes, and Ballet advance based on one's progress as a dancer, and for the most part, comprises professional dancers with a substantial level of experience in classical Ballet, gathered either at IFBC or at other academies in India or abroad. Each semester is for 5 months, and a student normally takes about 3-4 semesters, sometimes longer than that to get to the next level.

The academy also claims to provide a consolidated diploma-based Ballet study and training program. According to Aguilera,

“Ballet is a whole school of dance. A student of Classical Ballet is not just a student of technique but also a student of Ballet's history, Ballet's repertoire, Ballet music, costumes, etc. This is why I teach to all my students, not just physical practice but also Ballet's theory. I provide them with important Ballet books on the net, and encourage them to watch classic Ballet videos. But there are no exams. Sometimes I take class tests you know. For example I would make my students hear an excerpt from the musical scores used in Swan Lake, and ask them which character dances on that particular piece of music. This is my way of providing them an absolute expertise on Ballet.”

While, for a child, it may take a total of approximately 8-9 years to acquire the Ballet diploma offered at IFBC, for adults it takes a minimum of 5 years, *“that is because adults are mature enough to grasp the training faster than kids. They have a better understanding of their own bodies, and also understand the amount of devotion required in Ballet”*, explains Aguilera.

From the perspective of expanding the academy, and in that, ensuring means of sustenance for the budding professional Ballet dancers in the country, the academy also provides training in 'teaching' Ballet to its repertory company. It is clearly not a departmentalised 'Ballet-teaching-training' comparable to a comprehensive educational program available in the dance universities abroad, but is limited to employing dancers for teaching kids and beginners level classes in the academy. According to Aguilera,

“Teaching Ballet is a vital part of the training of Ballet dancers. By teaching, they get to reflect on their own technique and work towards reaching the benchmark they would like to set for their students. To be able to demonstrate for others how a plie must be done, a dancer needs to master that himself. So, this is how teaching becomes a way to self-evaluate. At the same time, it is also a means to earn a living. You have to understand that if dancers will have no way to earn from Ballet, they would not want to continue doing it. Its only when people feel that Ballet can give them financial security for their future, would they like to take it professionally.”

With the promise of maintaining international standards, the academy also invests in inviting dancers from Aguilera's academy back in Argentina, who may come either as guest faculty to teach the repertory company, or as demonstrators for the beginners' classes taught by the company dancers. The underlying idea is to expose the students to the most 'appropriate' and 'fully-developed' Ballet bodies. According to Surbhi Sachdeva, 25, one of the company dancers,

“The idea is to be honest and let the students know that even their teachers, that is us, are also growing. We are yet to reach the limits set by Ballet dancers all through over 100 years that Ballet as a form of dance has been existing. The idea is to give them the right vision and make them believe it is possible”.

What is noteworthy is that apart from Classical Ballet, IFBC also keeps organising contemporary dance workshops, sometimes exclusively for the company, sometimes also open to the students. There are also Tango lessons imparted, mostly before a show, and the students are always encouraged to experiment with dance styles other than Ballet. Aguilera, the founder of as well as the only permanent teacher at IFBC suggests,

“Ballet is indeed one of the most complete dance forms, just like Indian Classical. But you can see how even Indian Classical dance is changing and its schools are merging with each other. There is immense competition in the world of dance today. I believe learning only one form will not be enough. Therefore, I always tell my dancers to keep exploring. That is where there real growth lies. And whenever I get the opportunity I try to invite talented contemporary dance teachers to teach my students.”

The Danceworx Performing Arts Academy

Unlike IFBC, the Danceworx began not with Ballet but Jazz classes, and it was only two years back that it introduced a Ballet wing under the leadership of Master Gabor Sziracky, a Ballet teacher from the Hungarian Dance Academy. Before than this, the repertory company had been exposed to Ballet technique through various Ballet workshops conducted at the academy by many guest teachers in the past. Apart from that, basics of Ballet like plies and tendus were being taught as part of the work-out to all levels of Jazz and contemporary classes offered by the academy.

With Sziracky's arrival in 2010, the Danceworx introduced open classes in Ballet, with no specified age-limit at about 3 of its outlets, available either for its own students who were trained at least upto 3 levels of Jazz, or for those who exhibited elementary knowledge in Classical Ballet acquired elsewhere. With that, the academy also introduced Ballet level-1 formed by students accepted on the basis of auditions conducted by Sziracky, for a training a little more advanced than that imparted in open classes, out of which those who showed potential and progressed faster were soon promoted leading to the formulation of level-2. Later, in July 2012, under the supervision of Ms. Chelsea, from U.S.A the academy also introduced Ballet for kids in the age-group of 6-11 years, and beginners Ballet. Today, there

are about 7 levels of Classical Ballet, quite actively running at the Danceworx, kids Ballet beginners, adult Ballet beginners, the open Ballet, level-1, level-2, and the advance Ballet, equivalent to level-4 or 5, dividing the repertory company into Group B, constituting the junior company dancers, and Group A, constituting the senior company dancers.

It must be noted that the academy stands at a naive stage of structuring its Ballet training program, separately from its already well-established Jazz training classes. According to Shohini Dutta, one of the deputy artistic directors and the senior most teacher at the Danceworx,

“As was envisioned by Ashley, it is by developing an understanding of jazz and contemporary dance that we have attempted to initiate our dancers into learning Ballet. We were sceptical if Ballet would be welcomed in a country which had been under the spell of Bollywood for the longest while. So at first, we encouraged only our senior students to learn Ballet, who we knew were accustomed to stretching and working at the barre, or doing plies as part of their warm-up exercises in their Jazz and contemporary dance classes, and hence will not find Ballet slow and boring. The purpose was to get them interested in doing Ballet by harbouring their interest in a 'fun' dance form like Jazz.”

Exhibiting an outright market-oriented behavior, and only after having created an expansive base of over 130 company members, 4000 students, and 12 studios located at different locations⁵⁴, did the Danceworx decide to teach Ballet, ensuring that there would be enough students (consumers) available to make Ballet 'successful' in India.

Dutta, further suggests,

⁵⁴ Over the past 4 years Danceworx has set up 4 studios in Mumbai, as well.

“We had been getting a lot of inquiry calls at our central office from people who would want to learn Ballet. That was one of the primary reasons we decided to include Ballet amongst the forms that we teach. Earlier it was only there for our repertory dancers, but now we have classes for absolute non-dancers also who would like to give Ballet a try. And, if we keep getting good number of people in our Ballet classes, we aim to convert these classes into a certificate or a diploma-bound course.”

Thus, within Dutta's proposition, one must read a suggestion of Ballet taking a form of a 'choice' available amidst the array of dance styles, such as Jazz, hip-hop, and contemporary, that the academy claims to offer. As its name suggests, the Danceworx does not promote itself as a Ballet academy but as a 'performing arts academy', whose ways of carving a niche for Ballet in India by finding for it a place amongst the rising 'trends' attracting the contemporary Indian masses, hold significant implications for the popularity and sustainability of Classical Ballet in the Indian context.

While both IFBC and the Danceworx, compared to SRCB, appear to be reaching out to larger and wider range of people, cultivated through planting studios at different locations, sending out advertisements in the newspapers, and availing 'open' Ballet classes, sending out a clear message of *“everyone can do Ballet”* (as is usually propagated by these academies), all three of them have seen a constant rise in the rate of enrolment in their Ballet classes, ever since they began, which hints at considerable 'acceptance' of and rising 'inclination' towards Classical Ballet in India. Even though, despite their intricate diversification of levels of training based on the criteria of age, talent, and interest, they are yet to arrive at systematised Ballet 'courses' as one would like to call them, limited by a fixed duration of completion, credible enough to compliment a degree-based complete study of Ballet, as is imparted in the international universities which they all regard as their benchmark. What they clearly seem to

be promising is a reliably strong technique of Ballet, the promise which they would like to substantiate with their 'foreign' connections, either in the form of an established organisational affiliation as in the case of SRCB and IFBC, or temporarily found through the regular 'imports' of teachers as 'specialists' from the 'authentic cultures' of Ballet; in that procuring for the dancers, both the 'dreams' as well as 'routes' pertaining to a dance career in the West.

2.3 Teaching and learning Ballet: maintaining and contesting the 'tradition'

This section undertakes an analysis of the content of Ballet training imparted in the academies discussed above in order to assess the 'forms' in which Ballet is brought, bought and practiced in the Indian context.

What does the 'real' training in Classical Ballet entail? (The universal standards)

Ballet's essence lies in how it constructs and instructs body, completely overtaking, sometimes defying its naturalness⁵⁵, wherein the 'naturalness' may in fact be redefined leading to creation of a whole new anatomical plane. A Classical Ballet body is lean, most often anorexic, for its purpose and function is to showcase long and clear lines, and communicate the geometricality of Ballet. 'Frontal legibility'⁵⁶, calls it, is what provides the external hip-rotation for developing a turn-out, and five positions of the feet, fundamental to Ballet. What Ballet constructs an aspiration for, and thus, materialises, is a body-centric flawlessness, defining the correct and incorrect ways of moving.

⁵⁵ Baxmann, Inge in ed. Marion Kant (2007) p98-99

⁵⁶ Dempster, Elizabeth in Ellen W. Goellner, Jacqueline Shea Murphy (1995) p26

Most experts agree that the age of 6-8 years is most appropriate for starting training in Ballet, from the perspective of the amount of malleability required in the body for its Balletic moulding. Having started as early, one needs to dedicate a minimum of 7-8 years of training comprising at least 4 hours of doing Ballet everyday to build himself/herself into a professional-level Ballet dancer, as per the 'Classical' standards of Ballet training.

An ideal Ballet class begins at the barre, with students holding it with both the hands as they warm up their bodies with a basic pointing and flexing of the feet, soft stretching of the body sideways, and balancing of body weight on both feet with plies. The barre is then held with one hand as the student works on each side at a time (traditionally, all students are supposed to start uniformly with their right sides, holding the barre with the left hand), practicing the sets of *plies*⁵⁷, *tendus*⁵⁸ and *degages*⁵⁹, *fondus*⁶⁰, *frappes*⁶¹, *adagio stretches*⁶², and *battlements*⁶³. The class then proceeds into practicing center barre, which means the exercises which were till now practiced with the help of the barre will now be practiced without it, so that the student learns to use his/her core strength, connoting the strength of the stomach, which will enable him/her to retain bodily balance and confidence while performing the same exercises in front of an audience. The third part of the class, contrary to the stationary work at the barre, involves moving across the floor, as the students practice *pirouettes*⁶⁴, *chaines*⁶⁵, and

⁵⁷ A smooth continuous bending of knees

⁵⁸ Usually done as an exercise at the barre from the first or fifth position, the working leg is extended to either the front, side, or back, gradually along the floor until only the tip of the toe remains touching the floor.

⁵⁹ When the foot is lifted off the floor from a tendu, it becomes a degage

⁶⁰ A term used to describe a lowering of the body which is made by bending the knee of the supporting leg.

⁶¹ It means hitting the floor or an ankle with a moving foot.

⁶² The adagio portion of the class concentrates on slow movements to improve the dancer's ability to control the leg and bring the leg higher with more control and ease.

⁶³ A beating movement of the working leg; the technique for getting high kicks with a controlled and well-aligned center.

⁶⁴ A controlled turn on one leg

⁶⁵ Series of quick turns on alternating feet.

other kinds of Ballet turns, which then progresses into students practicing the allegro⁶⁶ work, that is, combinations of Balletic jumps and turns.

While most of the exercises remain the same for both men and women, there may be some suggesting a separation sought between the two, owing to the difference in the male and female body type⁶⁷. For women, most extensive work lies in developing a strong pointe, meaning, strengthening the arch of their feet which will enable them balance on the tip of their toes, also to be supported by an effective 'lift' in their bodies. Men are supposed to master an exemplary number of air borne turns, the *tour en l'air*⁶⁸, high jumps such as *entrechats*⁶⁹, and most importantly in lending an effective support to female dancers in *pas de deux*⁷⁰ Ballet. While women must convey a sense of weightlessness of a feather, men must exhibit their verility in effortlessly swirling the women around in the air.

Apart from the gendered codes of movements, a Ballet class also prescribes to its students, codes of class conduct. For example, the class begins and ends with a salute as an expression of showing respect to the audience, the dancers must stick to their own position given to them on barre, or in group with which they are supposed to practice across-the-floor exercises, they must never be late for class, or talk, or do anything that would mean disrupting the discipline of the class. The students must also be dressed in a 'proper' attire, comprising a leotard (for both men and women), tights, and Ballet shoes.

It is noteworthy that across all three academies being discussed here, the Ballet classes conducted are constantly 'referring' to and seem to be effectively in sync with the ideal type as explained above (Fig. 1, Fig 2). The teachers follow the same format, teach the same

⁶⁶ A term applied to all fast and brisk movements

⁶⁷ It must be noted here that due to the distinctive separation of male and female movements that Ballet comprises, it has been critiqued for being gendered. See Foster, Susan in ed. Susan Foster (1996) p1-25

⁶⁸ It means flipping in the air

⁶⁹ A step of beating in which the dancer jumps into the air and rapidly crosses the legs front and behind.

⁷⁰ A duet usually performed by a male and female dancer

syllabus, and strongly emphasize on maintaining the same 'decorum' in a class as the Classical Ballet demands. *“The rules of Classical Ballet cannot be broken. They are same everywhere in the world,”* remains the common position that the teachers in these academies proclaim and practically assume. Ballet's universal values are both commanded and abided by. Yet the difference lies in the individual motives and the amount of devotion, with which this universality is approached, and the varying degrees of the internalisation of Ballet that they may lead to.



Fig. 1 Classical Ballet Group A class being taught by Gabor Sziracky on April 4, 2012 (Photo credit: Gabor Sziracky)

Taking Ballet lessons: Ballet technique accessed as a process, as a product

Aguilera, with reference to his open classes, notes, *“As a Ballet master, I will teach what I am supposed to. But students can take whatever they want from it. It is true that not everyone comes here to be a Ballet dancer!”* What one may be able to read in his statement is a suggestion at the 'appropriations' of Ballet technique embedded in the personal prerogatives

attached to taking Ballet lessons, and the consequent projection of the same, to be looked up on as corporeal interpretations of Ballet. As observed, influenced by the nature of these prerogatives, accessing Ballet technique may either retain its form of a processual embodiment (as it traditionally is) or may get reduced to a product for consumption.

Ballet technique a 'prolonged process': The 'professional' Ballet dancers

As a matter of fact, on an average, out of 10 Ballet learners there may be only 2 who have gone on to or would like to be 'professional' Ballet dancers. One of them is 28 year old Sanjay Khatri from Delhi, who started learning Ballet at the age of 19, and has been practicing it for 10 years now. Khatri began his career at National Ballet Academy Trust of India⁷¹, and later joined IFBC where he trained himself under Aguilera and established himself as one of the principal dancers of the newly found company.

For Khatri, Ballet happened only by chance. As he shares,

“Surprising as it may sound, I did not even want to be a professional dancer, neither did I know any other dance form before I decided to appear for auditions at NBATI. The academy was new, and was looking for people to set up a team to put its first step forward. They had declared open auditions for those people who had basic rhythm in their bodies and could be potential dancers. The dancers did not necessarily have to be trained, and that is how I stood a chance, because I liked dancing and thought I could do it, and hence decided to appear just for fun. NBATI was also offering scholarships, and since I was at the verge of finishing college and was looking for a job, the chance looked lucrative.

⁷¹ It was a joint venture started by Fernando Aguilera and David Pollock, another Ballet dancer from Argentina. It was later dissolved as Pollock left India. Aguilera stayed back and went on to set up IFBC.

Trust me, in the starting it really did not have to do anything with Ballet for me. In fact, I had not seen any Ballet images or videos, and was completely new to the idea of doing Ballet. I did my first plie on 16th August 2003 in Mr. Fernando's class. Initially I found it really boring. I thought I would quit. But then the turns, and jumps got me going. It took me about 2 years to decide that I wanted to continue doing Ballet, and learn more and more about it. But now, it's not just about turns but about doing something that gives me happiness. Ballet changed the course of my life and made me believe in myself. It has been 10 years for me, but seems too short a time one could spend doing Ballet. It is a lifetime commitment. It is an art-form with immense depth and one may take years and years of training to understand what Ballet really is.”

Having performed leading roles in Ballet recitals like *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and many others, today Khatri is a known name with considerable number of press reviews on him and his performances. In 2010, he established his own Mumbai-based Ballet academy, called Central Contemporary Ballet in collaboration with a Korean ballerina, Euyong Jung.

Sasha Shetty, 17, is another Delhi-based Ballet dancer with considerably long years of training. She began learning Ballet at the tender age of 7 at SRCB, and completed its 9 years certificate based training program in 2011. For Shetty, Ballet is her parents' gift to her. As she notes,

“As a kid, I always used to keep dancing around, which is what encouraged my parents to put me into some sort of dance training. They were told about Galina ma'am's classes by their theatre friends. They thought it was different from the dance forms people usually learn in India, and hence did not take much time to decide they wanted to send me to Ballet classes. I remember because I was young when I started, I never understood what I was doing. But

after few years I started enjoying making shapes in the air with my hands and legs. Galina ma'am helped me develop my interest. She would make us watch interesting Ballet dances which made me feel that even I wanted to dance as beautiful as these girls. But then she would constantly tell us that it would not happen the very next day. If I want to be one of them, I will have to work very hard, never miss classes, and even work extra if need be.

For example, my stretches are not that good. So, to improve them, I would sometimes do extra classes. The point is that you have to be really thorough with your training you know.

Going to Ballet is not like going to just another dance class. But it is more like going to school. A lot of times, Galina ma'am would tell us to remember the sets the next class we come. It would be our homework. So, even though I would not have to go to classes everyday like I would go to school, it still felt the same.”

Ready to commit herself to Ballet for her life, Shetty has plans of availing scholarships for Geoffrey's Ballet, New York, for an academic alongside a physical training in dance. *“Here I get to do only 3-4 hours of Ballet in a week. Also, opportunities to study Ballet are not there. So, I plan to go abroad. I believe that is the least I must do if I am serious about Ballet”,* says Shetty, talking as a diligent ballerina with dreams of *“inspiring”* others in India to learn Ballet by establishing a lasting career in the same.

Surbhi Sachdeva, 25, who started learning Ballet some 4 years back at IFBC, may have had a late start unlike Shetty, but her vision to see herself as a ballerina is no different. She tells her story,

“I was with another academy earlier, where I had been exposed to Ballet but not so much that I could be a professional in it. But I guess, that exposure turned out to be enough to make me realise I enjoyed Ballet more than any other dance and wanted to do only Ballet as

a dancer. So, I decided to join IFBC. At that time I was 20. I knew the risks of starting it so late. I was scared it might end up nowhere. But then I thought I should not be hesitant to put in my 100 percent. So since then, I have been working everyday for good 4-5 hours on my technique. My challenge is my turn-out. I think it is really small. But, even Baryshnikov⁷² does not have a good turn-out you know. I know I do stand to chance to improve it if I work hard. I trust my body, it has shown humongous improvement since I started. For example, I can sit in a 180 degree split today, which I could not in the beginning. So you see, I do have a hope. My body has been changing, and one day it would have changed completely.”

Clearly, for Khatri, Shetty, Sachdeva, and a few others like them, embodiment of Ballet implies a profound 'endurance', an ideal that characterises any Classical tradition around the world. What they come together to cast is a significant site of Ballet's existence in India, as a slow and steady practice of letting the body go through a sustained transformation with a consistent 'schooling' of oneself in the technique of Ballet. For them, the idea is to not just to do Ballet physically but to observe it normatively, with a consciousness to 'be' the exponents of 'genuine' Ballet in India.

⁷²Mikhail Baryshnikov is a Russian American dancer, choreographer, and actor. He started his career at Kirov Ballet in Leningrad. After freelancing with many companies, he joined the New York City Ballet as a principal dancer to learn George Balanchine's style of movement. See Baryshnikov, Mikhail & Swope, Martha, Baryshnikov at work: Mikhail Baryshnikov discusses his roles, (1978)



Fig. 2 Repertory Ballet class at IFBC, 2012 (Photo credit: IFBC)

Ballet technique: available as a tool for all - both a 'process' and 'product'

Other than the professional Ballet dancers, there are professional non-Ballet dancers forming a significant category of Ballet practitioners in India. For them, Ballet is not to be a dance career itself, yet it is never short of a detailed training, wherein the Ballet technique is accessed as a 'supplement' for bettering their understanding of other dance forms, which are seen to be more 'career-oriented' and 'audience-friendly'⁷³ dance forms.

A few of these dancers come from the background of Indian dance forms, such as Kathak Bharatnatyam, and Chhau. Meraz Alam, 27, who has been training in Kathak for as long as 7 years now, began learning Ballet at the Danceworx Academy two years back, with an aim to

⁷³ See Chapter 3

gather “more experience” as a dancer. Tushar Kalia, 28, who used to be one of the principal dancers at the Sadhya Academy, where he trained himself in Chhau, has now been taking classes at IFBC, in return of the contemporary dance classes that he offers there, merging the indigenous and the Western technique. While at one level, it is familiarity with the disciplinarian regime of Ballet, similar to what they have been through while learning the indigenous forms, that gives them the ability to cope up; at another level, they seem to be already equipped with the fundamentals of Ballet, such as the understanding of 'spotting' for turns that one might get from Kathak or turn-out from Bharatnatyam, use of the pelvic muscles for elevation required in extensive aerial jumps such as in Chhau, etc. which may lead to a fast learning, sometimes even rendering their bodies ready to for them to directly venture into advance Ballet. Then there are dancers who have been dancing popular Western dance forms such as Jazz, hip-hop, and Bollywood etc, and hence, understand the basic hand-leg coordination, along with possessing basic minimum flexibility and a sense of rhythm in their bodies to begin with. Most of the dancers learning Ballet, out of the very few that are anyway there, have been trained at least once, in either of the two of the oldest dance academies in Delhi, the Danceworx, which has primarily been a Jazz academy, or SDIPA, that is, Shiamak Davar Institute of Performing Arts, a pioneer of Bollywood dance lessons in India.

With an aim to acquire 'versatility' as a performer, these dancers attempt to diversify their knowledge of 'various' dance vocabularies, amidst which Ballet is seen to be a predominant source for achieving a polished alignment. Their engagement with Ballet often comprises a paradox. While there is a focus on a qualitative 'building' of technique to grasp the original source of a movement in the body, as reflected, for instance in Dutta's instructions to her students at the Danceworx, “*Don't just kick your leg high. You know must know where that kick comes from*”; this process of 'building' is not be translated into a traditional slow-paced

Ballet training, rather, what may be understood as a 'speedened up' training, comprising an emphasis on 'selective' Ballet techniques considered fundamental to yield an internationally regarded dance look.

Prashant Kumar, 28, has been attending Aguilera's open Ballet classes for about a year now, but has no plans to be a ballerino. He notes,

“I have been dancing jazz and hip-hop for some 6 years now. Recently, I opened my own academy. The decision of attending Ballet classes under Mr. Fernando came from the understanding that in order to do any western form, one always needs to be thorough with the basics of Ballet. I believe learning Ballet will not only make me a better dancer but also a better teacher, as I would know the intricacies of various movements.”

For Prashant and many other dancers like him, learning Ballet is primarily about building a strong torso, tight calves, and arms, and an overall agile body which are seen as vital requisites for the execution of Jazz, hip-hop, or any kind of dance moves. The Balletic allegros involving spinning and jumping are likely to add to their bodies the qualities of vibrancy and swiftness, while the adagio stretches make them more flexible and centrally controlled.

The Danceworx, which has been building itself on the lines of a Jazz and contemporary dance academy, is the most prominent exemplification of the prevalent use of 'selective' Ballet by dancers in India. Interestingly, the Ballet training of the Danceworx repertory dancers has happened, not in its Classical conventional form, which may be defined as a linear progression from one level to the other presupposing beginning at an early age and continuing it almost endlessly with an uninterrupted regularity, but in the form of occasional

workshops in different Ballet styles, which would obviously entail dealing with the restriction of time and pushing for a fast learning on the part of both the teachers and the dancers.

Apart from Anthony Noa's American style and Sziracky's classical Vaganova style, which have already been discussed, the company has been exposed to various other Ballet styles such as Yoga Ballet under Soraya Franco from France, Neoclassical Ballet under Anastacia Flewin from Australia, and modern German Ballet under Marion Buchman from Germany, amongst various others; the time period of the workshops ranging from 2 years to 1 month. Noa, who has been teaching Ballet for 20 years now, notes,

“As I began to teach here, I knew I had to keep in mind three things, a. They are not training to be professional Ballet dancers, b. Their bodies already have basic knowledge of Ballet, c. And since all of them are past the right age, they need something that helps them build a career fast. After a couple of months of simple classes, I began to give them intermediate-level stuff. But, with that, I would teach them fundamental tricks such as how to use one's back to turn, or how to land on toes rather than on heels to avoid knee injuries, etc. I would never emphasize on any traditional beautification of moves, it was not Classical Ballet. I made it fast and acrobatic, which due to its speed would automatically make their bodies assume the right placement. I would also encourage the girls to try all kinds of athletic moves, traditionally designed for men, because the idea was to help them really explore the abilities of their bodies.”

Borrowed from such extensive styles of Ballet, the Danceworx has come up with a culmination of certain exercises focussing on selective Ballet techniques. For example, there are floor barre⁷⁴ exercises for working on the alignment of back, hips, and arms, and

⁷⁴ Floor barre training method was developed by Zena Rommet, a Ballet dancer and a teacher, in the 1960's to help Ballet students prevent back injuries. It is widely practiced in many contemporary Ballet companies abroad. Unlike traditional Ballet barre exercises, which require students to stand upright holding a barre

lengthening of legs and torso; various tendu exercises, sometimes in place, sometimes while moving across the floor to improve the arch of the foot and understand the concept of supporting leg, rand de-jambes⁷⁵ on the floor focussing on improving the relationship with the floor, etc. According to Amith Kumar, 29, one of the senior most teachers at the Danceworx,

“This syllabus has been designed keeping in mind the level of our training in Ballet as a dance company. We practice it every day of our training, irrespective of whether we are getting formal Ballet classes or not. None of us wants to be Ballet dancers. We want to be Jazz and contemporary dancers, but we want the lines and clarity of Ballet. By working our bodies through these exercises we hope to disentangle the complexities of Ballet at our own pace.”



attached to a wall, Floor barre begins with students stretched on the floor and proceeds with gentle exercises to refine body placement.

⁷⁵ Half-circles made by the pointed foot, returning through first position to repeat.



Fig. 3 & 4 Floor barre exercises, being practiced by a dancer at The Danceworx,(Photo credit: Shifali Gupta).

These dancers clearly display a target-based relationship with Ballet, wherein what must be obtained from it is presupposed, and is not to be shaped or unfolded over a customary, continuous involvement in Ballet. Informed by the sense of competitiveness born out of intercultural dissemination of dance and dancers, Ballet, for the present-generation Indian dancers, may have assumed the status comparable to that of a 'technology' imported from the west, for them to tap the potential of their bodies to the best possible extent.

Beating a 'late start'

A commonality across the small population of dancers training in Ballet in the academies being studied, is a 'late start', most of them having started their Ballet lessons in their late teens or even early twenties, that which is, for the most part, classified as an anomaly as per

the conventional standards of Ballet physiology and 'Ballet culture'⁷⁶. As has been discussed already, while some of them want to be professional Ballet dancers, others would like Ballet to be a medium for sharpening their physical abilities as a dancer. But in both cases, there may persist the exigencies posed by the subjection of 'ripe' bodies (the bodies which may soon wear out!) to the physically demanding practice of Ballet, wherein it may always be doubted when, and if at all, the body will bear results. Thus, to ascertain a positive body response, there may be employed a sense of mind-body dualism⁷⁷, wherein at one level, the body may be objectified as that which can be moulded as one separates oneself from it and assumes a regulatory power over it, at another, the 'natural-ness' of body may be evoked to allow *"the body take its own recourse"*⁷⁸. A control mechanism may be generated in the belief that 'age' is simply a 'social construction', as Steven P. Wainwright and Bryan S. Turner argue in their study on the relation between 'old age' and 'dancing body'⁷⁹; the relation that can be overpowered by what they understand as 'ageless self':

"Old people" do feel betrayed by their aging bodies because bodies act as reminders of the inevitability of their aging in themselves and for others. This shifts the source of identity to the self that on this view does not age but remains fixed sometime in "early adulthood"...The intimate experience of becoming and being older shapes and is shaped by daily living."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ "To speak of movement as a way of knowing implies that the way people move is as much a clue to who they are as the way they speak.....Someone performing the body postures and movements of Ballet embodies a 'piece of cultural knowledge' that is different from the knowledge embodied by a performer of the hula...All movement must be considered as an embodiment of cultural knowledge", Skylar, Deidre in ed. Ann Dils, Ann Cooper Albright (2001) p30

⁷⁷ Fraleigh, Sondra, Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Studies, (1987), p8

⁷⁸ The ideology of 'freeing the body', as has been expressed in many modern and contemporary dance traditions, may be employed to ease the training pressures.

⁷⁹ "Old age cannot be reduced to the visible impact of biological processes on the surface of bodies because what is required in addition to this is an account of the factors that induce people into being constructed as old."- Wainwright, Steven & Turner, Bryan in ed. Christopher A.Faircloth (2003) p262

⁸⁰ Wainwright, Steven & Turner, Bryan in ed. Christopher A.Faircloth (2003) p262

In order to deal with the challenge of, “being too old to do Ballet”, 'self-belief' and 'discipline' may be recounted as ideological propellants to 'find' in the body which it already has, and 'achieve' what is considered unattainable. According to Amith, “*It’s a mental, emotional thing you know. You have to believe you can do it.*” Aguilera, in one of his open classes, while pushing the dancers to work on a difficult set of frappes, instructed the dancers as follows:

“You have got to work much harder at this age. Imagine the precision of a warrior while working those feet forward and back. You must know your purpose, just like a warrior.”

Such use of the metaphors⁸¹ may discourage a clinical, merely anatomical comprehension of Ballet, and encourages a metaphysical internalisation by locating its sources in mind, heart, and soul. The dancers may be expected to respond better to a metaphoric simplification of positions and movements sought, for it may propel them to produce a movement through emotion, rather than making ‘measured’ shapes. In this process, what one may observe is an optimism on the part of the teachers as well the dancers to outdo the so-to-say natural flow of a Balletic development of body, by hoping to cultivate through a sense of 'emotional relatability' and 'individual will', an 'aware' body susceptible to changes.

Ballet technique a 'product' or a 'desire' to be 'as-pretty-as-a-ballerina'

Within Classical Ballet's uncompromisable ethos, are also embedded the western notions of female beauty and elegance, and it is these notions which may be perceived to be informing the rising attraction for Ballet in contemporary India to a considerable extent. Though few in number, Indian women are being seen opting for Ballet, from amongst many other choices of 'dance lessons' and other kinds of body-grooming activities available in the urban cities.

⁸¹ Foster, Susan in ed. Jane C. Desmond (1997) p240

According to Aguilera, out of 800 students in his academy, around 30-40 are women mostly falling in the age-bracket of 25-35, who come to his classes after getting inspired by the 'defined posture' and 'sleek frame' of a ballerina's body, and wish to achieve the same through a Ballet 'work-out'. For Manorama Gupta, 26, a media consultant by profession who has recently joined Aguilera's classes,

“Ballet is like Yoga. It is slow, soothing, and stress-relieving. It works the muscles in the right way. Unlike gymming which sometimes leads to muscular and stiff bodies, Ballet, through its stretches and various balancing exercises can help you develop a body that is delicate-looking yet strong. It can keep you young and beautiful.”

It must be noted that just as Ballet comes from the west, so does its ways of consumption. The phenomenon of rearing through Ballet technique a 'desired' body, being constructed by the virtual spaces of internet, satellite-projected music videos, and other youth-culture oriented media, is not atypical to India but finds its origins in the West, where the age-old tradition of Ballet is constantly being renewed and redefined to attune it to the concerns of the globalising westerners. Hence, one observes many Ballet practitioners in the West are involved in designing fitness-methods out of Ballet technique. '*Ballet Beautiful*', created by U.S based ballerina, Mary Helen Bowers, is one such method, comprising a simplification of Balletic exercises for nondancers to avail quick 'body-benefits' of Ballet. Bowers explains,

*“I have designed the program in such a way that you can either work on your body as a whole or break the sections down to target specific body parts or trouble spots, including arms, center, legs, and butt.”*⁸²

⁸² Bowers, Mary, *Ballet Beautiful*, (2012) p17

With respect to the Indian context, one may not find illustrations of such well-structured fitness programs in Ballet per se, (owing to the emphasis on teaching and learning 'authentic' western classical Ballet pervading the academies under study), yet highlighting the benefits of Ballet technique remains a predominant marketing strategy for nearly all these academies. *“Ballet is a Western Classical dance form. There are many advantages of doing Ballet, such as it helps you build strength, flexibility, and stamina. It is not only for dancers”*, is usually how people calling IFBC's office to inquire about their classes may be 'educated' about Ballet. Indeed, the academies are found to be constantly foregrounding the importance of years of a consistent training as a reiteration of the Classical status of Ballet, yet there is no denial that they do acknowledge the prevalence of a consumer-oriented 'short-term-goals' approach to Ballet (with a minimum 2 hours a week of beginners Ballet), which, in most cases, implies a clear cutting down of 'Ballet years', yet remains significant within the purview of their mission to initiate the people in India into learning Ballet.

Having mapped its absence through to the contemporary ways of its practice, one may argue that even though one is yet to see the conventional so-called 'perfected' embodiment of Ballet in the Indian context, there is clear indication of an increased awareness about what Balletic technique is and what it can bring to one's body, amidst the various kinds of Ballet practitioners in India. Perceived as an instrument to access an 'international' dance career by the dancers, or international standards of beauty by non-dancers, contemporary India's appraisal for Ballet technique has to be seen just as much a symbol of its fascination with the west, as its urge to be a global nation.

Chapter 3

Accepting Ballet: Performance and identity construction

Taking on from the previous chapter, which culminates into a discourse on the processes as well as levels of internalisation of Ballet as a technique with respect to the methods, and modes of its teaching and learning as observed in the study of the academies teaching/selling Ballet, this chapter explores the nature of the 'performative projection' of Ballet, to grasp the extent to which Ballet as a 'dance form' is reaching and creating an audience for itself. Implicated within such an inquiry is a curiosity pertaining to 'where these dancers learning Ballet are seen?', since not all of them, as has already been expressed, are professional Ballet dancers, and thus do not always perform 'Ballet' in 'Ballet recitals'. Having said that, considering those for whom Ballet is a technical tool to enhance their performance in other genres of dance, one will have to ask in what ways and to what extent this technique gets 'applied' and becomes 'visible'.

It is important to note that the dancers and the audience, by virtue of their respective level and nature of participation in any performance, implicate each other's significance and define themselves only in relation to each other. Choreographic arrangement of the dancers and their bodies in a specific time and space mediate the relationship between the dancers and the audience, as all three come together to render any performance meaningful. By problematising the complex relationship between the dancers, audience, and the performance, this chapter contemplates over the issue of acceptance (or rejection) of Ballet which holds an obvious measure of itself in how it comes to inform the identity construction of its performers and audience.

3.1 Ballet performed and viewed: the recitals, movements, and the 'look'

As per the observations made during this research, there can be classified two different kinds of social spaces in which Ballet is performed or incorporated, first are the 'classicist spaces' showcasing the imitations and reworked versions of Ballet classics, while purporting the 'classicalism'/ 'classicism' of Ballet, and second are the 'commercial/popular spaces' pronouncing selling Ballet, either in the form of how it is 'supposed' to be, or in deconstructivist ways, that is to say, as Balletic movements or Balletic 'look', intermixed with popular dance forms like Jazz, Tango, Salsa, and Bollywood. These spaces, significantly, vary in terms of their socio-cultural composition, as they define as well as get defined by the social positioning of the performers and the audience. In between these two categories, one may locate an 'artistic-yet-commercial' space created and largely occupied by the practitioners of contemporary dance, for whom their idea of achieving an 'artistic freedom', which often gets realised in their creations comprising a borrowings from various dance forms, irrespective of their being Indian, Western, classical, or popular, may bring them to engage with Ballet.

The Classicist spaces

Choreographing Classical Ballet

1. Imitations

The engagement of the Ballet-teaching academies with Classical Ballet repertoires such as *Nutcracker* (Fig. 4), *Swan Lake*, *Giselle* etc. has led them to create interesting imitations of these classics, significantly reflecting a consciousness of upholding their 'sacro-sanctity', by

following the 'original' narrative and choreography. Aguilera from IFBC has choreographed many such productions with the repertory dancers of his company. In 2009-2010, the company had its first major production *Swan Lake*, which was toured across the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore. Ever since then, it has been continually participating in various Delhi-based dance festivals staging its productions inspired by renowned Ballet classics⁸³. Reflecting on his choreographic intent, Aguilera notes,

“It took me 10 years from the day I set up IFBC to produce 'Swan Lake'. That is because the dancers needed that long a training to develop that much technique as is demanded by a Ballet repertoire like Swan Lake. And once I saw they were ready, I taught them exactly the same choreography. So much so, that the girl who danced the part of the black swan did 32 fouettes, just like the black swan in Petipa's⁸⁴ choreography. A lot of my dancers who danced important parts in it had been training with me for at least 4 years, and thus had the required technical abilities for such a difficult choreography. I also hired dancers from my academy in Argentina to assist me here and make it possible, because reproducing Classical Ballets is always a task of huge responsibility. And, especially if your audience comes from a non-Ballet culture. You have to make sure you do not cheat and give them just the right thing.”

⁸³ *La Bayadere* in *Nritya Katha* International Ballet Festival, Delhi 2012; *Swan Lake* on International World Dance Day, Delhi 2012

⁸⁴ Of all the versions of *Swan Lake* which have been produced and staged till date, Marius Petipa's version has gathered most name and popularity. Most Ballet companies today base their stagings both choreographically and musically on Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov's version, which they revived in the early 1900's.



Fig. 4 IFBC's dancers performing *The Nutcracker* at Siri Fort Auditorium, Delhi 2012 (Photo credit: IFBC)

Regarding the repertoire Ballets as an integral part of Classical Ballet syllabus, Aguilera observes how he would like to maintain their generational perpetuity, to be valued as inheritance from the past,

“I learnt repertoire Ballets during my schooling at Colon. These were taught to all the students in their training years and we all were supposed to write exams based on these. We were taught everything, the story, all the parts, their music and choreography. And, even the costumes, for example the style of the sleeves of a male dancer's shirt as per the tastes of the French royalty in the sixteenth century. I have studied them for 10 years. And, now I want all my students, Indians, Argentineans, or any nationality I teach to study them as well. All Ballet students must know how important they are. They are our heritage, left behind by the 'greats' of Classical Ballet. They have to be passed on with no adulteration”.

What must be pointed out here is that the 'purity' intended in these ventures, informed by their apparent classicalist temperament, is most often, likely to get hindered by a dearth of 'trained' dancers, also complicated by their 'late start', as has been pointed out in the last chapter, which may lead to a slight simplification of the choreography. Sachdeva from IFBC, points out,

“If you would compare these productions to those performed in the west, you would see there still are many differences. For example, all the classics must have girls dancing on pointe. But, we do not have girls dancing on pointe yet. Only a few of us can dance on pointe. That is because we are not that trained. Our bodies are not that perfect yet. Barring some 4-5 people, nearly all of us started when we were like 19, or 20. But, for us what is important is whatever limited we can do has to be done just the right way. You know, we cannot hold our legs very high when we do fouettes. But, wherever they may be, they have to show proper rotation.”

2. *Reworkings*

Reworking, most often, entails 'inserting' simplistically choreographed sections, in between the classical narratives, essentially from the perspective of involving 'more dancers' during Ballet workshops conducted by these academies. Performed as 'student presentations', these productions are supposed to be more 'inclusive', and are danced by the students from all levels. Such reworking may imply considerable departures from the 'original' choreography, as it gets interrupted by parts choreographed for kids and beginner students, usually comprising romantic Ballet poses, while all the 'difficult' parts are danced by the senior company dancers. Sasha Shetty, who has been one of the principal dancers at SRCB, and has danced many Classical Ballets under Lyakhova's choreographic supervision notes,

“The narrative, the costumes, the music always remains the same, but the choreography tends to get improvised upon. Galina ma'am always focuses on telling the actual story. But the steps can be changed. In fact sometimes Galina ma'am also asks for choreographic inputs from the senior students to involve them more. At the same time, she wants to make sure that all students, from all levels, including kids are involved. On the basis of their performance, she decides if they should be staying at the same level or are ready for promotion. So, this becomes our annual assessment.”

Sachdeva shares,

“It is about giving everyone a chance to be Ballet dancers on stage. Little kids get to be fairies and adults get to showcase what they have been learning. Without dancing, learning Ballet remains an incomplete experience.”

Within such reworking one must read a clear suggestion of the commercial viability of classicalism of Ballet, for, by creating such adjustments within the traditional narrative

structures of these repertoires for students from all levels, what they must be seen encasing on is the opportunity opened for all to dance Classical Ballet, wherein the 'technical ability' is not to be seen as the only determinant for it. What, in fact, becomes a determining factor is the socio-economic status of these students (examined in details in the following sections) availing them access to these performative opportunities packaged as 'attractions' along with the Ballet courses.⁸⁵

3. *Short Balletic Choreographies*

Apart from the imitations and reworked versions of repertoire Ballets, one may also witness Classical Ballet performed in the form of short choreographies comprising, for instance, a 10 minute-long *Pas De Deax* or just a showcase of the girls' *pointe* work, which do not have a storyline, but seek the status of 'Classical' on the basis of their use of traditional music, costumes, and 'pure movements'⁸⁶ of Classical Ballet. It is for this reason that these choreographies need a special mention in this context. Sziracky, who choreographed a similar piece for *The Chrysalis Project*, one of the Danceworx productions in 2010, (Fig.5), states,

“It was not a traditional romantic Ballet. It was inspired by the ancient Aristocratic Ballets, from the age of Parocco. The costumes and the music were also from the same time. Since it had so many melodies, I felt it was too hard for Indian ears to interpret.

My central concern while choreographing it was to showcase just as much as the dancers could display at their best that is quality movements with well-learnt technique and stability.

⁸⁵Most of these academies do not merely offer classes in Ballet. Along with the classes, the Ballet courses, especially for kids and beginners include 'chance' to perform/be a part of the Classical Ballet performances conducted by the academies for all the students.

⁸⁶ By allowing no digressions from the theoretical style of execution of various movements as per the codes prescribed by the school of Ballet these choreographers come from.

Ballet Classics are much demanding, physically, and also culturally loaded. I feel Ballet would appeal to the audience more when presented with clear lines and the ease of the dancer, which a simple choreography allows, than when danced in a Classical recital, whose standards are difficult to match for young, newly trained dancers.”

Clearly, all the above attempts at creating or reviving Classical Ballets on Indian stage, with Indian dancers, reflect the choreographers' advocacy for Ballet's classicism. The difference lies in the degrees to which they are able to bring out and sustain that classicism. Restricted by the under-trained bodies of their dancers, it is through their adherence of the elements other than the technique, that is the costumes, the music, and the narrative, constituting Classical Ballets that these choreographers seem to be conveying the message of their integrity in attempting the unquestionable Classical Ballet repertoires.

Who dances? Who watches?- Classicism accessed and appropriated as 'Elitism'

Learning, performing, and watching Classical Ballet has been symbolic of 'high culture' throughout the world. This brings into consideration the questions pertaining to the suggestiveness of the socio-cultural backgrounds of the dancers who make the choice of learning and performing Classical Ballet. As per the findings of this research from the fieldwork conducted in the academies teaching Ballet in Delhi, most of the dancers learning Ballet come from affluent families, that is, the so-called 'elite' class of the society, comprising the businessmen, the professionals, the literati, and the academia. 7 year old Meera Krishnaswamy, who has been insisting her mother to get her enrolled for Ballet classes at SRCB, first saw Ballet in a *Nutcracker* CD which her father, a top-notch consultant at a multinational in Chicago, got for her as a birthday gift. Fascinated by the pointe work of the



Fig. 5 Sviracký's choreography at *The Chrysalis Project*, 2011, (Photo credit: Heemanshu Sharma)

“Barbie-like” ballerinas, Meera finds Ballet much more appealing than Indian Classical dance. According to her mother, Malini Krishnaswamy,

“Seeing my daughter learn such an elegant form of dance would certainly make me very proud. I know how kids these days want to keep jumping around on vulgar Bollywood numbers. I am happy she is showing interest in something as aesthetic as Classical Ballet.”

Acknowledging such sentiment towards Ballet, Shetty notes,

“Most of my friends in my Ballet academy come from very rich families. My parents are not that rich. But then I would say my parents are well aware in today's time. Both of them are theatre persons. My father, Suresh Shetty, is the Dean at The National School of Drama, and my mother takes theatre workshops with kids. They have always encouraged my involvement in arts. I have always seen my father reading about so many great artists and dancers from across the world. He is the one who used to narrate life-stories of Anna Pavlova and Martha Graham to me when I was young.”

Apart from the 'rich' Indians, the cast of these Ballet performances comprises a significant number of foreigners. Coming from various diasporic communities living in India, these foreigners locate in their 'going-to-Ballet-lessons' a deliberation towards staying connected to their cultural roots. For Carolina Das, a Russian married to a Delhi-based intellectual, it is “relieving” to have Ballet academies in the city. She explains, “*My daughter is being brought in a different culture. I would like her to learn things about Russia. She has to know that she is not just Indian but also Russian.*” Lyakhova, with respect to having “many foreigners” coming to her classes, suggests, “*I, being a foreigner myself, can relate to their sentiments. Ballet classes bring them home.*”

What the all the above stated case studies commonly come to express is how an 'inclination' towards learning Ballet can be understood as that acquired as 'cultural capital'⁸⁷, that is, as an inheritance from one's familial and other social associations. Yet, as the observation of this research would suggest, a significant chunk of the population of these academies is also formed by the dancers from considerably humble backgrounds, 'who could not have ever imagined doing Ballet', as many of them expressed during interviews considering what they call, their own as well their family's lack of association with art, before they began to dance. For Ranjana Nag from IFBC,

“Let alone Ballet, dance itself was a distant dream for me. I come from a middle-class family from Jharkhand. For my parents, the most important thing was to give me good education and get me married. Before they saw me performing in a summer workshop at the Danceworx, they had never seen a dance show. As far as my knowledge about dance was concerned, I only knew of Bharatanatyam as our national dance, or Bollywood dance I had seen in the Hindi movies. It all began from the newspaper advertisement on Danceworx that I came across one lazy evening and decided to give it a try. That is where I first learnt what a 'plie' or a 'tende' was. Today Ballet is a way of life for me. And, you know very less number of people get to do Ballet in India. So, I feel quite lucky.”

Vikas Kumar⁸⁸, 22, who has been taking open Ballet classes at both the Danceworx and IFBC, work as a freelancer, shares his experience,

“My father runs a small stationary shop. But I did not want to work there. I wanted to dance in Hindi movies. So I left home. Earlier I was dancing in an academy which used to teach only Bollywood dance. My search for good dance schools led me to IFBC. I began to take

⁸⁷ Bordieu, Pierre, The Forms of Capital ed. J.Richardson (1986) p241-258

⁸⁸ Name changed as the person did not want his identity to be revealed.

classes here. That is how Ballet happened. Now I work in a call centre from where I am able to earn enough to pay for my classes and take care of my important needs. I know Ballet makes me a better dancer. I once did a Ballet show with Mr. Fernando. I think dancing in front of people also makes you popular. People know me now. And you see it is Ballet. So, really good people come to watch it. A lot of them are very known dancers themselves. It is an amazing feeling to dance amongst them. I feel proud that I can do such a difficult and international form of dance like Ballet.”

What they seek in Ballet is a 'classical base', and thus an opportunity to be taken seriously as 'artists'. A classical Ballet body constitutes in itself not just its own definition but also the definition of what could be called an 'unschooled'⁸⁹ dancing body, signalling and determining the social limits of its accessibility. In other words, on the one hand, it is precisely the highly technical and physically demanding movements of Ballet, transcending the 'ordinary' ways of moving, “*that anyone may not be able to do*” as often expressed by these dancers, that classicalise Ballet. On the other, its classicalism is constituted also in one's ability to access it due one's membership of a 'high-class' as becomes certain from the above interviews. Thus, to be able to access and acquire such a 'refined' dancing body, which is to symbolise an acquisition of it only through the investment of the devotion (investment of talent, labor, and money) demanded of and commonly attributed to a classical dance form may come together to make the practice of Ballet a source of 'upward mobility', and a rise in/marker of the 'status quo' for these dancers.

Also, within these dancers' urge for associating themselves with Ballet, one must read the socio-cultural connotations of their preoccupation with the codedness of Ballet. Why must

⁸⁹ Such an understanding of dancing body comes from Carol Lee's historical analysis of Ballet de Cour in France, wherein she discusses how Ballet body came to be modeled under the influence of stylized, bodily conduct outlined by the 16th century French court. See Lee, Carol, Ballet in Western Culture: A History of its Origins and Evolution (2002) p37. Also see Baxmann, Inge in ed. Marion Kant (2007) p98-99

they be inclined towards a 'coded' foreign dance? The answer is, it is the 'emulation' of these codes which bears for them a sense of 'belongingness' to a set of given socio-cultural as well as corporeal ideologies of a 'school of dance'. In other words, it is primarily to curb the insecurity of being located in a “no-man's land”⁹⁰ and the competition these dancers tend to face against the Indian classical dancers for whom both the resources and the respectability to be known as 'professional dancers' is prevails.

Just as it is for the dancers, Ballet's classicalism becomes a reiteration of 'elitism' also for the audience attending Ballet recitals. As Bourdieu argues:

“Surveys establish that all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading etc.), and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin. To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools, or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class'.”⁹¹

Clearly, what the audience inherit or inculcate as its 'taste' is essentially for and due to the aesthetic values of 'antiquity' and 'romanticism' attached to classical Ballet. What this audience is interested in is 'witnessing'/'experiencing' Ballet in its entirety, that is, complete with all its characteristic elements of 'story-telling' accompanied by its larger-than-life melodrama and visual extravaganza.

Even though, considering the dancers' limited training in comparison to that of the Ballet dancers in the west, the dancers may be found 'technically wanting', which might call for a criticism from the audience under the influence of their culturally imbibed perceptions on

⁹⁰ As expressed by Shohini Dutta, from The Danceworx, in the interview conducted on January 15, 2012

⁹¹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), p1-2

'authentic' Ballet, what must be considered of prime significance here is how this audience may assume a socio-cultural capacity and responsibility to 'receive' Ballet in 'their own' culture. Sanobar Khare, 33, who has been associated to London Theatre Society for 2 years and has been a quite a regular at the art events in the city ever since she has shifted to Delhi, suggests,

“I have always loved watching all kinds of theatre and dance. Ballet is one of my favourites. You see it is simply timeless. It has the ability to take you to an era which has been outlived by the greats of the art world. I simply love looking at those costumes, learning about the age-old fiction and fables. Because of having stayed in London for 5 years, I have seen some brilliant dancers dancing Ballet. I have also seen a few Ballet recitals in Delhi. One of them was Swan Lake, performed by the students of Imperial Fernando Ballet Company. The dancers looked quite good. I know, you hardly get to see Indians doing Ballet at all. But, now that it's happening, I think it's a good change. As an audience, I would like to encourage them.”

Mugdha Prajapati, 43, who is currently teaching literature in a renowned school in Delhi, and is also a practitioner of Indian classical music, shares her experience of watching the annual student recitals organised by the School of Russian Classical Ballet, Russian Centre,

“I always make sure I take my kids to watch theatre, music concerts, dance concerts etc. And its not just about visiting concerts showcasing Indian art forms, but also the non-Indian, international ones. Knowing about one's own culture is not enough, one must also learn about other cultures. Ballet is a world treasure. Everyone in the world knows about it, then why should my children lag behind. And then being an artist myself, I want my kids to learn how to appreciate and savour art, be it from any part of the world.”

For many of them, what matters is Ballet's pronounced situation amongst the 'great traditions'⁹² of the world, which then renders it a similar status to that of Indian classical dances. For Vishesh Ranjan, a Kathak dancer himself,

“Ballet's perfection of lines is no different from the perfection of Kathak's mudras. It has just as much mesmerising quality as our Indian classical traditions.”

One may argue that the appreciation of many indicates locating within traditional arts, in this case Ballet, what Regan understands as, *“intellectual motivators which include educational, cultural, and perceived sophistication, and emotive motivators which include aspects of sensory pleasure, spiritual feeling and relaxing with the familiarity of the performance.”*⁹³

The familiarity, with Ballet and its classicism in this case, that Regan is referring to may be acquired through one's exposure to literature, cinema, and travelling experiences, enabled by one's positionality in the social circles of the urbane privileged classes, and is then appropriated as a means to reassert oneself within these circles, that is by claiming to know the 'rare art', which *“not everyone gets to see.”* Many might not be versed enough to comprehend the embedded 'codes', but may have the 'access', as has been signified already, and for them it is their 'presence' in the auditorium amongst those significant 'others' who are watching what is 'labelled' as classical Ballet, that matters and becomes a determinant of their own 'belongingness' in that group. In other words, it is the sense of 'self-importance' derived from their socialising at such an event and the in-group agreement of *“what is being watched is that which is globally treasured”* that becomes a point of reiteration of 'elitism' subscribed in Ballet for both the dancers and the audience.

⁹² “Originally given by Robert Redfield based on his study of the Mexican communities, Little tradition and Great tradition is a theory that explains change through the concept of traditions and their social organisation. According to Redfield, for societies with profound historical past, change can be analysed at two social organisational levels. These are the great tradition or the tradition of the ‘reflective few’ or the elites, and the little tradition, that of the unlettered masses.”- Subberwal , Ranjana, Dictionary of Sociology (2009), pL-7

⁹³ Regan, Tom in ed. Mark Balnaves, Tom O’Regan, and Jason Sternberg (2002) p112

Commercial/Popular Spaces: De-classicalisation of Ballet

1. Ballet in commercials

This primarily refers to the recent visibility of Ballet in commercial shows and T.V advertisements (fig. 6) being produced in India. Few examples are worth mentioning. One of them is IFBC's, performance for CASTROL, a leading brand of motor oil, at its 100th anniversary, in 2010. The performance showcased a few girls, clad as “*ballerinas*” in typical Ballet attire comprising pink translucent tights, leotard, and tutus, were seen dancing en pointe next to Indian classical dancers, putting together an east-west 'fusion'. Having performed at various brand and product launches, fashion shows, television productions, exhibitions, etc, IFBC, on its website, advertises itself to its potential clients as follows

“At IFBC we love what we do...We ensure that every time you engage your audience they gain a memorable experience- an experience that they can associate with your brand. We perform with various dance skills like, Classical Ballet, Modern Contemporary, Lyrical Jazz, Tango, Flamenco, etc.”⁹⁴

Indicated within such Ballet performances is the commercial demand not so much for Ballet dance per se, as for the 'image' of a Ballet dancer (specially a 'ballerina'), hired to signify and represent the global appreciation and accessibility of the product being promoted. Even though, these performances are rare (Ballet itself has limited visibility!), they must be considered profusely telling from the point of view the consumerist dynamism informing in the arrival and spread of western Ballet in India.

⁹⁴ Imperial Fernando Ballet Co., www.ifbc.in/gallery.asp



Fig. 6 IFBC dancers performing at the Launch of OMEGA Ladymatic, Delhi, 2012 (Photo credit: IFBC)

2. Broadway style Commercial Shows

What must be seen as massively imprinting the urban dance spaces are western forms like Jazz, Salsa, Hip-hop, triggered by popularity of Bollywood dance, and patronised in the Indian cities by certain individuals⁹⁵. The urban Indians appear to be 'hyper-crazed' by these new Broadway style dance forms, reflecting in the rising enrolment at the local, almost fashionable, 'dance lessons', deeply influenced by, what is being conceptualised as, 'Bollywood fever'⁹⁶. Perceived as huge source of entertainment, these dance styles are perceived as commercially viable, and hence are being increasingly performed at the promotional events of various multi-national companies, along with many Bollywood events, such as the award-functions, fashion shows, reality dance shows, etc.

While locating within these events the 'commercial spaces' for Ballet, first of all, what one needs to grasp is their preoccupation with obtaining a 'global appeal', which then assumes the form of a pertinent demand to be met by the dance companies hired during these events. It is in order to meet this demand of their "*clients*", that these dance companies tend to fuse 'Balletic' movements, sometimes internalised through a considerable amount of training, sometimes merely copied and pasted, with the intention to deliver the so-called 'international look'. Shohini Dutta from the Danceworx, suggests,

“The clients always want world-class dancers. They happen to be well-travelled people who have seen musicals, Ballet recitals, etc. around the world. Their own clients come from different part of the world. So, they have really high standards. To give an example, during a

⁹⁵ See section 2.1 Chapter 2

⁹⁶ Morcom, Anna in ed. K. Mot Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake (2009) p127

show for Maruti Suzuki in Auto-Expo 2012, we had to be careful every minute detail, starting from the costumes, the music, the lines and the look of the dancers. You see the dancers were expected to convey the message of Maruti Suzuki's perfection, so no room for flaws.”

It is in the backdrop of such reasoning, that the descriptions associated with Ballet's poise and form may have come to resonate with the adjectives that these dance companies and their dancers use to define the new aesthetics of the popular dances. The sense of competition embedded within the forces of marketisation surrounding the sale of the popular dance forms, reiterates a rather commercial 'need' for 'specialisation'/'training' amongst these dance companies and the dancers. For a recently choreographed Bollywood musical called *Jhumroo*, currently running at the art auditorium of Delhi-based *Kingdom of Dreams*⁹⁷, the Danceworx provided regular Ballet classes to its dancers. Pankaj Guglani, one of the co-artistic directors of the show argues,

“After their last production, Zangoora, which was complete Bollywood extravaganza, the Kingdom of Dreams wanted a westernised treatment to be given to their next production, Jhumroo, to make it look like a 'West-side story' or a 'Lion King'. Thus, even to dance on Kishor Kumar numbers, they wanted dancers who had the lines of international dancers. The best possible training had to be given to the dancers, which could only be Ballet.”

Considering their inclination towards learning and using Ballet with respect to showcasing their dancing 'abilities' in these commercial settings of performance, what these dance companies seem to be locating in Ballet is a source of 'physical excitement' for their audience, which they believe, the technique and movements of Ballet are capable of

⁹⁷ Kingdom of Dreams is a theme park owned and operated by Great India Nautanki Company, which is a joint venture between Wizcraft International Entertainment Pvt. Ltd. and Apra Group of Companies.

generating. Expressing a similar sentiment towards Ballet, Amith Kumar, 28, one of the senior dancers at the Danceworx, argues,

“It is precisely the struggle, the achievement of getting those three turns without any fumbling on stage that gets both the dancers and the audience going. I mean if you see a guy whirling and swirling in the air as if she's made of a feather, and you know that she could fall anytime but she does not, that is what engages you in looking at her intensely, with a 100 percent involvement. As a dancer you want to be able to grab all eye-balls by doing things which appear as if they are physically impossible and as an on-looker you want to see that which makes you clench your gut.

Clearly, as much as these perceptions seem to be causing the dancers of popular forms turn towards Ballet, they may also be encouraging Ballet dancers to conceive employment opportunities within these commercial events. This brings one to point out the paradox of Ballet's relationship with these commercial dance shows. On the one hand, they may be looked upon as significant public platforms for popularising Ballet, though only by showcasing that which is 'like Ballet' or 'glimpses' of Ballet, they may also comprise a suggestion of how Ballet in its classical form, as compared to these popular dance forms, is found wanting from the perspective of it availing means of sustenance to professional Ballet dancers in the Indian context. Aguilera notes,

“Only Ballet will not do for these dancers. It is very new. Only few people know about it and come to concerts to watch it. I know that it is easier for shows like these to attract more people. Such dance styles one gets to see on T.V shows, movies, etc. But as the audience comes to know that it is a Ballet company, performing a tango or a salsa routine, I feel, they would want to know more about Ballet too. Through such shows people get to know more

about our academy and hence Ballet dance. It is these shows which create for us an audience, and it is amongst this audience that we aspire to create an interest for Ballet.”

It must be underlined that in such shows, which generate for themselves a 'mass appeal', and have the dancers dancing for money and entertainment, Ballet's appropriation, be it in its conventional form, or brought down to just the movements, elements, or mere impression, must be looked at through the lens of its declassicalisation in the Indian context.

Contemporary choreographers/choreographies

This dissertation concerns itself with those contemporary choreographers/choreographies, who/which have been experimenting with various foreign dance traditions, specifically the Modern Dance traditions, with an intention of becoming 'global'; an intention also excessively pervading the nature of the hitherto studied engagements with Ballet. Why they must deserve a special mention here is because one expects to be in a position to envisage/hypothesise within their embracing of 'non-Indian' dance traditions, a passive 'opening of doors' for Ballet. There may be drawn a distinction between two kinds of contemporary dance engagements which are being investigated, 1. The free-lance contemporary dancers/choreographers based in Delhi, 2. The contemporary choreographies being created within the Ballet-teaching academies understudy.

Steering clear from any generalisation, here have been highlighted two contemporary dance choreographers⁹⁸, who have lent significantly to the contemporary dance scene in Delhi, that is, with their creations inspired by western modern traditions, and hence may seem to have

⁹⁸ Coorlawala discusses many renowned contemporary choreographers and dancers, like Astad Deboo, Bharat Sharma, Vijai Shankar, and others, who have made some very important contributions to contemporary dance in India (Coorlawala, 1994 , p215). The chapter brings to light the works of Mandeep Raikhy and Gilles Chuyen who are upcoming and have been associated (at some point or the other) to the dance academies being talked about.

propelled an aesthetic visibility of Balletic movements, and techniques⁹⁹. One of them is Mandeep Raikhy, one of the most known contemporary dancers and choreographers in Delhi, who started his career at the Danceworx, went on to study Laban technique at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London, and has been a company dancer at Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company,

“Western modern dance reflects the aesthetic of Ballet, you know, in the sense, how legs are twisted, and arms are placed squarishly. As a contemporary choreographer, I have little interest in Ballet as a dance form. Yet, as far as training in Ballet is concerned, you cannot deny its always very useful. For example, when I worked with a couple of dancers at the Danceworx for a piece (Fig. 7), I could see how they were able to embody certain movements very quickly. You know, like getting on one leg from the other. They had a really good attack in their bodies, you know a kind of athleticism, which I am sure, had a lot to do with the fact that they had been training in Ballet and many other techniques. Ballet bodies are always fun to work with. But, beyond training, I do not have any interest in Ballet. That idea of beauty

⁹⁹ This argument is based on the most hard-hitting critique that Modern dancers in the West have received, which suggests that modern dance traditions have failed in completely breaking away from Ballet, since most bodies who created these traditions were Ballet dancers, which is why all these traditions bear heavy resemblance of Ballet, and only reiterate its universality.

does not appeal to me. I like things to be ugly, feary.”



Fig. 7 ‘Breakpoint’ by Mandeep Raikhy at *The Chrysalis Project 2011*. (Photo credit: Sangeeta Bannerjee)

According to Gilles Chuyen, a trained Ballet and contemporary dancer from France who has been living in Delhi for over 10 years now, and has been associated with many pathbreaking artistic projects, and festivals involving dance, theatre, and fashion across India,

“Ballet is a storehouse of extremely beautiful movements and being one of the oldest dance forms in the world, having revived, reframed, and reworked in every possible ways for all these years, could not have left any muscle in the body untouched or unmoved. Ballet training

can lead to immense number of discoveries for a dancer in his/her body. And once a dancer has achieved that, he/she is able to understand how to create new movements from the same sources. But, for me, it's only a great technique. I like free movements when I dance. My production called Rasa was exactly about that. I wanted my dancers to shed all their physical fears, boundations as dancers. Once the training is done, one has to let go of it on stage and just be oneself. That is what dance should be about."

The ruling ideology and practice for these dances is 'improvisation' and letting the body movements not be contained within any structured frames restricted by pre-determined meanings. Also, as can be observed, there is no conscious dependence on or enthusiasm for Ballet as a form, but at the same time there is no resistance¹⁰⁰. They do not entirely derive their experiments from Ballet, but one cannot deny how there must necessarily be seen an unconscious Balletic presence within their dances, at first, in their own bodies imprinted by 'training', and then in the bodily expectations raised within their dances, explaining their optimism for a Ballet training.

While these choreographers seem to be encouraging Ballet training only passively, the choreographers working within the academies understudy may show a direct concern for Ballet. Amith Kumar notes,

"I feel the dancers today are so lucky that they get to do Ballet. While choreographing 'Phylogeny'(fig, I did a lot of improvisation workshops with my dancers. But, at the same time I wanted them to keep working on their form. I wanted a combination of the two. In order to break the form, you must know it. And, I think today's audience are much more exposed. You cannot cheat. You can not just walk on stage and call it contemporary dance. You must give

¹⁰⁰ Comparison drawn with the modernist endeavors of Tagore and Shankar which were much more tradition-centric, and thus had much less association with Ballet. See Chapter 1, Section 1.1

them content. Dance movements. So, that way, training comes first.”



Fig. 8 'Phylogeny' by Amith Kumar at *The Chrysalis Project* 2012. (Photo credit: Ashmit Malik Photography)

Be it the contemporary dances created with an intention to undo the influences of training, while treating it only as an fruitful option but not a necessary condition, like those created by Raikhy or Chuyen, or the technique-heavy contemporary dances originating at these academies, influenced by their 'enthusiasm'/'activism' for establishing themselves as 'trained' dancers, in both cases training in 'Ballet' gets immensely emphasised upon. In both cases, Ballet's ideological as well as pedagogical dominance is signalled (even though in different degrees) in its claim to create a dance body that is universally adaptable; the claim that advocates Ballet technique as that which comprises the foundational skills required for executing any dance movement.

For the same reason, within these contemporary dance spaces, the dancers training in Ballet may find for themselves an 'artistic-stage', appealing to a larger audience, in the wake of how its association with an 'out-of-the-box-ness' has generated a curiosity as well as an interest for the 'contemporary' among both the 'elites' and the 'masses'. Aguilera argues,

“It is not possible to bind anyone within a form in today's dance scenario. If you ask me, I would always like that my dancers should become Ballet dancers. That is because I love Ballet. But most dancers want to be contemporary dancers. No strict categories of a dance form are acceptable today. What people want is fluidity. Thus, for my Ballet dancers, simply Ballet choreographies are not enough. They need a place for themselves within contemporary dance, to enhance their own creativity. At the same time, contemporary dance also has more audience.”

The conception of contemporary dance spaces as 'artistic stage', as has been mentioned above, may be justified in the fact that, for the most part, these dances are performed as part of reputed dance festivals, which may presuppose an audience looking for as well as appreciative of innovations and meaningfulness. Thus, by aligning themselves with such

performances, the dancers learning Ballet, may be seen seeking an aesthetic seriousness, and thus a social acceptability as dancers.

3.2 Is Ballet really there?-Assessing its 'acceptance'

The nature of Ballet's visibility, suggesting its disintegration into 'elements', as has been observed in the performance and choreographic usage of Ballet, finds its explanations in the acceptability of Ballet in its classical (read proper) form within the Indian context, to be judged from the positions of both the dancers and the audience.

To begin with, the foreign-ness of Ballet may create for its dancers and audience, disjuncture between the somatic and cultural identity¹⁰¹. Doing Ballet is likely to cause a dancer to put herself/himself through a scrutiny, a comparison/competence with, a fascination for the 'culturally other', in the light of which one must ask, do they not find their bodies to be culturally out of place, historically disoriented? Could that lead to a sense of 'identity crisis'? One may have to say yes, for the dancers are likely to find themselves struggling to find a sense of 'kinesthetic empathy'¹⁰² with the foreign bodies they aspire to confirm to, which may fail them in establishing an emotional relationship leading to an increased cultural gap¹⁰³.

The audience may face the same dilemma while viewing an Indian body performing 'foreign' movements. The question here is 'does an Indian body doing Ballet appear to be a disintegrated site for the audience watching it?' Watching a classical Ballet recital, cannot offer the Indian audience a sense of 'communal' or 'in-group' reminiscing of one's culture and a rekindling of a 'common' past, as is offered by the depiction of ancient religious scriptures

¹⁰¹ Albright, Ann Cooper, Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance,(1997) p3-12

¹⁰² Skylar, Deidre in ed. Dils and Cooper Albright (2001) p30

¹⁰³ Mandeep Raikhy in his interview stated that learning Ballet or even Laban, both of them being completely foreign techniques, had actually turned into an 'alienating' experience for him, which is what made him turn Shobana Jeyasingh's company, where he exposed himself to Bharatanatyam.

and fables comprising an Indian classical dance performance. Therefore, these classical recitals performed in front of a foreign audience, will always lack accountability for their codedness on the part of these audience. They may still play an aesthetic 'police' on the basis of their socio-cultural exposure, yet may never be able to reproduce its sense of 'classicalism' in the Indian context, just as Bharatanatyam may fail a classical status in the West. In this respect, such inaccountability on the part of the audience, coupled with a lack of expertise allowing a serious aesthetic engagement with classical Ballet, may become a premise for the dismantling of its classical status¹⁰⁴, just as it gets dismantled by its incorporation within popular and contemporary dances.

It is these factors that come together to divert the dancers learning Ballet to look for a source of not just financial but aesthetic sustenance in popular and contemporary dances, as has been established already. The dancers' as well as the audience's preoccupation with these dance forms have come to redefine what kind of dancing is currently found 'pleasurable' to watch. From the perspective of the popular forms, the emphasis lies in a neuromuscular provocation of the audience, giving to them a sense of "clenching of gut" with the incorporations of Balletic whirling, twisting, or leaping, to be interpreted as an expression of 'glamour' and entertainment. Pitted against these, are the concerns of contemporary choreographers, displayed in contemporary choreographies, that is, of generating a sense of inquiry and self-expression, which may use 'Ballet', if at all, as a heuristic device, an ideal-type, but only to set a context for its 'bending' with the belief of giving a dancing body a renewed signification.

¹⁰⁴ It must be noted that what classicalises a dance form in its 'original' cultural context is its ability to be able to outline moral codes of 'rights' and 'wrongs', from the same reason, Ballet in the Indian context, appears to have been reduced to only technical 'rights' and 'wrongs', in other words, an Indian body doing Ballet, along with its audience, though not to say generally, yet in most cases, may only adapt to embodying and beholding Ballet as 'shapes'.

These forms may be seen to be availing frames for the visibility of that which is Ballet-like, but not Ballet. In other words, there may be employed Balletic ways of 'moving' in these dances, but then it may reiterated by the audience's Balletic ways of 'looking', owing to the fact that they may be presented, for the most part, in front of the likes of a non-Ballet going audience, that is, either those who are for entertainment, or the elites, who may be concert-goers, but whose audienceship may not ensure their acceptance for classical Ballet.

3.3 Seeking a source of 'Universalism'

Practiced or performed in whichever forms or ways as it may be, Ballet may be sought as a source of a universal identity, as has been stated already. As it seems, most of the Indian practitioners of Ballet look at Ballet only in juxtaposition with Indian classical dances and the boundedness of body constituted in Hinduistic/nationalistic religiosity of these dances, and imagine Ballet's glorification of body¹⁰⁵ as a source of body-liberation, that which, due to its foreign-ness may free the dancing body from the pre-given non-negotiable meanings attributed to a traditional Indian dancing body. Such a 'freedom' from convention is completely culture specific and has to do with a certain sense of freedom from the 'notions' of tradition and may not have anything to do with actual achievement or feeling of 'freedom' of the body presumably, as historically the Ballet body in its spaces of origin and growth has been attributed with complete loss of freedom to be itself, and has been known to become a body shaped by the training and attitudes developed through the techniques.

The central contention of these practitioners, that is, Ballet's unfamiliarity in the Indian context, may in fact be interpreted as its cultural 'un-markedness' as it were, offering these

¹⁰⁵ Morris, Gay, *A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years, 1945-1960* (2006), p71

practitioners a 'refuge' from the already rehearsed categories, and placing them in a floating category (Ballet neither totally classical, popular, but seen through the eyes of a postmodern sentimentality) of 'becoming', the same time as it may also lead to creation of new codes and norms, resulting in the dancers and the audience's subjective reassessment of their identity, a breaking of existing 'cultural codes' and resisting of cultural norms.

In every sense, Ballet and its varied practice in India has come to be a typical example of modernity being sought and represented in the Indian dancers' interaction, and to a great extent, a consciously or an unconsciously expressed fascination with the west. Due to Ballet being a quintessentially 'western'/'international' dance form, the 'classical/traditional' idealisation of body lying at the heart of Ballet aesthetics, may in fact become a point of diverting towards a sense of 'cosmopolitanism' for both the dancers and the audience. As David Howes and Constance Classen argued,

“In the 20th century, people in non-western countries are increasingly producing their own representations of the west for the purposes of product promotion. Entrepreneurs around the world have learned that 'western-ness' or 'American-ness' is a highly valuable selling feature and have been quick to capitalise on this in their product of packaging commodities.”¹⁰⁶

Thus, the most widespread assumption here seems to be not so much that what the dancers are practicing and audience are watching is a western art, but also that it is being practiced and watched around the world, at the same time as practicing Ballet for its exponents may mean that which offers the same pains and pleasures of body for its dancers around the world.

Juxtaposed to such urge for universalism, is one common perception that pervades the practice and performance of Ballet in the Indian context is, that is, “not everybody does it or

¹⁰⁶ Classen, Constance & Howes, Davis in ed. David Howes (1996) p188

can do it”, which indicates how it can be translated into a way of expressing 'difference' or 'uniqueness' for its practitioners. As Ramsay Burt justifies,

*“Progressive, contemporary dancers and choreographers, rather than expressing their cultural identities thru their work, express their singularities which sometimes reveal that identities as such are problematic, fragmented, and constantly in the process of becoming.”*¹⁰⁷

Even from the perspective of the audience, Ballet and Balletic dances symbolise 'novelty'. Considering the selected audience of classical Ballet performances and Balletic contemporary dances, one can easily claim the significance of, 'not everybody watches it', for the purpose of the audience's self-judgement. In case of audience exposed to Ballet through its glimpses in Broadway-style dances and Bollywood dance, it is the idea of watching that which is loudly sold to them as new and signifies a dismantling of dominant paradigms, which may instil in them a feeling of their breaking away from the 'ordinary-ness'.

It is precisely the pursuit of embodying a foreign/western body on the part the dancers, and a response consciously lacking an enactment of a feeling of national identity or community on the part of the audience, that comes together for the dancers and the audience of Ballet to seek a global identity. What one sees is a degree of reflexivity here, rather than an essentialist assertion of Indian supremacy. *“Ballet has been done by everyone around the world but us. But we want to say we can also do it, and do it well”*, the expression clearly symbolises a sense of cultural solidarity and achieving a place for India in the world. The great Indian sentiment, as Howes argues, seems to be best treated not as some national-cultural trait but as a nationally labelled expression of aspirations that are as lofty and humanistic as they are universal. Even though there does not appear any unique Indian Ballet body, there is clearly a

¹⁰⁷ Burt, Ramsay in ed. Carl, Wolz & Stephen Burrige (2006), p124

unique Indian way of Ballet practice, which allows for a double consciousness of Indian identity and its globality. The ruling sentiment is to find a 'globalised' Indian-ness, where Indian-ness comes to mean existing here and now and 'crossing national boundaries'.

Conclusion

Ballet came to India long after India became independent. The dances from different parts of India survived in their local surroundings and communities and also made their ways to the urban areas, where they became popular with the families who wanted their daughters to learn some form of Indian dance. Ballet never made its way into those urban centres to really become another accepted form (technique) of dance available for Indian dancers. As per the findings of this research, it was much later; in 1966 that Ballet started being taught in India, with the establishment of *School of Classical Ballet and Western Dance*, founded by a London College of Dance graduate of Indian origin, Tushna Dallas in Mumbai. Today, there are at least 9-10 dance academies across Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Kolkata, where Ballet is being taught, and with their increasing number of students, signal at a remarkably rising growth rate of ballet in India.

Having said this, the research has faced a major challenge in terms of having to generalise the characteristics of Ballet's presence in India, only on the basis of its observations emerging out of its geographically limited field of study, by and large, only a few Delhi-based dance academies, when there could be important differences pertaining to the treatment and level of acceptance that Ballet may have received owing to the difference in the cultures of the cities in which the various Ballet teaching academies are situated. Most of the data that the research examines has been generated over informal interviews, either in person or telephonic, with the founders, the teachers, the students of the academies, wherein their opinions, most often,

bore an influence of their advertising strategies, and posed challenges to the intended objective analysis of the study. But despite all the limitations, the ideas and thoughts expressed by these Ballet practitioners have made most fruitful contribution to the reflections of this research.

No space for Ballet in colonial India

Dance, in colonial India, remained a purely political construct, serving a political function of embodying India's cultural identity. Its mobilization as a tool to bring people together as one nation, was taking place both in, what can be classified as, classicalised spaces founded by the efforts of dancers like Arundale, as well as, non-classical spaces of performance, born out of the modernistic attempts of artists like Tagore. The common concern of these artists was to align the cultural practices with the ongoing struggle for Independence, and generate, through their artistic endeavours, a sense of 'Indian-ness' for their audience.

In the wake of such rising nationalist temperament, the interaction of the Indian dancers with the West, instead of turning them West-wards, only led them into making reverse journeys, into finding 'home' through the exploration of their own Indian traditions. The motive behind incorporating significant borrowings from the western modern dance traditions in the various representations of Indian dance, for example, Arundale's "*theatricalisation of Bharatanatyam in the ways of Isadora Duncan*"¹⁰⁸ or Tagore's dance-dramas bearing an influence of German expressionist styles¹⁰⁹, was to convey the 'uniqueness' of Indian dance to both the natives and the world.

¹Chakravorty in ed. Carter and O'Shea (2010) p.278. Also see chapter 1

¹⁰⁹Chakravorty, Aishika in ed. Pallabi Chakravorty & Nilanjana Gupta (2010) p190

Thus, it must be stated that in a country, which was so rigorously engaged in honing its nationalism as a force against the ruling colonial power, a categorically Colonial cultural form like Ballet could have never found roots. And, compared to an acceptance for the western modern dance influences which, as has been stated already, could be seen in the Indian dances exhibiting both the puritanist as well as modernist inclinations of the artists, and which obviously had to do with the audience's familiarity with the Indian spiritual images that constituted modern dances, Ballet remained too western to be pursued, viewed, and accepted.

Ballet Academies appear in the Globalizing India

In the course of last thirty years, the understanding and socio-cultural connotations attached to dance in India have undergone tremendous change. The present-generation Indian dancers do not look at themselves as bearers/representatives of 'traditions' and a singular 'Indian Nation', but have been encountering global dance community as well as the audience as independent creative artists searching for their own vocabularies and artistic gratification.

The initial push for opening new spaces for thinking in Indian dance came from non-State organisations such as Max Mueller Bhawan (MMB) and the National Centre for the Performing Arts. The 'East-West Encounter' of 1984, Mumbai, by Dr. Georg Lechner of the MMB, brought forth the avant-garde works of artists such as Chandralekha and Kumudini Lakhia, who were emerging as the torchbearers of contemporary dance in India. As Munsri points out,

"This time was considered right to allow dance to also have, in this age of globalisation, a modern avatara to suit the image of modern India. My argument is that, it was from this point

onwards that the process of using multiple classical and non-classical forms, of crossing borders to use Western and other non-Indian Eastern techniques, of building a secular, open, and absorbent movement vocabulary became acceptable and laudable.”¹¹⁰

Thus, in order to throw light on Indian dancers’ inclination towards developing a larger repertoire of movements, through synthesis, fusion, or complete abandoning of one’s previous dance style and training, the developments such as ‘East-West Encounter’ must be regarded as remarkable endeavours towards putting together a platform for new directions in Indian dance where established Indian dancers were brought together, with dance critics, and a large audience to explore new ways of conceiving Indian-ness in new choreographies and/or movement practices.

The increased global interactions of the Indian dancers must necessarily be seen to have been accompanied by the increased mass-distribution and commodification of art across the world. And, it is in this context, characterised by the changing conception of Indian dance and building of a market-driven environment in India that Ballet teaching academies have emerged; with the efforts of certain individuals who have been able to grasp the trends of outsourcing and a growing fascination for the West in India.

Emergence of the academies and its challenges

The emergence of the Ballet-teaching academies in today’s context must be problematised in relation to their absence in the past. First of all, these academies, as one has seen in the second chapter, have been set up either by patrons from Anglo-Indian community, or foreigner dancers who came to India for different reasons, decided to settle down, and got

¹¹⁰ Munsj, Urmimala, in ed. Urmimala Sarkar Munsj (2008) p78-79

involved in the dance business with the establishment of their own academies. What must be doubted here is that why such efforts were never made by the Anglo-Indians and foreigners living in India during colonialism. To say that it is the forces of globalisation which have facilitated migration and exchange of people, which is what has encouraged the initiatives of the present-generation Anglo-Indians and foreign residents in India, would not be an appropriate justification; for people were travelling and were excessively exposed to British culture even in the past. Thus, a complete 'absence' of Ballet still remains questionable. But it must also be underlined here that by drawing a comparison between the past and the present, this dissertation does not attempt to find links to connect the two, as what it clearly states as its motive is to not resolve but only to highlight the mystery of Ballet's absence in colonial India. It is to be noted though, that the visiting ballet companies from the eastern block of countries, in the post independence era of the cold war, were received with utmost eagerness and enthusiasm, and got huge audience that filled the largest auditoriums in all metropolitan cities, signalling a clear interest in part of the Indian Audience for excellence in classical ballet.

Secondly, as one looks at the present from the vantage point of the past, the dejection that Ballet was facing from the side of the modern dancers, which could have affected the chances of its spread in India, remains a challenge even today, when Ballet has come to be relegated the position of a truly old tradition with much less number of assured audiences in the countries where it used to be most popular. Ballet is now looked upon as a technique, even though a 'must learn' at that, to prepare the ideally flexible and empowered body, which can be worked upon thereafter for training in other dance forms, such as the modern dance traditions, on the one hand, which have effectively come to dominate the Western proscenium stage; and the popular forms of jazz, hip-hop, and street dance, on the other, increasingly absorbing dancers' and audience's interest in both public and private spaces.

Thus, it can clearly stated that India's waking up to Ballet (if that is what it could be called) is about 50 years too late in relation to the dance history of the world, where ballet has ceased to be the prime form of dance with the largest audience.

Any Indian Ballet dancer, trained in any of the Indian Ballet academies (unless excellently trained in the intricacies of the body and movement praxis) may have to face challenges from the point of view of finding both Indian and Western audience. At home, he/she already seems to be struggling for an audience, as Ballet continues to be looked at as a foreign dance form. At the same time, s/he may not have any special appeal for a Western audience, which is used to evaluating the Ballet dancers with a critical eye, born out of familiarity born out of cultural proximity to the form, just in the same way as Indian audience view and evaluate the classical forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Manipuri , Odissi with a sensibility born out of life long familiarity. s/he may not have any special appeal for a Western audience, which is used to evaluating the Ballet dancers with a critical eye, born out of familiarity born out of cultural proximity to the form, just in the same way as Indian audience view and evaluate the classical forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Manipuri , Odissi with a sensibility born out of life long familiarity.

It is these pressures which come together to cause the Ballet practitioners to align themselves with the more acceptable realms of contemporary and popular. At the same time, these pressures may also contain an explanation for the apparent deconstruction of Ballet in the Indian context, into a technique, movements, or image, whose different ways of appropriation come together to constitute the process of Ballet's indigenisation in India. As has been observed, Ballet, for the most part, may have become a 'tool', for the non-dancers to realize their desire for an 'imagined' body, or for the dancers to access the other dance forms perceived to be commercially more rewarding. And, considering those very few who have gone on to be professional Ballet dancers, one has to take into account how most of them

have expressed their anxiety towards Indian audience's lack of acceptance for Ballet by either going abroad in their search for an 'original' context¹¹¹, where audience could be (though may not be) more welcoming, or, by finding means to sustain in popular forms and commercial shows, which only use Ballet for the technique, the movements, or the look.

At this point one needs to take into account the complexities of de-classicalisation that a classical form, once dislocated from its original context, necessarily goes through. The stringency of the socio-cultural norms that defines the sacrosanct grammar and movement patterns of Ballet in the West is most likely to fade when it is situated amongst a foreign community/nation, which has its own set of neatly outlined norms. In other words, the moral obligation for the Ballet practitioners and their own audience in the Indian context to not upstage it with their own individual, consumerist interventions, lessens. And, as a foreign import it has to go through the stages of its acculturation, which causes it to lose its original form in the process of its appropriation by the members of the indigenous culture.

'Indian Ballet body' must also be seen as one of the illustrations of such de-classicalisation. Once the word 'Indian' gets attached to it, it in itself becomes a question raised at the 'universality' of the conventional notions of a Ballet body, whose import may change as it is attributed a cultural specificity. And then, looking at the ways Ballet is being used and performed in India, we see how its practitioners tend to conceive Ballet differently, which have led to different ways of embodying of Ballet. An Indian Ballet body would imply an Indian doing Ballet. But its understanding cannot be simplified as just that. Indians are doing Ballet in different ways, so the question is does there exist one singular notion of the ideal India Ballet body? As we identify several ways in which the techniques, or skills of Ballet are being accessed by a group of Indian dancers, there are several categories of Indians who apply such skills for different ends. The dancers who learn/use some Ballet movements as a

¹¹¹Currently, around 10-15 dancers from each of these academies are training abroad.

part of their movement repertoire for building a large vocabulary - can they be called Ballet dancers? How is that group different from the group of practitioners who are keen to acquire the 'looks' of a ballerina, going for the imitation of stance and attitudes, rather than the serious learning of the form? How and where would one place the Indian students, who are really attempting to learn Classical Ballet as authentically as possible? What matters here is not to find answers to these questions but to acknowledge and investigate the instigation behind these questions, which, indeed, is a considerable presence of Ballet in India in different forms and usages.

In the light of the above reflections, this dissertation attempts to mobilise the socio-cultural agency of the practitioners over the agency of a dance form, suggesting how it is the former which determines the latter, and how the 'authentic' should be viewed only as a construct always vulnerable to challenges posed by cultural situated-ness of a body, and thus, always lacking an on-ground reality. What must be emphasised upon is that measuring Ballet's presence in India on the scale of authenticity may undermine the newness of the 'effort' and the 'desire' being projected by the individuals to interact with the 'cultural-other' through the language of Ballet, illustrating how they imagine themselves, trading the path of modernisation on which one does meet the chances of losing, learning, unlearning, aping, and hence creating a hybridised sense of self and identity. It is the very uniqueness of Ballet's presence in India that has to be brought under the scrutiny of an aesthetic and sociological inquiry. Even the act of making Ballet shapes has important implications, for both Ballet and the body, which must not be ignored. Even the 'unserious' Ballet counts.

Even though Ballet's absence in the colonial India remains peculiar, it does appear disjointed with its contemporary presence, characterised by its struggle to adapt to the changing conception of dancing body and socio-cultural identity in present-day Indian context. Hence, the Indian Ballet body, in whichever way it may be imagined or realised, is not to be judged

as a perfect or imperfect Ballet body, under the scrutiny of an obvious comparison with the so-called 'real' Ballet bodies, but as a body which could be site of evolving mind-sets and changing socio-cultural dynamics, constituted by decades of its absence and sudden-ness of its emergence, an enterprise to dare traditions, and a desire/need to interact with the world.

Bibliography

- Albright, Ann Cooper, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997
- Appadurai, Arjun, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Arjun Appadurai & Carol Breckenridge, “Public Modernity in India”. Eds. Carol Breckenridge, *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in Contemporary India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Auerbach, Jeffrey, ‘Art and Empire’. Ed. William Roger Louis, Elaine M. Low, Nicholas P. Canny, Peter James Marshall, *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 1*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999
- Banerjee, Projesh. *Indian Ballet Dancing*, Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1983
- Baryshnikov, Mikhail & Swope, Martha, *Baryshnikov at work: Mikhail Baryshnikov discusses his roles*, Random House, 1978
- Baxmann, Inge, ‘The French Revolution and its spectacles’. Ed. Kant, Marion, *The Cambridge companion to Ballet*, Cambridge University Press, 2007
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, USA: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1984
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Bourdieu, Pierre & Randal, Johnson, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on art and literature*, Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, ‘The Forms of Cultural Capital’. Ed. J. Richardson, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood, 1986
- Bowers, Mary, *Ballet Beautiful*, Boston: Da Capo Press, 2012
- Lee, Carol, *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of its Origins and Evolution*, New York: Routledge, 2002
- Blunt, Alison, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home*, Wiley, 2005

- Chakraborty, Aishika, 'The Daring Within- Speaking gender through *Navnriya*'. Eds. Pallabi Chakravorty, Nilanajana Gupta, *Dance Matters: Performing India on Local and Global Stages*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2010
- Chakravorty, Pallabi. 'Global Dancing in Kolkata'. Ed. Isabelle Clark Deces, *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011
- Chakravorty Pallabi, 'From interculturalism to historicism: reflections on classical Indian Dance'. Ed. Carter, Alexandra & O'Shea, Janet, *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, Oxon: Routledge, 1998
- Chatterjea Ananya, *Butting Out: Reading Resistive Choreographies through the works of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha*, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Course*, United Kingdom: United Nations University, 1986
- Chen, Ya-Pin, 'In search of Asian modernity: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's body aesthetics in the era of globalisation'. Ed. Butterworth, Jo & Wildschut, Liesbeth, *Contemporary Choreography: A critical reader*, Routledge, 2009
- Classen Constance, Howes David, 'Epilogue: The Dynamics and Ethics of Cross-Cultural Consumption'. Ed. David Howes, *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*, London: Routledge, 1996
- Coorlawala, Uttara Asha, *Classical and Contemporary Indian Dance: Overview, Criteria, and a Choreographic Analysis*, New York University, 1994
- Dempster, Elizabeth 'Women Writing the Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances'. Ed. Ellen W. Goellner & Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *Bodies of the Text: Theory, Literature as Dance*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995
- Deshpande, Satish, *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*, Penguin Books, 2004
- Desmond, Jane 'Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies. Ed. Desmond, Jane, *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Duke University Press, 1997
- Foster, Susan 'Dancing Bodies'. Ed. Desmond, Jane, *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Duke University Press, 1997
- Foster, Susan 'The ballerina's phallic pointe'. Ed Foster, Susan, *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture, and Power*, London: Routledge, 1996
- Fraleigh, Sondra & Hanstein, eds. Penelope, *Researching Dance: Evolving modes of inquiry*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999

- Fraleigh, Sondra, *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Studies*, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987
- Frosch, Joan, 'Dance Ethnography: Tracing the Weave of Dance in the Fabric of Culture'. Ed. Fraleigh, Sondra & Hanstein, Penelope, *Researching Dance: Evolving modes of inquiry*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999
- Hamera, Judith *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference, and Connection in a Global City*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007
- Hammergren, Lena, 'The Power of Classification'. Ed. Foster, Susan, *Worlding Dance*, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009
- Havens, Thomas, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avante-Garde Rejection of Modernism*, University of Hawaii Press, 2006
- Gottschild, Brenda, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*, Greenwood Press, 1996
- Jeyasingh, Shobana. 'Getting off the Orient Express'. Ed. Carter, Alexandra & O'Shea, Janet, *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, Oxon: Routledge, 1998
- Kaeppler, Adrienne, 'Dance, Dancing, and Discourse'. Ed. Mohd. Anis Md Nor and Revathi Murugappan, *Global and Local Dance in Performance*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Mallaya, 2005
- Kant, Marion, 'Introduction'. Ed. Kant, Marion, *The Cambridge companion to Ballet*, Cambridge University Press, 2007
- Knight, Douglas. *Balasaraswati: Her Art and Life*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010
- Kopf, David. *The Brahma Samaj and the shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1981
- Leucci, Tiziana, 'A Neglected Chapter in the History of Indian Classical Dances: The East-West Interactions (1889-1947)'. In *Researching Dance/ International Conference on Dance Research*, Delhi, 2009 (in association with JNU, Dance Alliance India, Max Mueller Bhavan)
- Lin Yatin, 'Choreographing a flexible Taiwan: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and Taiwan's changing identity. Ed. Carter, Alexandra & O'Shea, Janet, *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, Oxon: Routledge, 1998
- Masani Zareer, *Indian Tales of the Raj*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987

- Massey, Reginald. *India's Dances: Their History, Technique, and Repertoire*, Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2004
- Mc. Fee Graham, *Understanding Dance*, London: Routledge, 1992
- Meduri, Avanti , “Bharatanatyam as a Global Dance: Some Issues in Research, Teaching, and Practice”. *Dance Research Journal*. Vol 36. No. 2 (2004): p14. Congress on Research in Dance
- Menon, Sadanand, “Passport, Please!” Border-Crossings in the Invented Homelands of Dance’. Ed. Mohd. Anis Md Nor and Revathi Murugappan, *Global and Local Dance in Performance*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Mallaya, 2005
- Miles, Steven, *Consumerism as a Way of Life*, London: Sage Publications, 1998
- Mitra, Royena, 'Living a Body Myth, Performing a Body Reality: Reclaiming the Corporeality and Sexuality of the Indian Female Dancer'. In *Feminist Review*, No. 84, Postcolonial Theatres, Palrave Macmillan Journals, 2006
- Morcom, Anna, ‘Indian popular culture and its ‘others’: Bollywood dance and anti-nautch in twenty-first century global India’. Ed. K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake, *Popular Culture in a Globalised India*, Oxon: Routledge, 2009
- Morris, Gay, *A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006
- Munsu, Urmimala, ‘Acculturation and the Repertoires of the Traditional World: Post Colonial Development within the Indian Context- Pressing Need for Documentation’. Ed. Mohd. Anis Md Nor and Revathi Murugappan, *Global and Local Dance in Performance*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Mallaya, 2005
- Munsu, Urmimala, 'Another time, another space, does the dance remain the same?'. Ed. Pallabi Chakravorty & Nilanjana Gupta, *Dance Matters: Performing India*, Delhi: Routledge, 2010
- Munsu, Urmimala, ‘Boundaries and Beyond: Problems of Nomenclature in Indian Dance History’. Ed. Urmimala Sarkar Munsu, *Dance, Transcending Borders*, World Dance Alliance. Asia Pacific Center. Research and Documentation Network, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2008
- O'Shea, Janet, 'Roots/routes of dance studies'. Ed. Carter, Alexandra & O'Shea, Janet, *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, Oxon: Routledge, 1998

- O'Shea, Janet. 'Rukmini Devi: Rethinking the Classical'. Ed. Meduri, Avanti. *Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986) A Visionary Architect of Indian Culture and the Performing Arts*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Private Limited, 2005
- Pinny, Christopher "Introduction: Public, Popular, and other Cultures". Ed. Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinny, *Pleasure and Nation: The History, Politics, and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, Oxford University Press, 2001
- Purohit, Vinayak, *Arts of Transitional India 20th Century. Vol-1*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1988
- Rampal, Veena. 'Re-invoking Rukmini Devi: Questions from a Dance Maker in Britain'. Ed. Meduri, Avanti. *Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986) A Visionary Architect of Indian Culture and the Performing Arts*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Private Limited, 2005
- Regan, Tom, 'Arts Audiences: Becoming Audience-minded'. Ed. Mark Balnaves, Tom O'Regan, and Jason Sternberg, *Mobilising the Audience*, University of Queensland Press, 2002
- Rogis, Vivienne, 'Same but Different: Globalisation and Identity Negotiated Through Inter-Cultural Dialogue in Dance'. Ed. Mohd. Anis Md Nor and Revathi Murugappan, *Global and Local Dance in Performance*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Mallaya, 2005
- Rubridge, Sarah, 'Does Authenticity matter? The Case for and against Authenticity in the performing arts'. Ed. Campbell, Patrick, *Analysing Performance: a critical reader*, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1996
- Sarkar, Tanika. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001
- Srinivasan, Priya "Dancing Modern/Dancing Indian/Dancing...In America: The myths of cultural 'purity'", Ballet dance magazine, *criticaldance.com*, April 2004 www.Ballet-dance.com/200404/articles/asiandance/html
- Stock, Cheryl, 'The Cocacolonisation of Differences: Homogenised Diversity in the 21st Century Cultural Practice'. Ed. Mohd. Anis Md Nor and Revathi Murugappan, *Global and Local Dance in Performance*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Mallaya, 2005
- Subberwal, Ranjana, *Dictionary of Sociology*, Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 2009
- Skylar, Deidre, 'Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance'. Ed. Ann Dils & Ann Cooper Albright, *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, USA: Wesleyan University Press, 2001

- Tumko, Linda, 'Teaching dance history: A querying stance as millennial lens'. Ed. Bennahum, Judith, *Teaching Dance Studies*, Routledge, 2005
- Wainwright, Steven & Turner, Bryan, 'Ageing and the Dancing Body'. Ed. Christopher A. Faircloth, *Ageing Bodies: Images and Everyday Experience*, California: AltaMira Press, 2003
- Weidman, Amanda, 'Listening to the Violin in South Indian Classical Music'. Ed. Richard K. Wolff, *Theorizing The Local: Music, Practice, and Experience in South Asia and Beyond*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009
- Wolff, Janet, 'Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics'. Ed. Desmond, Jane, *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Duke University Press, 1997
- Wolz Karl, Burrige Stephanie eds. *Shifting Dance: Dance in Asia and Pacific*, Australian Dance Council: AUS dance Inc, 2006
- Yahuda, Michael, 'The changing faces of Chinese nationalism: the dimensions of statehood'. Ed. Michael Leifer, *Asian Nationalism*, London: Routledge, 2007
- Yangwen, Zheng, 'The sinicisation of Ballet in China'. Ed. Kant, Marion, *The Cambridge companion to Ballet*, Cambridge University Press, 2007