

Counterflows of Knowledge: The Transnational Circulation of Physical Culture Practices
Between India and the West During the Early 20th Century

by

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the transnational flows of physical cultures, particularly physical education, yoga, and modern dance, between India and the West during the early decades of the 20th century. I develop two case studies where individuals became involved in circulating dance and physical education practices between India, Western Europe and the United States, illuminating how colonial powers conceived of European modernity in opposition to and in conjunction with the ‘Orient’ and how Indian nationalists developed a monolithic cultural identity along rigid lines of the nation state.

The first case study examines how the YMCA (‘Y’) brought American sport and physical education; particularly ideas around Muscular Christianity, to India in the form of missionary work. It focuses primarily on the efforts of the physical educator Harry Crowe Buck, who arrived in India in 1920 to direct the YMCA School of Physical Education in Madras. The second case examines the career of Indian modern dancer Uday Shankar (1900-1977), and his involvement in shaping Western ideas around Oriental dance and Indian culture in the 1930s. It also considers his reception in India where he received harsh condemnation from the public because his performances were not sufficiently grounded in Indian dance traditions.

Drawing from studies in postcolonial and physical cultural theory, this thesis pays special attention to the areas of Indian physical education and modern dance during the late colonial period. Physical cultures warrant attention for their importance in shaping colonial and nationalist thought, as the body became critically important in the ‘articulation of imperial ideologies and in the often-fraught dynamics of cross-cultural contact’, particularly in shaping ideas around gender roles, race relations and national identity in India and the West, that persisted beyond the colonial period.

In my arguments, I employ Edward Said's contrapuntal approach, which involves examining documents with an awareness of the complex social, political and cultural circumstances that underlie them. This approach influences how the case studies are written, as I pay explicit attention to the contexts of British imperialism and Indian cultural nationalism, and the ways they intersected during the early 20th century.

Lay Summary

The aim of this study is to examine the transnational flows of physical cultures, particularly physical education, yoga, and modern dance, between India and the West during the early decades of the 20th century. Two case studies were developed, the first of which examines how the YMCA (‘Y’) brought American sport and physical education to India in the form of missionary and professional work. The second examines the career of Indian modern dancer Uday Shankar (1900-1977), and his involvement in shaping Western ideas around Oriental dance and Orientalist perceptions of Indian culture in the 1930s. The study uses a critical socio-historical perspective and draws from studies in postcolonial and physical-cultural theory. It takes up a ‘contrapuntal’ approach to reading texts, which involves examining documents with an awareness of the complex cultural circumstances underlying them, primarily British imperialism, Indian nationalism, and the ways they intersected during the early 20th century.

Preface

All of the work presented henceforth was conducted with the Physical Cultural Studies and Sport History Research Group at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. It is an original intellectual product of the author Aishwarya Ramachandran, under the supervision of Dr. Patricia Vertinsky.

A version of Chapter 3 has previously been submitted to the *Journal of Sport History* and is currently forthcoming as: Patricia Vertinsky & Aishwarya Ramachandran (2019), 'The 'Y' goes to India: Springfield College, Muscular Missionaries and the Transnational Circulation of Physical Culture Practices', *Journal of Sport History*.

A version of Chapter 5 has been published in *Sport in History* as: Patricia Vertinsky & Aishwarya Ramachandran (2018), 'Uday Shankar and the Dartington Hall Trust: patronage, imperialism and the Indian dean of dance', *Sport in History*, 38:3, 289-306, DOI: 10.1080/17460263.2018.1488152.

For both chapters, I was involved in collecting and organizing secondary source material (including books, journal articles, magazine and newspaper articles), communicating with archives for primary source material, writing the paper, and editing the manuscript for the purposes of publication. Patricia Vertinsky was the supervisory author on each of the projects and was involved throughout in concept formation, analyzing the data and outlining theoretical arguments, and editing the manuscript for publication.

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To my supervisory committee, Dr. Brian Wilson and Dr. Robert Lake, thank you for your direction and support throughout the research process. Your encouragement, and willingness to share your expertise and provide feedback on my work has been invaluable.

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Finally, I'd like to thank Anamika, Vasu and Lisa for their unending friendship, for sharing my laughter and tears, and for helping me back up when I was down.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Theoretical Background

The aim of this study is to examine the transnational flows of physical cultures, particularly physical education, yoga, and modern dance, between India and the West during the early decades of the 20th century. This time period is particularly important in understanding the modern history of South Asia as the years leading up to national sovereignty for India in 1947 were fraught with the last vestiges of colonial rule and fervent expressions of nationalism in various parts of India leading to a number of competing approaches to physical development. The physical culture practices in this era were similarly privy to complex social, political and cultural interactions. I look at instances where individual actors and institutions facilitated complex and often multidirectional flows of physical culture practices, paying attention to the ‘effects, resonance and reverberations’ underlying the dynamics of imperialism, colonial struggle, and nationalism in India during this period.¹ I focus on individuals who became involved in circulating dance practices and physical education systems between India, Western Europe and the United States during 1920s and 30s. In the process, I illuminate how colonial powers conceived of European modernity in opposition to and in conjunction with the ‘Orient’ and look at attempts by Indian intellectuals and nationalists to develop a monolithic cultural identity along rigid lines of the nation state.

Postcolonial Theory & Physical Cultural Studies:

Throughout this study, my perspective was guided by works in postcolonial theory and physical cultural studies. Apollo Amoko suggests that formerly colonized societies continue to

¹ Bancel, ‘Physical Activities through Postcolonial Eyes’, 863.

be plagued by ‘fundamental contradictions, inequalities and dependencies brought about by colonial rule’, and asserts the importance of postcolonial studies in investigating the past and present impacts of European colonization on their social, cultural, political, and economic systems.² The production of a cultural identity was particularly central to the fight for political sovereignty among many non-Western nations and has, according to Stuart Hall, ‘profoundly reshaped our world...and [continues] to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples’.³ Physical cultures warrant attention for their importance in shaping colonial and nationalist thought, as they have been used by nations, in one form or another, to express their core values. They were often adapted and transformed by the colonized population according to their needs, particularly through intermixing, creolization and hybridization practices.⁴ The body became critically important in the ‘articulation of imperial ideologies and in the often fraught dynamics of cross-cultural contact’, particularly in shaping ideas around gender roles, race relations and national identity in India and the West, that would persist well beyond the colonial period.⁵

I am particularly persuaded by Robert Young’s observations that a postcolonial methodology can be radically anti-theoretical, with the freedom to choose specific ‘social and cultural objectives, which draw on a common range of theories and employ a constellation of theoretical insights’.⁶ This has allowed me to draw from research works across diverse disciplines including kinesiology, history, sociology, anthropology and performance studies, and has also helped me make sense of the fact that my study prioritizes ‘story-telling’ or narratives

² Amoko, ‘Race and Postcoloniality’, 133.

³ Hall, ‘Culture Identity and Diaspora’, 223.

⁴ Bancel, ‘Physical Activities through Postcolonial Eyes’, 863.

⁵ Burton and Ballantyne, *Bodies in Contact*, 5.

⁶ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 64.

(in the form of cases), as essential to the research process. Indigenous scholar Dian Million echoes the importance of considering narratives as a legitimate theoretical approach, particularly because they ‘seek the nooks and crannies of experiences filling cracks and restoring order... Narratives serve the same function as any theory; in that they are practical vision’.⁷ My focus then, is on relating stories which give primacy to the value of individual experiences, and through a focus on transnational actors, I hope to draw attention to ‘flesh and blood people rather than abstract processes’, thus enlivening the relatively ‘bloodless idea of globalization’ with colors, smells, stories, beliefs and concepts.⁸ My decision to look at the transnational circulations of physical cultures is in part, a response to Claire Midgley’s call for culturally informed histories which bring to the fore ‘hitherto neglected historical agencies of “ordinary” people who live transboundary lives’.⁹ In particular, transnational historical narratives create an opportunity to examine the lives of non-state actors, and how their cross-border relationships, exchanges and affiliations interacted with the ongoing politics of imperialism and nationalism during the early 20th century.¹⁰ The compatibility of this approach to postcolonial studies has been asserted by Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne, who insist that ‘empires have not simply been carriers or enablers of global processes, they have in turn spawned new hybrid forms of economic activity, political practice, and cultural performance that take on lives of their own’.¹¹ Edward Said similarly contends that ‘to ignore...the interdependence of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized co-existed and battled each other through projections as well as

⁷ Million, ‘There Is A River in Me’, 35.

⁸ Midgley, Twells and Carlier, ‘Introduction’, 7.

⁹ Midgley, *Women in Transnational History*, 6.

¹⁰ Donna Gabaccia has suggested that the term ‘transnational’ was particularly relevant during the mid 19th century. ‘Intellectuals at mid-century may have also sought a new word to categorize relationships built across borders among nonstate, politically motivated actors of diverse and multiple nationalities’. By nonstate, she refers to migrants, pilgrims and missionaries, artists, intellectuals, political activists and humanitarians. Gabaccia, ‘Thoughts on the Future of Transnational History’, 23.

¹¹ Burton and Ballantyne, *Bodies in Contact*, 4.

rival geographies, narratives, and histories, is to miss what is essential about the world in the past century'.¹²

Case Studies:

This paper looks at two case studies, the first of which makes up Chapter 3 of the thesis titled 'The "Y" goes to India: Springfield College, Muscular Missionaries and the Transnational Circulation of Physical Culture Practices'. It examines the YMCA ('Y'), and its involvement in bringing American sport and physical education; particularly ideas and values around Muscular Christianity, to India in the form of missionary and professional work. The focus is on the development of the Y's values around and approach to physical education in India throughout the early 20th century. Physical education was central to many of the evangelical efforts of organizations like the YMCA, mainly in its attempts to masculinize young men and protect them from the negative effects of industrialization and city-living. It was also an important aspect of their foreign missions to non-Western, non-Protestant countries like India, where the young men were believed to be bereft of sport and physical activity. Driven by the desire to provide the 'accoutrements of Western civilization' to native populations in foreign parts, the YMCA increasingly used physical education as a useful agent of religious conversion and cultural propagation during the early 20th century.¹³ Like Harald Fischer-Tinè, I consider the extent to which the Y's mission in India was really democratic and egalitarian as they frequently claimed it was, by bringing to light perceptions held by secretaries (the title given to missionaries employed by the YMCA) around 'native' bodies being fundamentally different, 'hopelessly

¹² Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, xx.

¹³ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 127.

defective', and in need of (benign) Western intervention to be rectified.¹⁴ The common perception held in the West that India, like other non-Western nations, historically lacked any kind of sport and physical recreation culture, and that the Indian population was weak, unhealthy and helpless, brought the body (and its use) to the forefront of debates and developments around imperialism and the nationalist movement.

This case study will look primarily at the efforts of the physical educator Harry Crowe Buck, who arrived in India in 1920 to direct the YMCA School of Physical Education in Madras. He was involved in developing and implementing physical education programs for young Indian men in schools and colleges across India, and in building gymnasiums and sports facilities in his capacity as advisor to the colonial government. His time in India, however, is somewhat unusual in that it resists the usual narrative of overzealous missionaries imposing Western sport and physical activity on unwitting 'native' populations. While Buck's discussions of 'native' peoples were often tinged with paternalistic ideas around Indian weakness and frailty, his efforts at building a hybrid program of physical education (that incorporated Indian games and physical activities) belied his ability to see the effectiveness of physical exercises regardless of where they originated, and a desire to prioritize the needs and enjoyment of his students. He thus adopted indigenous practices, including yoga-āsanas, as integral parts of the YMCA's program, even while acknowledging they fit somewhat ambiguously into the discourse of muscular Christianity. This case study follows Buck's attempts to sustain the focus of his training while accommodating to colonial struggles and nationalism in India and facilitating transnational

¹⁴ Fischer-Tiné, 'Fitness for Modernity', 37. Like Fischer-Tiné, the anthropologist Joseph Alter discusses how in India, the body, exercise, and physical education systems were explicitly linked with nationalist politics during the early 20th century, particularly in the form of a militant Hindu nationalism he refers to as 'somatic nationalism'. He examines political movements where the body became the primary object of discipline and reform, central to the process of forming an oppositional, highly nationalistic identity on the road to independence. For more see Alter, 'Somatic Nationalism', 559.

exchanges of physical cultures between colonial India and America through the circuitry of the Y.

The second case makes up Chapter 5 of this thesis and is titled 'Uday Shankar and the Dartington Hall Trust: Patronage, imperialism and the Indian Dean of Dance'. It examines the career of Indian modern dancer Uday Shankar (1900-1977), in particular, his involvement in the shaping of Western ideas around Oriental dance, especially Orientalist perceptions of Indian culture in the 1930s. During this time, his Indian dances were extremely well-received in Europe and North America because they comfortably satisfied Western notions around and articulations of an exotic Indian culture. Shankar, who was neither a trained dancer nor familiar with Indian performance styles, relied on his 'Indian' appearance and convincingly Oriental costumes, sets and choreography to meet the expectations of his Western audiences. His supporters included a coterie of important cultural figures including the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova; the wealthy owners of Dartington Hall in Devonshire, England, Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst; actors Michael Chekhov and Beatrice Straight; John Martin, international dance critic; Sir William Rothenstein, leading British authority on Indian art and traditions, and Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Prize winner in literature. In 1936, during a visit to Dartington Hall, the Elmhirsts even provided Shankar with funds to open his own culture centre in India. Through the auspices of the centre, and his earlier tours in India, Shankar also became implicated in reintroducing his views around performance and culture back to his native India. However, he received a multitude of harsh critiques and condemnation from Indian critics and the public because his performances were not sufficiently grounded in Indian dance traditions. Shankar's centre shut down within four years due to his inability to attract enough students, his financial mismanagement and artistic disagreements with his trustees, all in the face of wide-ranging political turmoil in India.

The idiom of dance was indispensable to Orientalist views of Indian culture, as well as in British and Indian attempts at fashioning an essentialist cultural identity during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This case study pays particular attention to the Western and Indian views and reception of Shankar's dances, as they allow a particularly effective conduit through which one may explore the dynamics of colonial struggle and nationalism during the early 20th century. This is because in the West, modern dancers like Shankar played an important role in propagating certain images and stereotypes of Indian spirituality and mysticism. Meanwhile in India, classical dance became central to the formation of a national culture and identity in the political turmoil leading up to 1947 (the year India became a sovereign nation). It was used by nationalists to further a homogenous history of Indian national culture that derived authenticity from its rootedness in an ancient Indian past, and Shankar's style, which was self-consciously modern and drew from both Indian and Western sources, did not fit in this political agenda.

Reading Texts 'Contrapuntally':

Throughout this study, I take up Edward Said's contrapuntal approach to reading texts, which involves examining documents with a keen awareness of the complex social, cultural and political contexts that underlie them but may not be explicitly mentioned. This entails drawing out, extending, giving emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented.¹⁵ Said discusses the value of such a perspective in thinking through and interpreting together experiences that are otherwise discrepant, 'each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them coexisting and interacting with others'.¹⁶ George Wilson describes this

¹⁵ Wilson, 'Edward Said', 265; Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, 66.

¹⁶ Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, 32.

as a balance between the ‘legitimate claims of internal or intrinsic readings of a work...and the claims of various forms of external critique on the other’.¹⁷ Keita Takayama, in his work on comparative education at Teachers College, uses this approach to emphasize the importance of recounting what he refers to as ‘subjugated histories’, neglected and less comforting narratives, that ‘allow us to reflect deeply on the intellectual legacies that we inherit and how they continue to inform what we think and do...today’.¹⁸ This approach influences how the following case studies are written, as throughout the research process, I pay particular attention to the political and sociocultural contexts of British imperialism and Indian cultural nationalism, and the myriad ways the two intersected with one another during the early decades of the 20th century. My arguments are informed by studies in postcoloniality and physical culture which look at British imperialism in India during the 1920s and 30s, the development of a highly nationalistic Indian cultural renaissance, and the role of physical education and dance within these contexts.

‘Orientalism’ and the changing role of ‘Others’ in Western Modernity

Said has demonstrated how the relationship between the West and the Orient developed around issues of power, domination, and ‘varying degrees of complex hegemony’. During the post-Enlightenment period, European cultures worked to systematically manage the East politically and militarily, while also producing it socially and ideologically.¹⁹ The question of a distinctly ‘Western’ culture was not only essential in painting colonized nations with broad brushstrokes, collapsing their many heterogeneities into a single, and ultimately inferior Orient that the West could set itself against, but eventually became an important impetus to how many

¹⁷ Wilson, ‘Edward Said’, 265.

¹⁸ Takayama, ‘Beyond Comforting Histories’, 460.

¹⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

postcolonial states came to view themselves, particularly in their struggle for political sovereignty. Frantz Fanon similarly highlights the particular success of imperial powers in devaluing entire systems of beliefs, references, and ways of existing. Racist discourse at this arena, he claims, was extremely successful because it could be reinforced through the routine destruction of quotidian cultural values and patterns. The 'native' culture thus remains 'closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yoke of oppression'.²⁰

Orientalist stereotypes around India's mysticism, effete males and female exotic lasciviousness created a perception of the subcontinent as dark and dangerous, reinforcing the colonial metonym of 'Oriental femininity'. This view underscored the British Empire's feeling of masculine superiority over Indian backwardness, while simultaneously incorporating the study or adoption of certain facets of Indian culture for its own use. Said has discussed how the West was able to maintain its flexible, positional superiority by entering a number of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing its 'relative upper hand'.²¹ Simon Gikandi similarly considers how 'Others', including women, slaves, and colonized peoples, could never be totally excluded from the discourse of modern identity because the British Empire constituted its own understanding of 'modernity' and 'culture' through its stark opposition to the Orient. Colonial bodies were consistently deployed in a subliminal, subordinate, or suppressed manner to the West,²² even as Eastern cultures, religious practice and spirituality were appropriated, primarily through stereotypical images and fantasies of 'Orientals', during the Progressive Era (1890-1920).²³

²⁰ Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', 34.

²¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

²² Gikandi, *Slavery*, 26-27.

²³ Said asserts that 'everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient...assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies'. Said, *Orientalism*, 20.

Indian Nationalism and the Evolution of Dance and Physical Education

During the early 20th century in India, there was an uptick in nationalist activity spurred by political movements like the *swadeshi* campaign,²⁴ and a corresponding belief among important political figures and activist groups that physical cultures could hasten the country's move to independence through the development of a powerful Indian masculinity that was capable of not only competing with British men, but of defeating them. Racist scientific discourse had long portrayed Indian men as weak and unmanly, thus engendering several long-standing colonial tropes, such as those of the effete Bengali *babu*. Over time, these stereotypes had come to be internalized and propounded by several Indian nationalists, and as a result, hegemonic masculinity and the cultivation of muscle and physical strength were looked upon as a likely path to political sovereignty. Strength, in the minds of many, was synonymous with the ability to both defend 'mother India' and eventually return to an idealized nation undamaged by colonialism. A new oppositional masculine identity, linked closely with the use of sport and exercise as a weapon in the fight for *swadeshi*, began to be espoused by contemporary militant nationalists and activist groups.²⁵ Along with shaping the trajectory of physical education movements like those of the YMCA, Joseph Alter asserts that the 'ideals of muscular Christianity have also played a significant role in the emergence of regional nationalisms that are anti-colonial, thus complicating any simplistic binary of coloniser and colonised'.²⁶ Heightened nationalist activity in the 1920's saw activist groups enthusiastically deploying various physical

²⁴ This campaign was part of the larger Indian independence movement and focused on removing the British Empire from power and improving economic conditions in India by following the principles of *swadeshi* (or self-sufficiency).

²⁵ Alter, 'Yoga at the Fin de Siècle', 759-760.

²⁶ Alter, 'Yoga and Physical Education', 21.

cultural systems for explicitly political causes. The Indian nationalist figure Swami Vivekananda, for instance, frequently propounded the importance of strength and muscularity in the fight for political sovereignty.

‘You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little strong blood in you. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men’.²⁷

During this time, intellectuals also advocated for a collective Indian cultural identity that was built around its people’s shared ancestry, and derived ‘authenticity’ from the material and ideological remnants of an ancient and pre-colonial golden age. In the case of dance, this involved propagating, what has since been referred to as the ‘dominant narrative’, which suggested that Indian classical dance originated in an ancient Hindu past and was associated with Sanskrit dramaturgy texts and discourse. Such a view of cultural identity is predicated upon a shared, collective ‘one true self’ that constitutes some kind of an essential and unchanging Indian identity.²⁸ Paul Gilroy, among others, has critiqued this nationalistic view of culture for its dogmatic ideas around community and belonging, since ‘neither political nor economic structures of domination are still simply coextensive with national borders’.²⁹ I examine how authenticity was construed in the context of Indian dance and the performing arts in general, using Walter Benjamin’s deliberations around the ‘cult value’ of art, particularly his notion that ‘the unique value of the “authentic” work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value’.³⁰ Indeed, this notion that a ‘true’ Indian culture, and subsequently national identity,

²⁷ Alter, ‘Yoga at the Fin de Siècle’, 759.

²⁸ Hall, ‘Culture Identity and Diaspora’, 223.

²⁹ Gilroy, ‘The Black Atlantic’, 7.

³⁰ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 223.

could be rediscovered in the religious texts and artefacts of an ancient Vedic past allowed cultural nationalists and intellectuals to systematically erase a number of other, more recent, dance histories in order to raise, in their minds, the status of Indian national culture, which had been long perceived by the West as primitive and lacking. Howard Becker has discussed, for instance, the central role played by national governments in supporting those artists and works which further its political agenda or support certain national goals.³¹ While it has given open support to some forms or practitioners of art, ‘when they appear to further national purposes’, the Indian government, during both the colonial and postcolonial eras, was extremely invested in suppressing artistic productions which deviated from the values and beliefs the nation purportedly ascribed to.³² For instance, Purnima Shah suggests that the emergence of state-sponsored dance festivals in India during the 1950s betrayed the newly formed government’s desire to ‘restore the religious, social, and cultural sanctity’ of the performing arts, by creating ‘national sites where social memory is evoked, and regional and national identities are negotiated and reformulated through the performance of regional dance forms’.³³ Consequently, such an explicitly political agenda has also meant that certain communities of performers were heavily censored and eradicated from the most histories of classical dance, because their work and lifestyles did not converge with the sovereign Indian state’s values and aspirations.

The aim of this introduction was to provide an overview of both case studies, which make up Chapters 3 and 5 of this thesis. I briefly outlined the theoretical areas that I have drawn on throughout the rest of this study, which include a number of works in postcolonial and physical culture studies. I introduced a number of concepts such as Orientalism, Nationalism and

³¹ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 165.

³² Becker, *Art Worlds*, 191.

³³ Shah, ‘State Patronage’, 126.

Modernity, which make up the central part of both case studies and will be expanded upon in the upcoming chapters. In Chapter 2, I look at the effects of industrialization on modern Western societies, specifically concerns around racial degeneration and masculinity that were engendered by rapid urbanization. I also consider the impact of the Muscular Christianity movement on physical education in 19th century American society. Chapter 3 focuses on the YMCA's particular desire to protect young Christian men from the harmful effects of urban life by providing sport and physical education programs as an ameliorant to what they believed were otherwise unhealthy lifestyles. I also consider the Y's interest in bringing the gospel of muscular Christianity and American physical education to non-Western countries, with a particular focus on India.

The focus shifts to dance and the performing arts in Chapter 4, where I begin by elaborating on 'Orientalism', and the growing Western interest in Indian culture during the late 19th century. This follows into an examination of imperialist dynamics underlying the production and consumption of modern dance in Europe, and the rise in nationalistic fervor surrounding the performing arts in India during the same time. I pay attention to the role of 'authenticity' in constructing particular meanings around Indian classical dance during the 1920s and 30s. Given that Uday Shankar was an Indian dancer but mostly performed for Western audiences, considering both of these contexts is necessary. Shankar's career is the focus of Chapter 5, while Chapter 6 concludes this thesis by discussing both case studies within the context of the theoretical lenses that were chosen for this study. This chapter also includes an overview of the limitations experienced during the research process and suggests a number of future directions and potential areas of study that will further enrich this thesis.

Chapter 2: Muscular Christianity, Physical Education and the YMCA in 19th century America

The mid 19th century saw shifting attitudes toward industrialization and its effects on health and wellness across Europe and North America.³⁴ As the Industrial Revolution rapidly modernized cities across Western Europe and North America, there was a growing anxiety caused by the sudden and dramatic urban sprawl and its potentially destructive effect on personal wellness laid bare the need to approach health and bodily fitness with a renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

During this time, American Protestant men became particularly concerned with developing and maintaining their masculinity.³⁵ According to Clifford Putney, this was seen to be the result of a disproportionately higher female attendance and participation in church and community activities, as well as what they perceived to be an ill-conceived idealization of ‘sensitivity’ and ‘asceticism’ as Christian traits, seen to encourage effeminate qualities in men.³⁶ In the face of growing concerns about over-civilization and its attendant illnesses, including neurasthenia (coined by neurologist George Beard in 1880, and used to diagnose a number of mental conditions including depression, anxiety and hysteria), physical weakness and a loss of vitality began to be seen as accompanying industrialization. In 1886, for instance, Theodore Roosevelt vilified intellectuals of the Gilded Age for neglecting the ‘rougher and manlier virtues’, claiming their focus on intellectual development too often led to a ‘certain effeminacy

³⁴ This was the era of Baudelaire’s flâneur who strolled the side streets of Paris, watching the ‘unfolding of a new way of life in a dense urban environment of the “crowd” and noted the impact of urbanization upon society and art’. Jeanne Willette, ‘Charles Baudelaire, Author of Modernism’, *Art History Unstuffed*, August 20, 2010, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://arthistoryunstuffed.com/ baudelaire-modernism/>.

³⁵ Meanwhile, in Britain, for instance, imperial culture was influenced by this ideal of the ‘Promethean man’, who was European, attended public school, and regularly engaged in manly activities like game hunting and team sport.

³⁶ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 74.

of character'.³⁷ Additionally, concerns around rural depopulation (industrialization had led to an increasing number of families moving out of the countryside and into the city) and the arrival of non-Western immigrants throughout the latter half of the 19th century added to the scare of cultural displacement and racial degeneration. Putney evocatively asserts that the 'physical enervation of its young [men]...proved essentially compelling to America's Protestant establishment, who occasionally entertained fears of well-bred but overeducated weaklings succumbing before muscular immigrant hordes'.³⁸ So too, did the growing popularity of the New Woman ideal, and as the number of women entering the white collar work-force trebled between 1900 and 1920, their encroachment on men's territory fostered a potent desire among some, to return to the simplicity (and traditional gender roles) of the past.³⁹

Thus, the body and its upkeep became a bastion of good Christian manhood, essential to one's physical, mental, and most importantly, spiritual development. It was in the efflorescence of urbanization and its attendant evils that Muscular Christianity, described by Putney as a 'Christian commitment to health and manliness', arose as a response to both the ravages of modern city life, and the body denying asceticism associated with the practices of American churches of the postbellum period.⁴⁰ Missionary organizations like the YMCA were at the forefront of the movement and were particularly adept at incorporating these stereotypes around masculinity into the organization's philosophy. Patricia Vertinsky has suggested that early 'proponents of physical education identified morality with muscularity...in their crusade to stave off what they perceived as the imminent degeneration of American society'.⁴¹ For the muscular

³⁷ Roosevelt, 'Machine Politics in New York City', 76.

³⁸ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 31.

³⁹ Ibid, 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 11.

⁴¹ Vertinsky, 'Science, Social Science', 73.

secretary of the American YMCA, evangelism and exercise went hand in hand, and the American public certainly seemed to respond to the Y's offerings in kind. While the enrolments in bible studies and other programming either stagnated or dwindled, gymnasium memberships grew rapidly throughout the fin de siècle. John Donald Gustav-Wrathall points out that argument for building more gymnasiums focused on the attraction such spaces held for young men and regarded them as useful sites for evangelical work.⁴²

During the late 19th century and leading into the early 1900s, there was also a growing concern with eugenics and the implications of evolution, which took a hold of intellectual circles throughout Europe and North America.⁴³ Adding fuel to the fears of racial degeneration, this was most clearly manifested in the widespread biologically-based prejudice toward non-Westerners. In particular, racist claims propagated by scientific practices like phrenology, somatotyping and craniometry, etc., allowed authoritative statements to be made about the intellectual, physical, and emotional primitivism of Oriental men. Such views were manifest in the YMCA's efforts and growing interest in overseas missionary work. The close relationship of muscular control to leadership and initiative, courage and self-control, central to the YMCA's 'whole-man' ethos, was seen to be lacking among non-Western peoples. In the Far East, for example, it was believed that a successful Christian leader might 'influence the entire life of one hundred human beings to the one that would be susceptible to his efforts in America'.⁴⁴ In India the Y's agenda reflected pre-existing imperialist notions that 'native' men were particularly weak, un-masculine and would benefit from the 'upbuilding of physical strength and vigor, assets which have been so

⁴² Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger*, 141. This notion proceeded well into the 1940's, with an increasing number of gymnasiums being built throughout.

⁴³ These ideas were promulgated, in part, by the immense popularity of Darwin's evolutionary theories and Herbert Spencer's ideas around Social Darwinism.

⁴⁴ Harry L. Kingman, 'Physical education', 5.

long overlooked and neglected by them'.⁴⁵ Missionaries recognized that athletics could be used to strengthen moral backbone and could serve as an important auxiliary to Christian teaching.⁴⁶ In particular, they recognized that sport had the power to transcend the otherwise insurmountable caste boundaries and transform Indian bodies in the image of Western modernity.⁴⁷ During the high noon of British imperialism, colonial perceptions of Indian masculinity were similarly informed by racial theories portraying Europeans as masculine, and Indian men as especially effeminate. Sikata Banerjee for instance, has discussed how the 'non-martial' races of India, including Bengalis and Tamils, were characterized as such because of their perceived short stature, dark skin, hair and eyes.⁴⁸ The division of Indian men into martial and non-martial races and the preference for the former by colonial authorities indicated, according to Mrinalini Sinha, the 'priorities of a discrete Western masculinity', as well as the changing ideals of manliness in the construction of British gender roles in the 19th century.⁴⁹

The YMCA's relationship with colonial authorities and the Indian population, however, was complex, and necessitates a deeper consideration of ruler/subject divisions as well as the various ways colonialism was experienced in India. Sinha warns against examining 'modern Western masculinity or of traditional Indian conceptions of masculinity as...mutually exclusive categories by [recognizing] their mutual implication in imperial politics'.⁵⁰ The Y's involvement in India must be viewed 'a process of translation or a remaking rather than a unilateral diffusion or dissemination'.⁵¹ The presence of the Y, like other American institutions in India, has been powerful, lasting, and mattered significantly in the unfolding of the subcontinent's national

⁴⁵ Kingman, 'Physical education', 7.

⁴⁶ Mangan, 'Soccer as Moral Training', 44.

⁴⁷ Mangan, 'Soccer as Moral Training,' 53.

⁴⁸ Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism*, 15.

⁴⁹ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁵¹ Fischer Tinè, 'Fitness for Modernity', 37.

history throughout the 20th century.⁵² Paul Kramer, for instance, underscores how American organizations profited from ‘both the presence and the disintegration of older, European colonial worlds’. On the one hand, the organization designed programs for and accepted land and funding from the colonial authorities where it was deemed suitable for evangelical work. Nevertheless, in the decades approaching 1947, there was a growing attempt to distance the image of the ‘liberatory, anti-imperial’ American from older Western European colonial powers.⁵³ By the 1920s, for instance, several indigenous secretaries had come out in favor of the nationalist struggle, publishing articles ‘explaining the relationship between Nationalism and Christianity’ in the YMCA publication *Young Men of India*.⁵⁴ The American secretaries were either non-partisan or somewhat reserved in their support of the nationalist movement during this time. However, despite attempts of some progressive Y educators to develop a hybridized program of physical education that incorporated both Indian and Western physical culture practices, there can be little doubt that there was a rhetoric of racial difference and ‘Otherness’ underlying much of the American YMCA’s involvement in India. As Harald Fischer-Tiné notes, the YMCA’s supposedly emancipatory discourses and practices of physical fitness were influenced by the somatic Orientalism of the British empire, which constructed native bodies as fundamentally different, and in need of evangelical intervention. ‘The program...continued to be rife with the imperial tropes of somatic Orientalism...the pervasive influence of deep-seated colonial ascriptions and stereotypes is ubiquitous’.⁵⁵

The next chapter will direct the discussion to the YMCA, following physical educator Harry Crowe Buck from Springfield College to Madras, India in 1920, where he became

⁵² Paul A. Kramer, ‘Power and Connection’, 1349.

⁵³ Ibid, 1369.

⁵⁴ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 251.

⁵⁵ Fischer Tinè, ‘Fitness for Modernity’, 39.

involved in building and running the Y's first physical education training school in India. The following case study draws on themes from the previous section by considering Buck's views on muscular Christianity, and his efforts to introduce American physical education programs and values around sport and recreation to the Indian population.

Chapter 3: The ‘Y’ goes to India: Springfield College, Muscular Missionaries and the Transnational Circulation of Physical Culture Practices

Springfield College, muscular Christianity and the training of the YMCA’s international secretary:

Central to the formative work of the North American YMCA was the organizing zeal of physical educators, putting to rest existing prejudices against Sunday pastimes by promoting their philosophy of muscular Christianity through a growing menu of sports, gymnastics and recreational activities.⁵⁶ In an era in which the contours of professions such as physical education were being carefully defined by the American Association of Physical Education in 1885, the YMCA relied on manhood and its accompanying support for muscularity as an anchor and foundation of expertise and professional knowledge.⁵⁷ As a result, debates around the purpose, systems and practices of physical education in North America were endemic around the turn of the twentieth century as the profession sought to establish its credentials, drawing liberally upon a wide variety of physical culture and sporting systems from Denmark, Sweden, Germany, the UK and elsewhere. Pioneer physical educator Dudley Allen Sargent had articulated the four main aims as hygienic, educative, recreative and remedial at Harvard in 1879, each of which was underscored by particular views on the appropriate training of the body. With these in mind, the YMCA worked out its own, somewhat eclectic, system of physical education, striving for a

⁵⁶ North Americans became acquainted with the YMCA during London’s Great Exhibition in 1851 and after visiting numerous YMCA’s in England decided “to transplant it to the US. As the century progressed, the Association spread rapidly, launching recreational, social and educational programs to promote Protestant virtues such as honesty, temperance and industriousness.

⁵⁷ Lupkin, ‘Manhood Factories’, 40-64. See also Weibe, *The Search for Order*, 3.

balance across the various systems in vogue with a focus upon ‘the all-round man’. Early support came from American Congregationalist clergyman and social reformer Henry Ward Beecher in Brooklyn, New York who was among the first to advocate building gymnasiums and bowling alleys in every YMCA to provide ‘physical exercise that put a muscle on a man’.⁵⁸ Amazed at the growing proliferation of gymnasiums, a preacher extolled its newly discovered potential in the Y’s newsletter, *The Watchman* in 1885:

‘It used to be considered a wicked place, a place for pugilists to get a muscle, a training school for manufacturing ‘Heenans.’ Now what do you see there? College professors swinging dumbbells, millionaires turning somersaults, lawyers upside down hanging by one foot, doctors of divinity with coats off punching a bag, sending out blows as if in a controversy... dyspeptics on a rope ladder, old age dancing itself young...’⁵⁹

Diversifying in a way the YMCAs in England never did, American branches began to line up with colleges and universities in order to manage their facilities and activities more professionally, and physical education and the gymnasium grew from minor attractions into the defining features of the organization.⁶⁰ The growing need for physical directors (another term to refer to international secretaries involved in physical work) to staff the YMCA’s facilities was largely met by Springfield College, first known as the *School of Christian Workers* in 1885 and later renamed the *International YMCA Training School*.⁶¹ There, influential physical educator

⁵⁸ Beecher was well known for his emotive oratory and writings on the need to promote healthier Christians and more godliness in the land. See, Baker, ‘To Pray or to Play?’, 200.

⁵⁹ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 248-249.

⁶⁰ Baker, ‘To Pray or to Play’, 201. Baker suggests that the Y’s in England were less secular, more focused on anti-amusement and much less involved with the kind of campus organizations available in the US.

⁶¹ Founded the same year at the organization of the American Association of Physical Education, the College was later renamed *The International YMCA Training School, Springfield College* with its counterpart in the West called *George Williams College*.

Luther Halsey Gulick, a registered physician blending his physical education expertise with his medical training gave the movement its first philosophy, raised the physical director's status to that of a profession, and built an internationally famous curriculum for his training.⁶² The son of missionaries, Gulick organized every detail of Springfield's program of physical training and correspondence courses and, as the first international secretary, stimulated the YMCA's relentless drive to extend its work to foreign places.⁶³ 'This international secretary', he explained, 'ought to be a sort of physical evangelist to go up and down the land looking after gymnasiums to see that they are run properly and to preach to the physical directors the value of exercises.'⁶⁴ 'Associations are working for young men, not simply for their bodies, minds and souls', he urged, 'but for the salvation, development and training of the whole man, complete as God made him'.⁶⁵ To do this work, of course, also required missionaries to sustain their own health through exercise, 'to be strong and ever aggressive for the Master'.⁶⁶ Missionary athleticism then, was both therapeutic and evangelical; healthy bodies were loved by God. 'In becoming a kind of priesthood of believers in the gospel of muscular Christianity', says Baker,

⁶² Gulick's well known YMCA upside down triangular symbol joining together body-mind-spirit, built upon G. Stanley Hall's views on Recapitulation Theory which saw each individual moving through specific stages of mental, physical and spiritual development with the right kind of training and support. His emphasis on play, dance and team sports focused upon community building, character development and social hygiene. Putney, 'Luther Gulick', 144-169.

⁶³ As Putney points out the Anglo-American boy was hardly the only target of Protestant missionary endeavor and drew strength from Anglo-American imperialism as well as the call for service in the dark places of the earth. Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 127.

⁶⁴ Green, 'The Physical Evangelist', 13.

⁶⁵ Leonard and Affleck, *A Guide to the History of Physical Education*, 322. Gustav-Wrathall shows how they coined the term scientific 'man making' to describe the strategy of moral and physical reform, bringing in medical experts to apply the most recent scientific knowledge to their physical and sex education programs. 'YMCA leaders believed they should bring Jesus Christ into the gymnasium and the doctor's office'. Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger*, 5.

⁶⁶ Pratt, 'Breaking the Shell and Spell of Centuries', 212.

‘the Y solved the perennial problem of all ideological movements; the need to translate prophetic inspiration into organized form and ritual’.⁶⁷

The physical director was thus tasked with imparting these values while gaining a secure foothold overseas, not only in Japan, Hawaii, China, and the Philippines but in India as well where Elmer Berry from Springfield spent a year in 1901-2.⁶⁸ The general atmosphere in India notes David, was definitely not conducive to the growth of the YMCA movement, given the exploitative colonial economic system that had left India depleted and underdeveloped.⁶⁹ Hence it took several years for the Y and its secretaries to find avenues through which to develop and promote their programs. Elmer Berry was followed in 1906 by John Henry Gray (Springfield Class of 1904), among whose missions was to establish a program of health and physical education in the main Calcutta YMCA. Newly trained as a medical doctor at Columbia University, Gray, himself born to missionary parents in Pithoragarh, India, set out to introduce ‘character building sports and scientific health education’, address local health problems and shift what he perceived to be a dull, monotonous and authoritarian public school physical training system based on British army calisthenics and Maclaren’s gymnastic system to his American model of ‘all sports for all’.⁷⁰ The need was critical, he noted, for ‘with the passing away of yogic exercise and the abandoning of Sivaji type of work, we have come to... the almost complete collapse of any spirited or aggressive work in the period just preceding the early

⁶⁷ Baker, ‘To Pray or to Play?’, 198.

⁶⁸ Hopkins points out that the foreign ventures of the YMCA were already extensive by this period though largely uncoordinated. Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 315. When the first American secretary went to India in 1875, Bombay was a leading YMCA entity along with 18 others. Madras, Bombay and Calcutta were the pivots of the work in India. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 5.

⁶⁹ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 7.

⁷⁰ Andrews, ‘Physical Education in India’, 13-14.

contacts with the West'.⁷¹ Writing about physical education for boys in Indian schools, Andrews concluded that until the first decade of the 20th century, physical education in schools had been a sorry failure.⁷² Six years into his stay, Gray was appointed senior physical director for the Indian National Council, drawing grants from the British Imperial government to assist him and five others who arrived on tours of duty from the YMCA.⁷³ 'The entire Indian community', he noted hopefully, 'was eager to undertake a more widespread and general type of physical education'.⁷⁴ Foremost among their tasks was the training of indigenous secretaries in accordance with the international committee's developing resolution to foster, rather than repel, native control of all foreign YMCA's given the problematic costs of training and maintenance and the need to reach further into poverty stricken rural areas. Indeed, indigenization of the leadership in the Indian Y was becoming a key focus of the organization. As a result, by 1920 the number of American physical directors had dwindled, despite some tension regarding their conformity to American standards, and more importantly because most of the more than 9000 members of the YMCAs in India were Hindus not Christians.⁷⁵ It was not at all surprising, therefore, that indigenous physical activities such as dundhals and bhaskis, and games like chal-bhair-du-du, kho-kho, and

⁷¹ Gray, 'The Development of Physical Education', 86. The causes, he said, '...were to be found in famine, poverty, disease, wars, defective diet, early marriage, purdah, ascetic ideals and associated social and religious custom. The physical condition of the people was such that they were said to have been the poorest race physically of any people on earth'.

⁷² Andrews, 'Physical Education for Boys', 19.

⁷³ Indeed, according to Kingman, physical training had gained such a fast hold in India that the Y was only able to control and direct a small part of it. Kingman, 'Physical Education', 45.

⁷⁴ Kingman, 'Physical Education', 54. See also Gray, 'India's Physical Renaissance', 341-347. Fischer-Tiné's extensive discussion of the YMCA's physical education schemes in India establishes Gray's influence as the Y's first professional physical director in India. Fischer-Tiné, 'Fitness for Modernity'.

⁷⁵ The focus was moving from the 4-fold development of man to one of community service. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 199. See also Davidann, *A World of Crisis and Progress*, 26. By the end of WW1 the YMCA missionary goals were changing fairly dramatically, evolving from a bible-carrying group emphasizing individual salvation into a professional cadre stressing regeneration through social engineering. Attitudes to physical education were similarly in flux.

atya-patya were finding a place within the YMCA's training models in India in rural areas as well as cities, alongside basketball tournaments, playgrounds and athletic pursuits.⁷⁶

Nor were Y physical education officials in India lacking inspiring examples from other foreign parts. Charles Harold McCloy had been appointed by the American Y as Secretary of the Department of Physical Education in the National Council of the YMCA of China in 1913 and by the 1920s he had become a veritable institution in the world of Chinese physical education. Not only had he published 14 books and numerous articles in his popular journal *Physical Education Quarterly* for his Chinese students, they were written in Chinese under his pen name of *Mai Kele*. He was, says Morris, hugely influential, 'an American writing under a Chinese name for a Chinese audience about Chinese progress, in Western defined terms'.⁷⁷ When John Henry Gray was moved on to China by the Y leadership after 12 years in India, he observed that physical culture occupied a significant intercultural zone in China where traditional activities such as martial arts and wushu were becoming accepted as modern forms of physical endeavor. Like McCloy, he too wrote some articles on physical education using his Chinese name, *Ge-lei*, but never with quite the intercultural dedication (or, according to Morris, the 'slip into otherness') of McCloy.

The arrival of Harry Crowe Buck: Addressing competing physical education systems

When American evangelist, Harry Crowe Buck arrived with his wife Marie, who was also a physical educator, to direct the National YMCA School of Physical Education in Madras

⁷⁶ 'In the field of physical education there is much that India can accept from the West, while her contribution in return will not be in the least as insignificant'. Salam, *Physical Education in India*, 19. *Dhundal and Bhaski* is an ancient branch of hatha yoga, which is associated with slow movements.

⁷⁷ Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*, 58. When McCloy returned to the US after 13 years in China, he continued his work for the YMCA as Secretary for Research in Physical Education, National Council of the YMCA in New York City until 1930. Between 1928 and 1930 he also was a lecturer at Teachers College before moving to the University of Iowa for the rest of his career.

in September 1919, following his training at Springfield College (class of 1910), he was not slow to notice the variety of competing ‘systems’ of physical education, culture and training being exploited and urged at this time in India.⁷⁸ Nor was he blind to the state of social and political ferment in India at that time surrounding nationalism, anti-colonialism and abject poverty and its effects upon the health of the indigenous population. He noted ‘with teachings of centuries back to the effect that all physical labor is degrading, India’s boys grow up enjoying the very minimum of physical exertion. There is none of the “hardy boy” life which we know in America’.⁷⁹ Buck would also have been aware of the growing discontent among Indians themselves about the burdens of colonialism and ways in which they might develop forms of ‘muscular’ resistance. ‘The problem of national education in India’, proclaimed Indian freedom fighter Lala Lajpat Rai was that ‘the state of physical education within the subcontinent had become a matter of national concern, a problem of the first magnitude that required all Indian men to apply themselves to its solution with all the energy and force of soul they possess. A nation that is physically weak and degenerated can never achieve true freedom, and if freedom comes to such a nation it will never be able to preserve and maintain it’.⁸⁰

Buck took particular notice of Abdul Salam’s dejected view in *Physical Education in India*, published some years before, which attempted to define the elastic relationships among sport, athleticism and national identity while tacitly accepting orientalist views of Indian

⁷⁸ E.C. Earl and W.D. Healy also arrived to work in Lahore and Rangoon. According to David, the Madras YMCA was ‘truly the first Indian YMCA because its membership was open to all Indians irrespective of race, caste or creed. As a result, the Madras YMCA became a model for most other associations in India’. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 30. Marie Buck (nee Dixon) came from Kansas but we have not been able to establish where she was trained in the US. On Buck’s death in 1943 she took over his work at the College.

⁷⁹ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 169. Of course, as Shyam records, there was a rich Indian physical culture including archery, fighting with clubs and mace, wrestling, riding, running, swimming, chariot racing and various martial games. Chandra, ‘The Development of Physical Education in India’, 22-24.

⁸⁰ Harry Buck, ‘Physical Education in India’, 1921, folder BV1060 15 B8 RARE - Physical Education in India, Rare Books Collection, Springfield College Archives and Special Collections, Springfield College, Massachusetts, 1. Rai, *The Problem of National Education in India*, 255.

effeteness.⁸¹ ‘We despise more or less the indigenous physical exercises of the East such as wrestling, practice with “mudghut” clubs, dun, archery etc., taunting those who practice them as pahalwans or wrestlers, and at the same time we have failed to take to the manly Western games such as tennis football, cricket etc’.⁸² Salam’s lament was echoed by the colonial government’s recommendation that ‘steps should be taken to remove the defect in character training of Indian youth [by providing] compulsory physical training and games and drill’.⁸³

Affable and adaptable, and building upon the work of T.K. Paul who had ably organized emergency YMCA war work in India during WW1 with a special focus on rural reconstruction, Buck worked tirelessly to at least modify Salam’s views. Like his more recent predecessors he was an ardent supporter of programs that catered to the ‘interests and needs of those participating in it’, rather than following the ‘outmoded method of merely attempting to develop physical strength’.⁸⁴ India and her needs could be best served, he felt, by a conscious attempt to encourage scientific physical training thus ‘raising the physical status of her people’, a practice deemed to have been missing outside of the *Kshatriya* or warrior castes in ancient India.⁸⁵ He envisioned Madras as the ‘Boston of India’,⁸⁶ by setting up the first training school for Indian physical directors in India supported partly by the Massey Foundation.⁸⁷ There he conducted a nine months training program for Indian ‘drillmasters’ before sending them out to teach physical education in the city’s public schools. Often referred to as the ‘Cinderella of the school staff’,

⁸¹ Indeed, notions concerning the effeteness of Bengali men had become sedimented among the English in India and Hindu reformers as well as Y officials. Valiani, *Militant Publics*, 38.

⁸² Salam, *Physical Education*, 18-19.

⁸³ Andrews, ‘Physical Education in India’, 12.

⁸⁴ Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration Volume*, 248.

⁸⁵ Buck, ‘Physical Education in India’, 1.

⁸⁶ ‘Madras might well be called the Boston of India. Her schools, colleges and universities under Government or Mission Control make her our great education center’. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 168.

⁸⁷ Vincent Massey who then served as the High Commissioner of London from Canada provided \$35,000 toward the cost of the college building. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 176.

drillmasters were underpaid, dressed poorly, and were required to do many menial tasks. They received little training to that point and tended to favor esoteric callisthenic routines picked up most likely during a stint in the British army.⁸⁸ Outside of these training activities, Buck reported carrying out routine inspections of hygienic and sanitary features and physical activities within schools, organizing interschool athletic meets, introducing recreational programs, creating standard physical tests for Indian boys and playing advisor to the provincial government in all matters of physical education and training.⁸⁹ Increasingly conscious of the pressing need to expand the scope of his training activities he orchestrated a move to more spacious facilities in Royapettah on the outskirts of the city in 1928, where he developed a one year course for those with a college degree and shorter courses for those without, as well as a boy's hostel to support clubs, socials and games.⁹⁰ Jack Dunderdale, a Canadian, provided the leadership in *Boy's Work* by training leaders in program building, group discussions, camping and athletic clubs to mitigate the harsh life of poor youth.⁹¹ In 1932, supported with funds from the government of Madras the campus shifted to a 65 acre site in Saidapet and was designated a YMCA College of Physical Education.⁹²

By this time Buck was writing and speaking openly of plans for a more diversified curriculum. His hope was that his students would go out 'as emissaries of a new conception of life for the youth of India', interpreting the goal of physical education as 'education of the whole man through the medium of physical activities'.⁹³ He insisted, for example, upon hiring a

⁸⁸ Johnson, *The History of YMCA*, 254; Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration Volume*, 21.

⁸⁹ Buck, 'Physical Education in India', 3.

⁹⁰ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 231.

⁹¹ Ibid, 77.

⁹² Harry Buck, 'The YMCA College of Physical Education- Its Purpose', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 255.

⁹³ Harry Buck, 'Physical Education- Its Place and Value in Modern Life', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 229.

medical officer to provide health education to those attending the College. He was also of the opinion that ‘if India was to be saved she must save herself through combining various indigenous exercises with western type exercises and games’.⁹⁴ In this sense, as Jun Xing notes of a number of similar YMCA international secretaries at the time such as McCloy in China, he became a sort of cultural frontiersman where his cross cultural experiences increasingly transformed his understanding and interpretations of the Christian mission, of his own cultural identity, and indeed his personal and professional views concerning the values of particular forms of physical culture.⁹⁵

In 1933, George Andrews summed up the situation in India that many Y international secretaries like Buck found themselves in. ‘One becomes conscious of the fact that a large number of the many varieties of physical education that are found in the world are bidding for recognition or a place of prominence here and there, and that India is perhaps the ‘hot spot’ of all the nations in the world in this particular. In other words, there are a larger number of the so-called systems or bands of physical education, culture and training being exploited and urged at this time in India than in any country in the world’. The outstanding of these systems are as follows, he continued:

1. ‘The indigenous system emphasizing the yoga-āsanas, breathing exercises, Surya-Namaskars, exercises with lezim, karla or heavy Indian clubs, single sticks, double sticks, and other indigenous games like atya-patya, kho-kho, kabaddi, etc.

⁹⁴ Buck, ‘Physical Education in India’, 1.

⁹⁵ Xing, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution*, 14.

2. The physical culture cults of Ramamurthy, K.V. Iyer, Krishna Rao, and others which are similar to those of strongmen Sandow, Liederman, Atlas, Maxick, Hercules and others in the West.⁹⁶
3. The Western systems of physical education, as existing in Europe and America inclusive of Ling's Swedish, Niels Bukh's Danish, Jahn's German systems of physical training and marching, and the Anglo-Saxon systems of games and athletic sports
4. The systems of physical training as emphasized by the boy scout organizations of Baden Powell, or national youth organizations, and by the military groups through the University training corps unit
5. The YMCA system as advocated by the YMCA College of Physical Education whose purpose is to prepare educated young men to conduct programs of scientific physical education and health education throughout the Indian empire'.⁹⁷

Even while financial support was being slowly withdrawn from the National Council of YMCAs, Buck managed to incorporate aspects from most of these systems in his training where useful, writing about them in *Vyayam* – the quarterly journal of physical education he founded in 1924 and edited for several years. By all accounts, his energy and broad range of activities were quite remarkable, leading to his later reputation as the ‘father of physical education in India’, and his award of the prestigious *Kaiser-i-Hind* Medal from the Viceroy.⁹⁸ Contrary to many foreigners who had fled from Madras in the face of a threatened invasion from Japan in 1942,

⁹⁶ Singleton notes that ‘Sandow’s rhetoric was shot through with notions of exercise as religious practice, which made it all the more compatible with Indian nationalistic fusions of religion and bodybuilding’. Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 89.

⁹⁷ Andrews, ‘Physical Education in India’, 12. During this time, there were also competing, although less well-known youth organizations in Madras, like the Young Men’s Indian Association (YMIA), founded by reformer Annie Besant in 1914, which explicitly supported the Indian independence movement.

⁹⁸ S. Thyagarajan, ‘Pioneer of Physical Education’, *The Hindu*, April 17, 2003, accessed May 20, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mp/2003/04/17/stories/2003041700230400.htm>.

Buck had stayed on to serve not only his own students, but also to take care of the many needs of Canadian, British and Indian troops stationed in Madras at this time.⁹⁹ He was especially proud that the National YMCA College of Physical Education that he had established in Madras was widely considered a replica of Springfield College, 'its alumni having had the privilege of leading the way'.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, he harbored the view that the YMCA College he had developed was rather unique in its cosmopolitan nature and the opportunities it provided for inter-sectional and inter-religious friendships within an All-India Institution.¹⁰¹

The Indian YMCA and the first Indian Olympic team

*'Buck has given India a good start. He laid the foundations of the Olympics in India and for 25 years labored for its programs'.*¹⁰²

As a result of Buck's reputation as an athletic coach and demonstrated ability to work with Indian athletes he was recruited to train athletes who might participate in the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris. This was India's first organized foray into the Olympics and six athletes were recruited from five different communities across India to represent the country in different sports by Dr. Noehren, the National Physical Director of the Indian Y and Sir Dorabji Tata, Chief Patron and First President of the Indian Olympic Association. The identified athletes were all brought to Buck's training school in Madras, which was designated as the headquarters of the Madras Provincial Olympic Association. Here he allegedly trained them so well that every athlete broke his own record at the Olympics.¹⁰³ 'The future is full of promise', declared

⁹⁹ Latourette, *World Service*, 143.

¹⁰⁰ Chandra, 'The Development of Physical Education in India', 55.

¹⁰¹ Lady Armstrong, 'Mr. Buck and the Madras War Amenities', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 127.

¹⁰² C.C. Abraham, 'Buck and the Olympics', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 101.

¹⁰³ These included 'six gentlemen representing 5 different communities in different sections of the country'. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 172.

Noehren after this positive achievement, for ‘no country is more in need of a stimulus that will promote physical vigor among the masses’.¹⁰⁴ Andrews agreed, suggesting that the Indian Olympic movement had been a particular factor not only in making modern games popular but also in sending 24 athletes from India to Berlin in 1936 to demonstrate such Indian games as hu-tu-tu, lalkemb, lezim, kho-kho, kabaddi and also yogic feats.¹⁰⁵

Much credit was given to Buck’s *Book of Rules* which he developed to bring some uniformity to sports and physical activities across the country, although as Alter points out, it is important to recognize that rule – bound sport itself is a modern construct inextricably linked to colonialism. ‘Once a traditional game is defined and played as a modern sport it becomes an artefact of colonialism even if the motivation to formalize it as a sport was inspired by anti-nationalism and anti-colonial sentiment’.¹⁰⁶ Herculean in its magnitude the *Book of Rules* nevertheless prescribed programs and courses for both Indian and western sports and a wide variety of physical exercises.¹⁰⁷ Promising to offer ‘the best physical exercise of West and East’, Buck also adopted yoga-āsanas as a part of the YMCA’s physical education program even while acknowledging that yoga fit somewhat ambiguously into the discourse and practice of muscular Christianity.¹⁰⁸ His efforts were clearly helped with the increasing move of the Y to indigenize its leadership by training its secretaries in India rather than in the US. Such efforts, of course, did not go unchallenged, especially in light of increased waves of nationalist surges against British colonial rule and the developing focus of the YMCA upon community service rather than

¹⁰⁴ A.G. Noehren, ‘Indian Athletes at the Olympic Games’, 604. See also Majumdar and Mehta, *India and the Olympics*, 17-24.

¹⁰⁵ Andrews, ‘Physical Education in India’, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Alter, ‘Yoga at the Fin de Siècle’, 774.

¹⁰⁷ Buck, *Rules of Games and Sports*, 192-227.

¹⁰⁸ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 177. Mark Singleton points out that it was Buck’s successor P.M. Joseph who finally made āsanas a part of the YMCA’s national syllabus in India. Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 92.

missionary work. By this time too, it was apparent that at least seventy five percent of Y members were non-Christian such that Indian YMCA leaders increasingly worried about how to best respond to the growing violence and disorder surrounding the Indian Nationalist movement. According to David, in many ways the YMCA worked hard to adapt itself to the Indian environment, and although its indigenization was only partial it did take on 'more and more Indian colouring'.¹⁰⁹ 'A happy combination is always a wise procedure' noted Buck, since 'one cannot bring a purely Western program of physical training to the Orient and expect it to be a huge success... We need to be broad minded and calmly attempt to determine the value of activities in the light of scientific and educational principles, and not by their place of origin or traditional usage'.¹¹⁰ At the same time, of course, there can be little doubt that these schemes of the YMCA, albeit seen through Harry Buck's earnest efforts at hybridization, shared much common ground with Britain's imperial civilizing mission and the racial prejudices that were not well concealed in much of the American YMCA's work. The ideological basis of the Y notes Fischer-Tiné, 'continued to be predicated on the idea of fundamental racial differences between Westerners and South Asians'.¹¹¹

Seen through the activities of Y physical education secretaries such as Harry Buck, one can begin to trace how diverse forms of movement practices were being extended by a growing range of practitioners interested in a variety of scientific and aesthetic movement styles, as well as a continuing search for ways to address the kinesthetic and rehabilitation demands of a modernizing society. Studying the flow of people and ideas across national and colonial

¹⁰⁹ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 260.

¹¹⁰ Harry Buck, 'Looking Forward in Physical Education', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 250.

¹¹¹ Fischer-Tiné, 'Fitness for Modernity', 2.

boundaries is by no means peripheral to imperial historiography, reminds Burton.¹¹² One can see how notions of Western progress, scientific racism and imperial ambitions were all variously hitched to the carts of physical educators and sport and exercise advocates, while in turn colonies such as India borrowed the physical culture practices of their masters and tied nationalist activity to the currency of physical exercise and bodily empowerment. The result, concludes Budd, was an amalgam of cultural borrowing and cultural imperialism where physical educators, body builders, boy scouts, military officials, health reformers and many others adopted specific features of physical culture to achieve their own ends.¹¹³

Modern postural yoga was just one component of these transnational physical cultures, becoming adopted by the West in its search for physical and spiritual renewal while simultaneously serving to reignite nationalist struggles in colonial India as well as blending with muscular Christianity inspired physical education brought by the YMCA.¹¹⁴ As Alter has pointed out, ‘the ecumenical possibilities of yoga (and its plasticity) were almost endless, including everything from Patanjali to the YMCA’.¹¹⁵ Indeed the Indian Y had earlier felt comfortable enough to support the development of a Christian Ashram Movement designed to ‘give Christianity a native dress and to voice the Christian message in an Indian way through bible study and yoga’.¹¹⁶ Buck remained circumspect saying, ‘in so far as the yoga-āsanas are concerned we do not feel competent to express an opinion. We MAY find some day that they

¹¹² Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, 87-88.

¹¹³ Budd, *The Sculpture Machine*, 83.

¹¹⁴ Thus, one can see that the association of yoga with Western discourses of the body, health, medicine and science as well as its practice as a secularized activity was taking place in India both prior to and alongside its global diffusion. De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*; Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*.

¹¹⁵ Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 9. The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali are a collection of 196 Indian sutras (aphorisms) on the theory and practice of yoga. They were said to have been compiled by the sage Patañjali before 400 CE.

¹¹⁶ David discusses the Puri ashram set up by Bipin Chandra Sircar who willed it to the Indian YMCA in 1928. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 240.

can be used to good advantage for remedial purposes'.¹¹⁷ Theodore Roosevelt had a point, perhaps, when he noted that 'the thing I like about you YMCA folks is the way you mix religion and common sense'.¹¹⁸

Yoga, physical education and the Y

Exploring the inclusion of yoga activities in physical education programs in India, and their dissemination to America through the activities of the YMCA, Alter suggests that one might usefully rethink muscular Christianity through a consideration of yoga, since 'a history of yoga provides a more expansive perspective on ideas that are relevant to a consideration of the relationship between body, soul and power as well as body, mind and spirit'.¹¹⁹ He, and indeed others, have argued convincingly that when thinking about yoga and its transnational effects one must look back to Swami Vivekananda's visit to the United States in 1893 and the success of his talks at the Chicago World Parliament of Religions to fully understand the moment when the relationship between the body, morals and religion began to be worked out with reference to the exchange of ideas between India and the United States. Indeed, it was Vivekananda who had famously declared, 'You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles a little stronger'.¹²⁰ His impact in the US and his well-known treatise *Raja Yoga* helped set in motion a demystification of yoga's many benefits, helped along by Sri Aurobindo who, (albeit mostly interpreted through 'The Mother'), more consciously engaged with the body, sport and physical fitness in his ashram at Pondicherry. Aurobindo, explains Alter, 'found a distinctly Western

¹¹⁷ Harry Buck, 'The Place of Indigenous Activities in the Physical Education Programme', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 251.

¹¹⁸ President Theodore Roosevelt, as quoted by Johnson, *The History of YMCA*, 224.

¹¹⁹ Alter, 'Yoga at the Fin de Siècle', 760.

¹²⁰ Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man*, 59. The Bhagavad Gita, often referred to as the Gita, is an important Hindu text, spanning over 700 verses in Sanskrit and is part of the Hindu epic Mahabharata.

metaphor about the relationship between mind and body to be more programmatically useful than the home-grown literalism of yoga itself'.¹²¹ It was during these years that yoga practices came to be intimately linked with hygiene and fitness such that they could be relatively easily incorporated into the practices of the Y as a form of muscular Christianity.¹²² Swami Kuvalayananda, Shri Yogendra and others then developed them further, each working to transform āsana and pranayama into forms of Indian physical culture and physiological soundness, which then became accessible to interested physical educators through their books and at their ashrams.¹²³ In his various writings, for example, Yogendra refers comfortably to classic therapeutic exercise and medicine related texts such as R. Tait McKenzie's 'Exercise in Education and Medicine' which he would have had ready access to during his residence in New York with a group of medical researchers between 1919 and 1924.¹²⁴

As YMCA secretaries such as Buck came to appreciate the promise of the practical benefits of activities such as yoga to their physical education programs, they used their networks to facilitate the travel of fellow American physical educators to YMCA centers in India as well as to ashrams such as Kuvalayananda's Kaivalyadhama at Lonavla. Indeed, this seems to have been a de facto jumping off point for many Westerners travelling to India at the time with an interest in body cultures, or what one might call spiritual tourism. During the time he spent at Teachers College in New York to study for his Master's degree in physical education in the mid-1930s, for

¹²¹ Alter, 'Yoga at the Fin de Siècle', 763.

¹²² Johnson, *The History of YMCA*, 177.

¹²³ See Broad, *The Science of Yoga*, 24-33. In his review of Mark Singleton's 'Yoga Body', Smit points out that both Kuvalayananda and Yogendra were students of famous wrestler Manick Rao which should have encouraged Singleton to acknowledge the importance of wrestling to aspects of modern āsana practice. Smit, 'Mark Singleton's Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice— A Synopsis, Review and Personal Perspective'.

¹²⁴ Goldberg, *American Veda*, 111. Shri Yogendra set up a Yoga Institute at Santa Cruz before travelling in 1919 to the US and establishing the Yoga institute of America near New York. He worked there with naturopath John Harvey Kellogg from Battle Creek and would have remained had he not been barred by the US's implementation of the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924 (not amended until 1965). Rodriguez, *The Householder Yogi*.

example, Buck was immersed in an important center of experimentation and innovative change in education with a powerful faculty including John Dewey, Jesse Feiring Williams and Edward Thorndike who were all open to new ideas regarding progressive education and body-mind development. Williams, for example, led the physical educators in championing a mind-body-spirit approach to physical education over programs of what he viewed as mindless exercise and muscle building.¹²⁵ Dewey himself was especially absorbed with the Alexander Technique because it provided a special demonstration of exercises to unify the mind and body.¹²⁶ It is no surprise, therefore that yoga found a respectable place in an institution which harbored some of the finest educational thinkers of the time and a group of forward thinking physical education colleagues articulating what they called ‘The New Physical Education’.¹²⁷

Some traditional Y physical secretaries later came to worry about these progressive views, claiming ‘that a group of well-intentioned generalists had butchered YMCA physical education and provided no substitute in its place’.¹²⁸ More progressive secretaries such as Buck, however, had broader visions about the social and educational benefits of providing a wider range of physical culture pursuits, not just in India but in other international missionary venues, and he embraced the innovative perspectives articulated at Teachers College as an opportunity to provide a more enriching atmosphere for learning and a diversified curriculum.¹²⁹ Among particularly supportive faculty there, for example, were William Kilpatrick and John Childs who both served as consultants to the YMCA with a strong commitment to the social gospel and

¹²⁵ Gerber and Feiring Williams, *Innovators and Institutions*, 415.

¹²⁶ Dewey, ‘Introduction’, xix; See Jones, *Freedom to Change*.

¹²⁷ Wood and Cassidy, *The New Physical Education*.

¹²⁸ Steinhaus, ‘The Next Step in Teacher Training’, 138-197.

¹²⁹ He would have been aware, for example that at Teachers College and Columbia University a number of professors had long been receptive to yoga and were affiliated with ISVAR (The International School of Vedic and Allied Research funded by Pierre Bernard to accord yoga the status of an applied science and build better relationships between the yoga cultures of America and India).

social betterment through progressive and somewhat pluralistic forms of education.¹³⁰ Indeed, both believed that making mind-body-spirit practices accessible to individuals would support collective projects of positive social change, a major objective of the YMCA. Thus, as Horton points out, this kind of resonance between the mind-body-spirit language of the new physical education and modern hatha yoga was no accident. Both believed that making mind-body-spirit practices accessible to individuals would help support collective projects of positive social change, a major objective of the YMCA.¹³¹ It is worth reminding, however, as Takayama recently pointed out, that the relationship between the scholarship at Teachers College and international organizations such as the Y needs much deeper examination given its entanglement with the prevailing logic of colonialism at the time. Glossed over in the comforting histories of one of the most influential US institutions in the area of education is its entanglement with the imperialist project, colonial subjugation and the prevailing ideology of racial hierarchy.¹³² More specifically, as Fischer-Tiné has underscored in his extensive discussion of the Y's physical education activities in India during these years, in spite of its representation as a school for democracy the YMCA's supposedly emancipatory discourses and practices of physical fitness remained over-determined by the powerful influences of the colonial discourses of race. 'The program of the Indian Y continued to be rife with the imperial tropes of somatic Orientalism...' Indeed, he continues, '...the pervasive influence of deep seated colonial ascriptions and stereotypes is ubiquitous'.¹³³

¹³⁰ John L. Childs' *Foundations of Method* (1925) and *Education for a Changing Civilization* (1926) were required reading for the Y's group leaders. Xing, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution*, 171.

¹³¹ Carol Horton, 'Yoga is Not Dodgeball', 109-125.

¹³² Takayama, 'Beyond Comforting Histories'.

¹³³ Fischer-Tiné, 'Fitness for Modernity', 39.

It was during his time studying at Teachers College that Buck met up with physical education faculty member Josephine Rathbone and invited her to visit the YMCA College at Saidapet and other Y connected institutions in India.¹³⁴ Rathbone had interests in both the YMCA and in physical education in India having previously met and been impressed with the ideas of Indian renaissance figure, Rabindranath Tagore on his visit to Wellesley, her alma mater. She was keen to visit his school at *Shantiniketan* and discuss his views on physical education.¹³⁵ She had also become interested in yoga activities from discussions with Lieutenant P.G. Krishnayya, a student from the YMCA College at Madras completing an MA in physical education at Columbia. Indeed, her doctoral studies in therapeutic exercise and corrective physical education at Columbia University had led to a particular interest in the techniques of progressive relaxation, along with a desire to examine the potential utility of yoga postures and breathing exercises at Swami Kuvalayananda's yoga training course in India.¹³⁶

Jagannath Ganesh Gune had adopted the title of Swami Kuvalayananda and established the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Ashram in 1924 that became, according to Broad, 'the world's first major experimental investigation of yoga'.¹³⁷ Its principal ideal was the co-ordination of western and eastern thought, and '... by their assimilation, to work out a philosophy which will perhaps give

¹³⁴ Rathbone spent 7 months in India in the capacity of consultant and advisor in health and physical education.

¹³⁵ Tagore was India's Renaissance man - a visionary driven by a desire to change the world through his school in the countryside which later became a University. Sen, 'Tagore and his India'. See also Elmhirst and Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore: Pioneer in Education*.

¹³⁶ The title of her 1936 dissertation was 'Residual Neuromuscular Hypertension implications of education'. She might also have heard about graduate student Theos Bernard and his extensive interests in yoga and Tantric ritual in Tibet. Indeed one could gauge the interest of Columbia University in Bernard's activities through Columbia University Press's 1943 decision to reprint a thousand copies of his doctoral dissertation, 'Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience'. See 'Theos Bernard's Spiritual Heroism' in Syman, *The Subtle Body*, 116-142. Theos Bernard's extensive travels throughout India and Tibet to gain knowledge of esoteric teachings of yoga were documented in *Penthouse of the Gods: A Pilgrimage into the Heart of Tibet* and *The Sacred City of Lhasa City* (New York: Scribner, 1939) and *Heaven Lies Within Us* (London: Rider & Co., 1941).

¹³⁷ Broad, *The Science of Yoga*, 24.

satisfaction to the greater part of humanity'.¹³⁸ Kuvalayananda's more practical project was to examine the physiological benefits of āsana and prāṇāyama in generating a fit and muscular body, and to promote these activities through physical education in schools and colleges as useful to the nationalist project.¹³⁹ Claiming that such research could 'materially influence the national life' Kuvalayananda hoped his ashram 'would send out youths that will selflessly help the building of their nation'.¹⁴⁰ His experimental work in the scientific study of yoga, detailed in *Popular Yoga Asanas* through visual images and lesson plans, helped to rationalize procedures and integrate them into what would become the official Indian System of Physical Education. The details of his training course were published (in English) in the ashram's research journal *Yoga Mimansa* in 1925 for use in local physical education programs, but the journal also provided a useful introduction to scientific yoga for interested physical educators and researchers from the West.¹⁴¹ The net effect was to help accommodate traditions of physical fitness in India and indigenize muscular Christianity, replacing faith in God with faith in the nation. 'As physical education was defined more and more in terms of the physiology and the science of kinesthetics, āsana and prāṇāyama came to fill a specific niche within, rather than be seen as alternatives to the western system of physical education'.¹⁴² This western take-up of Kuvalayananda's activities thus challenged the notion that 'science and technology were the gifts that western imperial powers brought to their colonies as an integral part of the civilizing mission', and encouraged their use as a tool for subversive anti-colonial projects.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Kuvalayananda, 'The Kaivalyadhama', 1.

¹³⁹ Alter, 'Yoga and Physical Education'.

¹⁴⁰ Kuvalayananda, 'The Kaivalyadhama', 303.

¹⁴¹ Kuvalayananda, 'Editorial Notes', 1. He also insisted that yoga exercises should not be utilized in features of strength by bodybuilders and strength trainers. Lonavla, *Yogi and Scientist*, 371-372.

¹⁴² Alter, 'Yoga and Physical Education', 32.

¹⁴³ Seth, 'Putting Knowledge in its Place', 373.

Following her visit to India, Rathbone recorded some of her yoga experiences at Kuvalayananda's ashram in her memoirs, *My Twentieth Century*, located in the Babson Library of Springfield College.¹⁴⁴ She recalled that she had found the visit quite meaningful, carefully learning the series of āsanās or positions she was taught there. 'Kuvalayananda knew of my study of relaxation techniques at Columbia', she noted, though 'I can tell you that hatha yoga was not devised to help one to relax. Its purpose is really to make you strong and vigorous'.¹⁴⁵ Like many of her Y colleagues from America, although interested in other physical cultures, she was eager to confirm her belief that she could bring as much wisdom to India in the form of American physical education as she might learn from them in the form of yoga postures and breathing exercises. No doubt she discussed these while visiting a variety of people from all walks of life, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore who both extolled the virtues of the yoga teachings of Kuvalayananda.¹⁴⁶ According to Armstrong, when she returned to New York she was part of a fairly small group in the US that intimately knew the physical yoga āsanās, and part of an even smaller group who had taken a scholarly approach to the practice. In 1938 she taught a class at Teachers College titled Art of Relaxation,¹⁴⁷ integrating her interest in yoga with the 'broader goal of alleviating a variety of disorders... caused ... by the era's pathological level of tension'.¹⁴⁸ She famously invited yogis Bishnu Ghosh and Buddha Bose to give lectures and demonstrations in what she considered a common sense approach to overall

¹⁴⁴ Rathbone's activities in India and at Columbia University and Springfield College are discussed at greater length in, Vertinsky, 'Yoga Comes to American Physical Education', 287-311. Jerome Armstrong has also followed up on her relations with Buddha Ghosh and Yogananda in Armstrong, *Calcutta Yoga*.

¹⁴⁵ Rathbone, *My Twentieth Century*, 247.

¹⁴⁶ Nehru took lessons from Kuvalayananda in 1929 and practiced yoga regularly while incarcerated by the British from 1931 to 1935. Armstrong, *Calcutta Yoga*, 261.

¹⁴⁷ New York Times, 'Art of Relaxation to Be Taught In Spring at Teachers College; How to "Do Nothing" to Relieve Hypertension Is Aim of Dr. Rathbone, Who Will Include Instruction in Yoga Technique', November 30, 1939, accessed June 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1939/11/30/archives/art-of-relaxation-to-be-taught-in-spring-at-teachers-college-how-to.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Syman, *The Subtle Body*, 141.

health.¹⁴⁹ ‘Take away chanting and mantras, take away its cosmology, take away its philosophical underpinnings’, says Syman frostily, and ‘you’d have a yoga as Rathbone viewed it, that garnered university support and sage nods from busy reporters, though it was a yoga devoid of transcendence’.¹⁵⁰ In this respect Rathbone’s project, assisted by her YMCA colleagues on both shores, might best be seen as a small but illuminating aspect of the shifting spaces of bodies-in-contact in cross-cultural encounters and complex imperial networks between India and America.¹⁵¹

Alter concludes that what forms of practice like yoga do is render the whole category of sport and physical fitness somewhat problematic. Yoga, he suggests, can be understood to be a form of physical education and physical self-cultivation or to be nothing of the sort. It all depends on how the body is represented and experienced.¹⁵² In *Yoga Body*, for instance, Singleton similarly claims that during the 1920s and 30s physical cultural influences established themselves as a contemporary expression of yoga, influencing the ‘semantic and practical plurality’ of the once mostly spiritual practice altogether.¹⁵³ Kuvalayananda also reminded his readers that although yogic practice is ‘chiefly mental and spiritual... we have yet to know a Yogic exercise that... has no physiological bearing’.¹⁵⁴ In a number of respects, therefore, both physical education and yoga had come to be understood in the first half of the twentieth century as fundamentally aligned with modern science and the global flow of cultural information about health and

¹⁴⁹ Armstrong, *Calcutta Yoga*, 266.

¹⁵⁰ Syman, *The Subtle Body*, 139-141.

¹⁵¹ Rathbone married eminent exercise physiologist Peter Karpovich in 1945, dividing her time between Teachers College and Springfield College where he worked. Together they went on to help found the American College of Sports Medicine while she developed corrective work in physical education – later re-named adapted physical education. Vertinsky, ‘Yoga Comes to American Physical Education’, 300-301.

¹⁵² Alter, ‘Yoga and Physical Education’, 33.

¹⁵³ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 113.

¹⁵⁴ Kuvalayananda, ‘Editorial Notes’, 79.

wellbeing. From this perspective, yoga might then be seen as muscular Christianity's legitimate heir, most certainly becoming a popular item at local YMCAs.¹⁵⁵

Like his contemporaries, Buck frequently extolled the necessity of aligning the YMCA's physical education program with the 'truths brought to us by the study of such sciences as biology, psychology, sociology, and allied subjects'.¹⁵⁶ It was this attitude that would ultimately determine his approach to yoga, advising attendees at the Eighth Provincial Physical Education Conference of Madras not to debate 'over the merits or demerits of Yogic Asanas, or of Suryanamaskars' but to focus instead on '[determining] the place and the value of activities for the program in the light of scientific and educational principles'.¹⁵⁷ In essence, his programs were designed to put students first, with the question of implementing indigenous or foreign systems of physical training entirely secondary to fulfilling the participant's 'natural play desires' and need for self-expression through rhythm.¹⁵⁸ Perhaps it is for these reasons that historians of the YMCA in India still see Harry Crowe Buck as a visionary as they reflect upon the campus he set up at Saidapet with the zeal of a Springfield evangelist but the determination to forge a more capacious view of physical education amidst the bitter divisiveness of colonial struggles and nationalist discourses.¹⁵⁹ The campus, which continued to flourish in his absence, has expanded over time to accommodate more sporting facilities, a women's fitness center and a campsite for its growing student body. At the entrance is a mausoleum where Buck, fondly remembered today as a pioneer of physical education, was laid to rest on July 24, 1943.

¹⁵⁵ Alter, 'Yoga at the Fin de Siècle', 773.

¹⁵⁶ Buck, 'The Place of Indigenous Activities', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 247.

¹⁵⁷ Buck, 'Looking Forward', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 239.

¹⁵⁸ Buck, 'The Place of Indigenous Activities', in Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration*, 251.

¹⁵⁹ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 326-327.

*‘Beyond the basketball courts and the swimming pools, the tree-lined campus of YMCA College of Physical Education is a Salvador Dali painting come alive; butterflies flutter past in slow motion, an abandoned dock awaits its boats, barren trees pose dramatically against an overcast sky, deer strut away with their heads held high, and founder Harry Crowe Buck’s presence lingers on in the oldest physical education college in Asia’.*¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Buck died from leukemia and was buried within the Saidapet campus. Parthasarthy, ‘Survivors of Time – YMCA College of Physical Education’.

Chapter 4: Making and Marking ‘Orientalism’: Imperialism, Nationalist Struggle, and the Evolution of the Indian Performing Arts

Dancing ‘Oriental’: Western Interest in Asian Cultures at the Fin de Siècle

While the first case study considered how American organizations, specifically the ‘Y’, became involved in bringing Western ideas and values around health, wellness and exercise to India during the early 20th century, the second case looks at how aspects of Indian culture, particularly dance, became a source of enthusiasm and fascination in the West during the turn of the century, even while colonial powers continued to conceive of the ‘Orient’ as the antithesis of European Enlightenment and modernity.

Simon Gikandi asserts that the presence of the Other was essential to the process of constructing a modern European identity. Colonized bodies remained firmly outside the domain of modernity as a result of their professed backwardness, but nevertheless ‘functioned as...figures of desire; that which was outside the manifest framework of the dominant cultural signifiers was essential to their meaning’.¹⁶¹ Indeed, this was illustrated by the West’s fascination for Oriental culture, spirituality and religious practices at the fin de siècle and during the interwar period, stimulated by a variety of historical events including wars, the opening of trade or diplomatic relations and popular books, music and movies, that brought ideas about the East into public consciousness.¹⁶² Where dance was concerned, the Progressive Era, according to Jane Desmond, was characterized by a ‘popular and elite fascination with non-European cultures, [coinciding] with a rise in such “sciences” of codification as ethnography’.¹⁶³ Exoticism served

¹⁶¹ Gikandi, *Slavery*, 27.

¹⁶² David Reck, ‘Beatles Orientalis’, 84.

¹⁶³ Desmond, ‘Dancing out the Difference’, 35.

as compelling inspiration in important scholarly endeavors, as well as in ‘high’ and ‘low’ art of the time. David Reck has convincingly argued for the ubiquity of Orientalist imagery and stereotypes across Western culture during the 19th and 20th centuries, citing the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, religious groups like the Theosophists or Unitarians, the music of Claude Debussy, and the artwork of Delacroix, Monet and Van Gogh among others, as examples.¹⁶⁴ Modern dance and emerging trends in choreography during this time were also inspired by ancient Greek and Oriental modes and gestures. Patricia Vertinsky underscores how bodily practices were central to the cultural evolution taking place at the turn of the century, ‘...the dancing body...became a particularly conspicuous participant in Europe’s social, cultural and political life’.¹⁶⁵ Forms of Oriental dancing were popularized by Loie Fuller and Isadora Duncan’s barefoot Hellenic performances, Maud Allen and Ida Rubinstein’s recreation of the *Dance of the Seven Veils*, Tórtola Valencia’s passionate Spanish ballets, and Ruth St Denis’s ‘Radha’, among others. Hillel Schwartz describes how Duncan’s ‘earthward stamping’ and St. Denis with the ‘sensuous pulsing/writhing of her bare midriff’, for instance, indicated the arrival of a new and more natural kind of movement, a reaction in part, to both the figurative and literal rigidity of 19th century corsets and ballet. A Delsartian emphasis on torque and natural movements which used the whole body abounded, and a new model was established, ‘bound link

¹⁶⁴ Reck, ‘Beatles Orientalis’, 84. The interest in Indian religion and spirituality was further propagated when several Indian *swamis* and *gurus*, who had caught on to the West’s growing enchantment with the Indian culture and spirituality, arrived in North America to spread the gospel of Hinduism. Some of these religious figures found popularity and acceptance preaching a particular form of ‘spiritual but not religious’ Hindu doctrine. This was largely achieved through depicting Hinduism as a universal religion based on tolerance and understanding, and frequently invoking Christianity to ingratiate themselves with American audiences. In 1893, for instance, Swami Vivekananda, an important Indian religious and political figure during the 20th century, gave an extremely successful talk on yoga and Hinduism at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Attracting a well-educated, affluent urban cohort of mostly female followers and sponsors, Philip Goldberg suggests that Vivekananda’s image as a representative of tolerance and progressive spirituality would set the stage for subsequent gurus to flourish in North America. Goldberg, *American Veda*, 113, 78.

¹⁶⁵ Vertinsky, ‘Isadora Goes to Europe’, 20.

by vertebral link to the earth as to the heavens'.¹⁶⁶ These performances both stimulated and reflected the era's fascination with Hinduism, Theosophy and Christian Science at a time when modern dance was increasingly being used as a cultural export.¹⁶⁷ From its beginnings, modern dance was informed by vigorous debates about gender, nature and artifice and the meaning and procedures of staging human subjectivity.¹⁶⁸ St. Denis once proclaimed, for instance, 'to dance is to feel one's self actually a part of the cosmic world, rooted in the inner reality of spiritual being'.¹⁶⁹ If physical cultures are symptomatic and constitutive of social relations, Jane Desmond suggests that 'examining the history of their... change across groups can help uncover shifting ideologies attached to bodily discourse'.¹⁷⁰ The appropriation of Asian cultures and the performance of Oriental dances by Western modern dancers in the early 20th century indicated an ongoing negotiation in the social construction of race, gender, class and nationality. St. Denis, for example, evolved from her Delsarte classes and glimpses of Oriental dancing at Coney Island, a free style of dance that both appeared quite exotic and seemed unencumbered by any accordance to Indian traditions. Her dances were a 'mishmash of various Indian and Western elements', and her *pièce de résistance*, Radha, performed for the first time in 1906 and based on the Hindu mythological figure of the same name, 'was equal parts artistic performance and vaudeville novelty'.¹⁷¹ Karl Toepfer describes the mix as exuding 'the fragrance of the jungle,

¹⁶⁶ Schwartz, 'Torque', 75. Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter discusses how Francois Delsarte was important to the development of modern dance in America, particularly because of its broad applicability. His system of expression and gesture was first championed in the US by theatre actor Steele Mackaye and dancer Genevieve Stebbins, who taught courses and wrote books on the system. For more see, Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Body and Mind*.

¹⁶⁷ Desmond, 'Dancing out the Difference', 28-49; Olivia Whitmer, 'Dancing the Past into the Present', 497-504; Shlundt, *Into the Mystic with Miss Ruth*.

¹⁶⁸ Vertinsky, 'Isadora Goes to Europe', 20.

¹⁶⁹ St. Denis, 'The Dance as Life Experience', 1-3.

¹⁷⁰ Desmond, 'Embodying Difference', 36.

¹⁷¹ Desmond discusses the birth of St. Denis's long relationship with the East. She came across a drugstore poster advertising Egyptian Deities cigarette, '...the bare-breasted goddess Isis sat surrounded by huge columns and flowering lotus...'. St. Denis later wrote, 'My destiny as a dancer had sprung alive in that moment. I would become a rhythmic and impersonal instrument of spiritual revelation.... I have never before known such an in-ward shock of rapture'. Desmond, 'Dancing out the Difference', 38.

the menageries and even the cabaret with its mixed blood attractions - wildness, conjuring insolence...and a bit of the cheap bazaar'.¹⁷²

Said reminds us that this popular 'appreciation' of Asian cultures continued to be predicated upon the belief that the East was fundamentally lacking, and that the relationship between the West and the Orient during the early twentieth century was characterized by a distinctly unequal power dynamic.¹⁷³ Fanon similarly dismisses this concern with respecting the culture of 'native populations' as objectifying, and a gross oversimplification designed to confine the colonized Other to a narrow definition which could ultimately be used by the West to infantilize and justify in a benign and paternalistic sense, the need for their political subjugation.¹⁷⁴ In an atmosphere of political turmoil, Oriental dances of the early 20th century were produced primarily by Western perceptions of the East's fixity, by 'freezing it into some timeless zone of the primitive, unchanging past'.¹⁷⁵ For instance, St. Denis spent a great deal of her 1926 trip to Asia in keen anticipation for her visit to India, where she expected to find the kind of revelation and spiritual awakening she had long associated with Indian religion and culture. On her arrival however, she became horrified by the abject poverty, dirt and suffering of the Indian people, and eventually came to the conclusion, 'I am beginning to see that I already possessed the soul of India right here in America . . . that the India I had adored . . . existed now for me much more intensely in the depth of my own spirit than in the poor huddled beggars lining the roadsides, or in the politicians shouting in the assemblies, or in mobs silently resisting the government'.¹⁷⁶ From this perspective, the outlying regions of the world have 'no life,

¹⁷² Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy*, 340

¹⁷³ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Fanon, *Racism and Culture*, 35.

¹⁷⁵ Hall, 'Culture Identity and Diaspora', 231.

¹⁷⁶ St. Denis, *An Unfinished Life*, 286, 294– 295, 299, 301– 302, 292.

history, or culture to speak of, no independence or integrity worth representing without the West', and the strangeness of Indian culture becomes freely available to the West for normalization and appropriation.¹⁷⁷ According to Dickinson, since the real India suffered from such an essential lack, dancers like St. Denis could use their privileged position to create an India of her own, a place they 'already knew by heart – and the real Orient did not need to be consulted for its own sense and meaning'.¹⁷⁸ The Western presence, Stuart Hall argues, endlessly speaks, first on the behalf of, and gradually instead of, those it marginalizes.¹⁷⁹ Exoticism thus becomes yet another way to oversimplify the oppressed groups' cultural values by objectifying and denying them any potential for evolution or transformation.

This formulation, however, negates the very material effects that colonial bodies had on the development of a modern Western culture during the 19th century. Just as Gikandi has suggested that slavery was one of the informing conditions of modern identity, the material and ideological exploitation of Indian culture, religion and spirituality also enabled the formation of a particular European cultural sensibility during the Progressive Era. The manipulation of stereotypical Indian images by modern dancers for instance, informed the very basis of modern dance choreography itself, as well as shaping its core ideals; femininity, gracefulness, and free self-expression.

The Rise of Cultural Nationalism: Aspects of Dance Culture in India on the Road to Modernity

Jane Desmond describes dance as a movement discourse that frequently reproduces race, gender and sexual identity.¹⁸⁰ Especially vulnerable, she argues, are subordinate classes, races,

¹⁷⁷ Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, xix.

¹⁷⁸ Dickinson, *Dancing in the Blood*, 231.

¹⁷⁹ Hall, 'Culture Identity and Diaspora', 233.

¹⁸⁰ Desmond, 'Embodying Difference', 36.

and nationalities to whose dancing bodies are ascribed a dangerous, overwhelming sexuality.¹⁸¹ This has particularly been so in the case of the *nautch* girls, hereditary female dancers of the fin de siècle who were important and increasingly infamous figures within Indian society. From as early as the 16th century, India had a tradition of patronage and support from Mughal courts and East India Company events for the *nautch*, and its performers, who were typically involved in sex work to some degree.¹⁸² They were, until the 20th century, often educated, could inherit and own land, have more than one sexual partner and remain unmarried, their liberties often exceeded those of other ‘respectable women’ of the subcontinent.¹⁸³ However, the annexation of several indigenous princely states by the colonial government led to a loss of royal patronage throughout the 19th century, and efforts by imperial officials, missionaries and Indian nationalists to organize an ‘Anti-Nautch’ movement contributed to the demise of dance as an acceptable professional undertaking for women.¹⁸⁴ Its subsequent revival as a classical dance during the early decades of the 20th century, focused on establishing its origins in ‘Hindu antiquity’, indicating the heightened nationalist fervor preceding India’s birth as a sovereign nation. The wipe-out of courtesan culture formed part of a gentrification process aimed at marginalizing the *nautch* girls’ involvement in the arts and replacing them with a new group of upper-class female dancers and teachers, thus developing a ‘new’, more respectable dance form. Classical dance

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 47.

¹⁸² *Nautch* can be roughly translated as ‘dance’.

¹⁸³ Veena Talwar Oldenburg attests to this in her work on Lucknow courtesans, where she found the tawā’ifs classed as ‘dancing and singing girls’ in mid-19th century British Civic Ledgers. Not only was it remarkable that women could be found within such records, it was also the case that they were in the highest income bracket within their respective cities. Oldenburg, ‘Lifestyle as Resistance’, 262.

¹⁸⁴ The Mutiny had an extremely detrimental effect on the relative peace between native subjects and British authorities, and reports of Indian sepoys raping, mutilating and murdering English women with the help of the salacious *nautch* girls took a firm hold in the colonizers’ imagination. The aftermath resulted in stringent policies separating native and imperial subjects, producing close-knit British communities that discouraged any form of assimilation. Jagpal, I mean to win, 64-65.

continues to be a privileged performance art in India, but its origin stories are rooted in pre-colonial stories of an ancient Indian civilization.

Stuart Hall describes an approach to thinking about cultural identity which looks to the past for meaning, and is premised upon acts of ‘imaginative rediscovery’, which create a sense of unity and are imagined strictly along the lines of the nation state.¹⁸⁵ Fanon suggests that it is among native intellectuals in particular, that the demands for a highly static national culture and its continual affirmation ‘represent a special battle-field’.¹⁸⁶ Social movements, and discourse around the performing arts, particularly among Indian dance scholars from 1920s and onward allowed the development of a legacy of India’s classical heritage, which entailed a selective recuperation of the past.¹⁸⁷ Fanon describes how ‘native’ intellectuals were marked by a keen sense of attachment to tradition, viewing the nation’s precolonial past as a source of collective truth. ‘This culture, abandoned, sloughed off, rejected, despised, becomes for the inferiorized an object of passionate attachment’.¹⁸⁸ As a result of the trauma and alienation written into the colonial experience, a rigid conception of belonging and identity offered an ‘imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation’.¹⁸⁹ Gilroy suggests that this view of culture is ‘socialized and unified by its connection with other kindred souls encountered...within the fortified frontiers of those discrete ethnic cultures which also happen to coincide with the contours of a sovereign nation state that guarantees their continuity’.¹⁹⁰ The performing arts

¹⁸⁵ Hall, ‘Culture Identity and Diaspora’, 225. The second view focuses on the ‘continuous play of history, culture, and power..., identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’.

¹⁸⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 36.

¹⁸⁷ Leading dance scholar Mohan Khokar, for instance, cite a bronze statue of a dancing girl found in an excavation of Mohenjo-Daro dating back to 2500 B.C. as evidence of the ‘practice and prevalence of dance down the centuries’ and an indication that Indian dance traditions were firmly rooted in the devotional practices of the ancient past. Khokar, *Traditions*, 30.

¹⁸⁸ Fanon, *Racism and Culture*, 41.

¹⁸⁹ Hall, ‘Culture Identity and Diaspora’, 224.

¹⁹⁰ Gilroy, ‘The Black Atlantic’, 30-31.

played a central role in discussions and debates around India's political sovereignty during the 1920s, in the fight against colonial subjugation and its role in ameliorating an otherwise deeply divisive, painful, and fragmentary colonial experience. The politicization of revival, reconstruction, and modernization gave national attention, recognition and funding to certain dance forms at an unprecedented scale, with women, albeit mostly middle and upper-class women, at the forefront of these movements as both organizers and performers. Hall suggests that the uncovering of such 'hidden histories' have played an important role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements and discourse of our time - feminist, anticolonial and antiracist.¹⁹¹ Said too suggests that although 'grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment' have often had aggressively separatist undertones, in some instances they kindled the fire of the fundamental liberationist energy which encouraged the formation of important nationalist coalitions and initiatives.¹⁹² This includes the cultural renaissance of the 1920s and the more explicitly political *swadeshi* campaign led by Mahatma Gandhi, which played an essential role in the fight against imperial subjection. The revival and reconstruction of several artistic dance forms in India formed a subtle but integral part of the nation's freedom movements and the sociocultural reforms it inspired.¹⁹³

Margaret Walker has suggested that the Indian nationalist attitude toward dance was influenced by 18th century Orientalist scholarship on Hindu manuscripts and religious practices, which asserted that contemporary performing arts in India 'were only a shadow of those practiced in the long-past golden age of pure 'Hindu' culture'.¹⁹⁴ The *nautch* girls, by virtue of

¹⁹¹ Hall, 'Culture Identity and Diaspora', 224.

¹⁹² Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, xiii.

¹⁹³ Shah, 'State Patronage', 125.

¹⁹⁴ Walker, *India's Kathak Dance*, 11.

their involvement in sex work, did not conform to the majority's agenda or the 'modern discourse on tradition that was integral to the larger nationalist project'.¹⁹⁵ They were thus relegated to the peripheries of Indian society, and their contributions to the development of classical dance were erased from the definitions and discourses around Indian culture and history. The anti-*nautch* movement reached its peak by 1890's with the widespread circulation of a memorandum produced by Viresalingam, a social reformer from Andhra Pradesh.¹⁹⁶ Initially intended for the Viceroy of Madras, it distanced the practice from the authority of Indian antiquity and tradition. By successfully distancing the *nautch* from any 'real' associations with Indian culture, it could be easily dismissed as a form of prostitution. This process was indicative of the ongoing nationalist rhetoric; to modernize long held perceptions of Indian traditions as primitive or backward. As late as the 1980s, the leading male dance scholars in India continued to associate *nautch* traditions with corrupt Mughal aristocracy and East India Company officials, practiced by prostitutes who used dance to justify their sex work. Mohan Khokar, for instance, maintains that the purity of *Kathak* was preserved by men dancers, while women 'divested the dance form of much of its dignity and directed it towards sensualism'.¹⁹⁷ Projesh Banerji similarly claimed that the association of the *nautch* with 'lasciviousness' resulted in European travelers having a mistaken impression of Indian dance as an erotic art.¹⁹⁸ Gilroy laments the 'tragic popularity' of such ethnicist views of national culture, particularly for its harmful tendency to wipe out those histories that cannot be accommodated into its narrow conceptions of belonging, usually targeting already vulnerable subaltern groups. He has been critiqued in turn

¹⁹⁵ Thobani, 'Entertaining Subalternity', 63.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 62. Article 5 of the memorandum stated that this 'practice rests only upon fashion, and receives no authority from antiquity or religion, and accordingly has no claim to be considered a National Institution and is entitled to no respect as such'.

¹⁹⁷ Khokar, *Traditions*, 96.

¹⁹⁸ Banerji, *Kathak Dance*, 45.

however, for homogenizing contemporary nationalisms as purist caricatures, and for failing to recognize the global diversity of political movements during the 20th century.¹⁹⁹

Distant Pasts in an ‘Ancient’ Present: The Search for Authenticity in Indian Classical Dance

In 1970, Marshall Berman emphatically said, ‘...the search for authenticity, nearly everywhere we find it in modern times, is bound up with a radical rejection of things as they are . . . the desire for authenticity has emerged in modern society as one of the most politically explosive of human impulses’.²⁰⁰ The authenticity of the performing arts in India during the 1920s became incontrovertibly tied up in nationalist politics, with attempts to locate its origins primarily in Hindu religious practices and ritual. Inspiration was drawn from ancient sculptures and dramaturgy texts, objects which had a great deal of cult value.²⁰¹ In particular, Sanskrit discourses like the *Nāṭyaśāstra* were often introduced as the earliest text on dance, their origins suggested to be anywhere between 2 B.C. to 4 A.D. Walter Benjamin suggests that the uniqueness of a work of art lies in its inseparability from being ‘embedded in the fabric of tradition’.²⁰² By establishing that dance originated with the Hindu gods, and was propagated by a continuous lineage of male teachers and students, the art form thus was seen to have a ‘unique’ aura. Authenticity was indicated by its continuous presence through time, ‘the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning...its testimony to the history which it has experience’ and classical dance could thus be separated from any subsequent, degraded forms of the original that deviated from the dominant narrative.²⁰³ While dancing girls were accused of debauching Indian

¹⁹⁹ Laura Chrisman, ‘Journeying to Death’, 492.

²⁰⁰ Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, xix.

²⁰¹ Benjamin describes the ‘cult value’ of an object as having its origins in the ‘service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind’.

²⁰² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 223.

²⁰³ Ibid, 221.

classical dance, male dancers and teachers were celebrated for preserving its technique, choreography and form.²⁰⁴ If ‘authentic’ artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to fulfill or serve a ritualistic purpose, any performance that did not conform to modesty and religious propriety couldn’t be considered art at all. Unlike Benjamin’s Stone Age cave paintings and medieval Madonnas, *nautch* performances relied on an explicit display. What mattered most was that the dancer, and specifically her body, be potentially available for exhibition and ownership, and consistently remain in the purview of the potential patron. ‘With the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products’.²⁰⁵ By using their sexuality to aid in their profession, they distanced ‘dance as a performing art’ from its basis in religious myth and magic, and thus could not be recounted when telling its history. What remained were the vitriolic accusations from missionaries, social workers, and government officials alike that their art was artifice, and ultimately nothing more than a front for prostitution.

Becker similarly discusses how the state pursues its interests by giving or withholding support from artists, sometimes even using police power to censor or suppress them and their works.²⁰⁶ The colonial government and social reformers successfully used humiliating legislature such as the ‘Contagious Diseases Act of 1864’ or the ‘Madras *Devadasi* Act of 1947’,²⁰⁷ and coercion from activist groups to ban public *nautch* performances, stigmatize the performers and eventually criminalize the profession. Recent scholarship has attempted to document and

²⁰⁴ Khokar, *Traditions*, 97. However, dance scholars have since drawn comparisons between modern performance choreography and the *nautch* repertoire, both of which are ‘characterised by gliding or shuffling steps, slow turns and expressive gestures involving the dancers’ full skirts, sleeves and veils’. Walker, *India’s Kathak*, 7-8.

²⁰⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 225.

²⁰⁶ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 180.

²⁰⁷ Oldenburg, ‘Lifestyle as Resistance’, 260. Provisions of Britain’s Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 were incorporated into a comprehensive piece of legislation, Act XXII of 1864 in India; it required the registration and periodic medical examination of prostitutes in all cantonment cities of the Indian empire.

acknowledge the role of the imperial government and colonial dynamics in shaping the evolution of dance. While many East India Company officials frequently became patrons of the *nautch* during the 18th and early 19th centuries, the British government, along with missionaries played a heavy-handed role in supporting the anti-*nautch* movement. Hall asserts that the imperial force's power cannot be located externally to the colonized nation's 'true' cultural identity as some kind of aberration or 'extrinsic force, whose influence can be thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin'.²⁰⁸ Similarly, Said illustrates how the 'processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions', and by considering its effects, along with those of colonial struggle and nationalism, we get a picture of cultural identity that is complex, multifaceted and constituted as much by difference and resistance, as it is by alliances and shared histories.²⁰⁹

Such legislature led to the gradual erasure of hereditary female performers and their performance repertoires from the contemporary dance scene.²¹⁰ Although networks of *nautch* girls and other courtesan performers have continued to operate into the contemporary period,²¹¹ they occupy a marginalized place within Indian society. Becker's work is particularly useful here, as state censorship of the *nautch* has interfered with the 'distribution, rather than the creation or continued existence, of the works...the work can be done but cannot be appreciated or supported in the usual way'.²¹² Dance scholars like Jennifer Post have discussed how *nautch*

²⁰⁸ Hall, 'Culture Identity and Diaspora', 233.

²⁰⁹ Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, 12-13.

²¹⁰ In his study of *nautch* girls from South India (referred to as temple dancers or *devadasis*), Soneji's findings show that *devadasis* in contemporary Southern Indian society continue to 'inhabit and subsequently cope with the spaces of civic, moral and cultural margins'. Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*, 12.

²¹¹ Veena Talwar Oldenburg carried out an ethnography of a group of *tawā'ifs* from the Indian city of Lucknow during the 1970s. The *tawā'ifs* of Northern India were secular performers who were recognized as preservers of Mughal court culture, involved in shaping Hindustani music and the *Kathak* dance style.

²¹² Becker, *Art Worlds*, 186-187.

performers increasingly found their way into the burgeoning film industry during the 20th century as singers and dancers,²¹³ while Anna Morcom, has examined the status of the *nautch* during the 21st century, and the ‘complex ways in which the “underground” and “illicit” worlds of Indian dance interact with emergent middle-class morality’.²¹⁴

During the 1920s and onward, state support of Indian dance was limited to particular institutions and events, operated usually by the upper-class elite, which propagated ideals and values that supported the existing social order, mobilized the population for desirable national goals and diverted people from socially undesirable activities.²¹⁵ Purnima Shah argues, for instance, that the ‘processes of nationalism, state patronage, and sponsorship...selectively legitimized [dances] as “national” and therefore “classical”’.²¹⁶ The valorization of middle-class Hindu dancers and the associated ‘bourgeois constructions of art that [were] clearly rooted in an ethos of orthodox, domestic roles for women’, necessarily formed a space that the *nautch* girl, by virtue of her profession and reputation, could never occupy.²¹⁷ Indian cultural nationalists during this time were particularly invested in reiterating some of the very same images and discourses used by European intellectuals to discuss and essentialize Indian culture. This is indicated, for example, by St. Denis’s critical and commercial reception in India in 1926, during the height of the nationalist movement. Dickinson recalls that ticket sales were very good, and the English language reviews of her Indian dances indicated a general agreement among spectators that she had faithfully represented Indian dance culture.²¹⁸ Furthermore, Rukmini Devi Arundale, wife of the president of the Theosophical Society and oft-cited ‘mother’ of Indian classical dance, like

²¹³ Jennifer Post, ‘Professional Women in Indian Music’, 97-109.

²¹⁴ Paige, ‘Review of *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance*’, 152.

²¹⁵ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 181.

²¹⁶ Shah, ‘State Patronage’, 126.

²¹⁷ Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures*, 223.

²¹⁸ Dickinson, *Dancing in the Blood*, 231.

Uday Shankar, was ‘encouraged to learn more about Indian dance’ by the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova in the 1920s.²¹⁹ She would initiate the recovery and reinvention of *sadir* dance from the *nautch* girls of Southern India as ‘Bharata Natyam’, a dance form sanitized of its sexual connotations, based on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and thus worthy of being referred to as the ‘dance of the nation’.²²⁰ Her dance institute in Madras, India was funded by the Theosophical Society, and aimed to teach dance to young middle and upper-class women, so they may recover dance from the *nautch* girls and increase its respectability and authority as a traditional Indian cultural art.

The next case study illuminates some of the previous discussions on the impact of imperialism and nationalism on the evolution of Indian dance during the early 20th century. It follows the career of the Indian modern dancer Uday Shankar through the 1920s and 30s, examining his considerable success performing ‘Oriental’ dances for Western audiences, attributable perhaps, to his ability to pander to Western stereotypes of Indian culture. This case study also considers questions around the importance of authenticity and tradition in the Indian performing arts in this period through the auspices of Shankar’s critical reception in India, where he was accused cultural nationalists for being unfamiliar with Indian dance traditions.

²¹⁹ Thobani, ‘Entertaining Subalternity’, 68.

²²⁰ ‘*Bharata*’ may be translated to India, ‘*natyam*’ to dance.

Chapter 5: Uday Shankar and the Dartington Hall Trust: Patronage, Imperialism and the Indian Dean of Dance

Introduction

When Margaret Barr brought dance to Dartington Hall in the Devonshire countryside in the 1930's and arranged for Indian modern dancer Uday Shankar to perform there, it was one more step in the utopian dreams of its wealthy owners, Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst. The Elmhirsts were an unlikely English/American partnership awash in money and a shared belief in the idea that 'a new flowering of the arts could transform a society impoverished by industrialisation and secularisation'.²²¹ Paradoxically, the wealth – around \$400 million in today's currency – flowed from the fortune inherited by Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst from her wealthy Payne/Whitney parentage in the US and their dubious investments in railways, Standard Oil and tobacco.²²² Much of it became used by the Elmhirsts, according to long-time friend Michael Young, to further their shared desire for experiment and innovation in liberal education, rural life, agriculture and industry, pacifism, and a range of the arts including painting, pottery, acting and dance. Even before they had established the Dartington Hall Trust, which would provide funds for many of these ventures, Whitney money was flowing to a range of causes considered worthy by Dorothy and her friends, relatives and advisers.²²³

Unlike many utopian ventures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Dartington Hall was not a barefoot and sandals affair. Frequent visitor, George Bernard Shaw called it 'a Salon in the Countryside', a place hospitable to an assembly of talents, creativity and

²²¹ Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 100.

²²² Swanberg, *Whitney Father, Whitney Heiress*.

²²³ Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall*.

energy. As Ivor Stolliday describes it, although Dartington had the structure and the corporate organization essential for a charity of some scale, its true legacy and genius was individual rather than corporate. Projects were supported because interesting individuals came with good ideas and important work to do though lacked the resources and environment in which to do it. Some stayed briefly, others for years; some made an impact while there, others later. In almost every case, he adds, the time they stayed at Dartington gave them what was needed and thus made a difference.²²⁴ Actor and theatre practitioner Michael Chekhov, for example, who was resident at the same time as Uday Shankar, told his students that ‘nowhere in the world is there such an opportunity as we have been given at Dartington’.²²⁵ ‘In a way it was marvellous’, reflected Maurice Punch. ‘People felt that Dartington was the New Eden from which people would radiate like rays from a rainbow... It was something both absurd and at the same time extremely moving’.²²⁶ Behind Dartington, he added, ‘there were always the resources of the Elmhursts’.²²⁷

Dance initiatives at Dartington Hall and the support of Uday Shankar

According to Lorraine Nicholas, Dartington made a place for dance from the outset and was at the forefront of several waves of modernist dance innovation during the 1920s and 30’s.²²⁸ Hillel Schwarz, for example, has described how these early decades of the twentieth century were characterized by the development and dissemination of an expressive, operative, therapeutic and transformative variety of movement practices that he termed the new kinaesthetic of modernism.²²⁹ Certainly, by this time, an extended community of actors, dancers and physical culture teachers were creating a spectrum of body cultures that responded and contributed to

²²⁴ Stolliday, ‘History of the People Associated with Dartington’.

²²⁵ Cornford, ‘A New Kind of Conversation’, 191.

²²⁶ Punch, *Progressive Retreat*, 20.

²²⁷ Ibid, 157.

²²⁸ Nicholas, *Dancing in Utopia*, 21. See also Hall, *The Anatomy of Ballet*, for a critical appreciation of the work of leading dancers at Dartington Hall during these years.

²²⁹ Schwartz, ‘Torque’.

social modernity and artistic modernism. In dance, this included emerging trends in barefoot modern dance that looked to Hellenic modes, gesture and expressive movements flowing from Delsartian gesture and Dalcrozian eurythmic techniques. In addition, the ballet companies of Diaghilev and Pavlova were slowly beginning to change the social context of dance in England, Europe, and beyond. Indeed, says Nicholas, ‘the resurgence of ballet and the development of dance that looked to Hellenic modes were characteristic of 1920’s Britain, the decade when the Dartington experiment was founded’.²³⁰

It was not British developments in dance, however, that first influenced Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst to support a range of dance initiatives, but rather their idiosyncratic personal interests and life experiences in America, England and colonial India respectively. These would take on a unique importance in effecting support for dance and the arts in the early days of Dartington Hall, influencing the nature of dance activities that would be supported and funded and the nature of their international reach and significance. Indeed, it was the combination of their background, interests and experiences that contributed to their support and promotion of Indian dancer Uday Shankar’s career in dance in England and India. Linda Tomko’s analysis of dance in America during the progressive era, for example, provides the background to appreciate Dorothy Elmhirst’s early introduction to artistic and educational dance as she grew up in American society.²³¹ Born within a whisper of the White House, according to her biographer Jane Brown, Dorothy was confidently expected to live there herself one day. Orphaned at seventeen, however, she had devoted her energies and her money to various reforming causes as well as travelling widely.²³² As one of Mrs. Astor’s ‘four hundred best families’ and one of the

²³⁰ Nicholas, *Dancing in Utopia*, 9.

²³¹ Tomko, *Dancing Class*.

²³² Brown, *Angel Dorothy*, 1.

wealthiest women in America at the time, she encountered a variety of modern and folk dance practices at tea dances and salons, matinees and settlement houses.²³³ At a more studious level, she took classes with John Dewey at the New School for Social Research that she partnered with her first husband, Willard Straight and continued to support after his death.²³⁴ She was, therefore, familiar with Dewey's progressive views concerning embodied intelligence, 'not the faculty of intellect... but... the sum total of impulses, habits, emotions, records, and discoveries'.²³⁵ She also promoted liberal causes through *The New Republic* periodical and organized a New York Committee to provide grants to artists, dancers and writers managed by her secretary, the formidable Anna Bogue.²³⁶ She was thus helpful in creating conditions of possibility for innovation by emerging dancers at early moments in their careers even before marrying Leonard Elmhirst and crossing the Atlantic to Dartington.²³⁷

By contrast, Leonard Elmhirst's interest in and support of dance and drama would spring from a more diverse set of interests, set in motion through his upbringing as a rural Yorkshire squire, early experiences with the YMCA in colonial India and the close relationship he developed with Bengali Nobel prizewinner of poetry Rabindranath Tagore. Unhappy throughout his English public school and the style of his Oxbridge education, Leonard enlisted with the YMCA to do 'missionary' work in India and became, in 1916, the secretary to the American head of the YMCA in India. Growing increasingly disenchanted with the colonial YMCA mindset, he met and was influenced by Sam Higginbottom who was experimenting with new

²³³ Isadora Duncan for example, danced at Mrs. Astor's villa in wealthy Newport and for other society figures who hired artists to entertain their guests.

²³⁴ Willard Straight initiated the magazine *Asia* which Dorothy continued to support.

²³⁵ Dewey, *Creative Intelligence*, 67-68.

²³⁶ Named the William C. Whitney Foundation in 1937. See also Rauchway, 'A Gentleman's Club in A Woman's Sphere', 61-79.

²³⁷ Ruth St Denis received support from Dorothy's New York committee and later visited Dartington with Tagore during her 1930-31 tour of Europe. Devi, *Nritya*.

approaches to rural agriculture in India at his Allahabad Agricultural Institute. It was on his advice that he travelled to the U.S. and enrolled in Cornell University to study agricultural methods.²³⁸ A chance meeting at Cornell brought together Leonard, Tagore, and Dorothy in a triangle of mutual financial support that would last for decades, though it was Sam Higginbottom who introduced Tagore to Leonard as someone who might help in rural reconstruction efforts in West Bengal and support his school at Shantiniketan. ‘The villages around my school at Shantiniketan seem to me to be dying’, Tagore had said urgently in their first conversation about rural reconstruction... ‘Come to India ... try to find out what is happening and what can be done... Will you come? Then why not sail with me tomorrow?’²³⁹ Leonard, suggests Stolliday, ‘was clearly under Tagore’s considerable spell’. Dorothy was not and disliked the adulation that surrounded him. Nevertheless, he claims, Tagore visited Dartington frequently and gave the estate ‘its abiding internationalism and its continuing themes of reconciliation and understanding between the East and the West, of modernity and innovation combined with the practice of the arts and a respect for the individual spirit’.²⁴⁰

Deeply interested, Leonard persuaded Dorothy, who happened to be organizing the donation of a student union building at Cornell in commemoration of her deceased husband Willard Straight, to finance him in assisting Tagore’s plans in India.²⁴¹ Once at Shantiniketan, Leonard was increasingly influenced by Tagore’s rural projects and his educational philosophy, as well as his focus upon dance and the arts, so much so that he later co-authored a book on the subject, *Rabindranath Tagore, Pioneer in Education*.²⁴² Tagore, he said, showed him an

²³⁸ Rees, *Vehicles of Grace and Hope*, 59.

²³⁹ Elmhirst and Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore*, 10-11.

²⁴⁰ Stolliday, *History of the People*, 2.

²⁴¹ The funds were provided to build the Willard Straight Hall, a student union building at Cornell dedicated to her late husband’s desire to make Cornell ‘a more human place’.

²⁴² Leonard co-authored a number of other books related to rural reconstruction, including *Poet and Plowman*.

approach at his school, which prioritised embodied and purposeful experience rather than intellectual abstraction, constantly speaking of the need to use the whole body to dance out one's ideas, to use the wealth of language in movement.²⁴³ A number of writers suggest that Dartington's activities were directly inspired by Tagore's pedagogic methods, though these tend not to take account of the many developments in progressive education and the arts and crafts movement in England, which had a significant influence on the experiment. Furthermore, Tagore's views on education changed over time in relation to his own shifting nationalist aims in colonial India.²⁴⁴ Indeed, says Chakraborty, Leonard even joined in his politically motivated dance dramas at the school from time to time at community events.²⁴⁵ It was in the Devonshire countryside at Dartington Hall, however, which Leonard and Dorothy bought upon their marriage in 1925, where they came together to organize a unique space for dance and the arts that reflected their conflation of interests and allocation of various trust funds for their support.²⁴⁶

Given Leonard's affection for Tagore and the interest he displayed in the merits of dance and physical activity for Indian children, it is not surprising that support was found for Bengali dancer Uday Shankar at Dartington Hall upon his arrival in 1934. While Margaret Barr's School of Dance-Mime did not last long at Dartington, elbowed out by other more well known dance troops including Kurt Jooss and his company,²⁴⁷ Shankar found a ready welcome as a performer with his accompanying Hindu dancers and orchestra, and as a teacher in the dance school. Paula

²⁴³ Elmhirst and Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore*, 102.

²⁴⁴ O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore*, 202.

²⁴⁵ Chakraborty, *Rangamancha O Rabindranath*, 180.

²⁴⁶ The Dartington Hall Trust was set up in 1932 with one million pounds of Dorothy's money, merging the Land Trust, the School Trust and the Dartington Trust into one. Leonard was chairman and remained so until 1972. The other trustees were Dorothy, and two legal advisers, Fred Gwatkin and Pom Elmhirst (brother of Leonard). The Trust was a charitable one and hence exempt from British income tax. The rest of Dorothy's money was placed into two trusts for her 5 children, The William C. Whitney Foundation in New York for her American children and the Elmhirst Foundation for her British children. Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 298-299.

²⁴⁷ Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 227.

Morel remembered his performances at that time as ‘magical...as though the Gods had come to Devonshire’.²⁴⁸ One of his students, young Beatrice Straight, Dorothy’s daughter from her first marriage became especially enamoured of him and his approach to dance. At twenty, Beatrice was showing early promise as an actress of power and originality.²⁴⁹ She also had control of her own substantial trust fund provided by her mother, and was quite prepared to use it to follow Shankar and his company on a trip to perform in India. He was, she said, ‘a wonderfully charming, darling man, childlike and most beautiful, and his company was a great joy to be with’.²⁵⁰

Nicholas points out that Uday Shankar’s visits to Dartington took place at a time when his fame was at its height outside India, at the same time that within colonial India attempts were being made to reclaim dance from its former disreputable associations.²⁵¹ India’s long-established history of nautch (nautch can be roughly translated to dance) in the Mughal Courts and Company events, and the tradition of royal patronage for its performers had declined precipitously under British imperial rule. While at one time, nautch performers had been implicitly acknowledged as preservers of Indian court culture, receding royal patronage and the nautch girls’ involvement in sex work had given rise to anxieties among colonial officers, missionaries and western educated, local nationalist groups about respectable behavior. This culminated in an ‘Anti Nautch’ movement during the latter half of the 19th century centered upon Victorian and Hindu conservatism, resulting in the courtesan tradition losing its popularity and place in Indian society.²⁵² The campaign labelled all classes of dancing girls as prostitutes such

²⁴⁸ Khokar, *His Dance, His Life*, 91.

²⁴⁹ Carter, *Dartington Hall*, 128.

²⁵⁰ Khokar, *His Dance, His Life*, 95.

²⁵¹ Nicholas, *Dancing in Utopia*, 123.

²⁵² Jagpal, *I mean to win*, 19; Walker, *India's Kathak Dance*, 4.

that performing dance in public became considered improper for women, and to a lesser degree, men. According to Dickinson, by the 1920's, traditional Indian dance had become virtually invisible in urban India.²⁵³

At the same time however, a number of efforts were being made to rid traditional dance of its sexual connotations, and turned into 'an art that could be appreciated (and practiced) by middle- class urban progressives'.²⁵⁴ A string of performances by Western 'Oriental' dancers including Ruth St. Denis, Anna Pavlova and Maud Allan helped spark a renaissance of 'invented dance traditions', through their travels in India. As well, Indian cultural nationalists such as Rukmini Devi Arundale, wife of the president of the Theosophical Society, would find success in drawing relationships between Indian music and dance to Sanskritic traditions.²⁵⁵ This involved, in part, establishing dance forms' origins in the Sanskrit treatises like the *Nāṭyaśāstra* allegedly composed in the early 1st millennium A.D., which contained terminology and lists of postures, gestures and movements that were further developed by subsequent discourses.²⁵⁶

Hence, while sometimes acknowledged as a founder of modern Indian dance, Shankar, who never truly focused on the revitalization of any particular dance form during his career, remains conspicuously absent in any celebration of India's classical dance revivalists. The most common accusation is that he was untrained in local dance forms and relatively uninvolved in discussions around indigenous national culture, in a sense 'breaching the canons of Indian classical dance' by playing to his advantage as a foreigner with the right look.²⁵⁷ One is inclined

²⁵³ Dickinson, *Dancing in the Blood*, 230.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 232.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 231-232; Walker, *India's Kathak Dance*, 40.

²⁵⁶ Walker, *India's Kathak Dance*, 40.

²⁵⁷ Purkayastha, *Indian Modern Dance*, 54.

to look to India as being on the brink of sovereignty, still in the grips of a post-naught, social hygiene agenda, as having no real interest in experimentation with transnational dance techniques or fusion choreography. Purkayastha, for example, underscores Shankar's peculiar location as an outsider within the framework of Indian cultural nationalism, highlighting the many criticisms of his lack of formal dance education and systematic training in the genius and scope of Indian art forms. More than this, she suggests, he simply fell short of being endorsed by the key protectors of national culture whose verdict on authentic dance and culture was the one that mattered most to national cultural critics and artists during that time.²⁵⁸ His efforts thus became mired in the politics of nationalism and the conflicting roles of tradition and claims to modernity.

Nonetheless, the dancer's magnetic relationship with European and American audiences assured his popularity at a time of enthusiasm for and elite fascination with non-European cultures and exotic popular amusements.²⁵⁹ Best remembered for his tremendous success as an Oriental dancer outside India, and with little formal training in dance, he tended to rely on mental imagery and recollection to choreograph his work, playing to a body of assumptions, images and fantasies held by Westerners about cultural otherness and the Orient that Edward Said has described as an act of 'imaginative geography'.²⁶⁰ At the same time, 'Oriental' dancing, as popularized by Ruth St Denis, Isadora Duncan's barefoot performances, Maud Allen's recreation of the Vision of Salome, Mata Hari's erotic performances as a Hindu temple dancer and Nyota Inyoka's Hindu dance, was part of the era's fascination with Hinduism, theosophy and Christian Science.²⁶¹ Never having studied Indian dance, St Denis, for instance, drew on the images of

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 55.

²⁵⁹ Kasson, *Amusing the Millions*, 17.

²⁶⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 90.

²⁶¹ Desmond, 'Dancing out the Difference'; Bentley, *Sisters of Salome*.

India available to her in books and used poses that recalled exotic, oriental icons and popular images of the late Victorian era such as the femme fatale. Deborah Jowitt suggests that St. Denis ‘knew the East in her soul and didn’t vex her nascent choreographic powers with questions of authenticity’.²⁶² As the *New York Times* glowed, ‘the fascination of the Orient is eternal. Women’s clubs that have sipped tea over pretty much everything from Sun worship to Mental Science generally fall back on Eastern lore for things to be enthusiastic about’.²⁶³ In fact, Shankar’s performances, in a sea of Eastern inspired choreography of the time, stood out because of his ability to give an ‘impression of being authentic’ without being specific to any of the traditional Indian dance forms. Joan Erdman credits his unquestioned bona fide status to his Indian features, dress and ability to convey ‘Indianness’ through poses and Indian gestures. ‘Famous in his epoch’, she concludes, ‘but no longer widely celebrated ... Uday Shankar was an expatriate, a Europeanised Indian, a self-made artiste, a non-observant Hindu Brahmin, and a handsome presence who loved women’.²⁶⁴ Indeed, during the 1930’s, according to dance impresario Sol Hurok, Shankar’s audiences were typically filled with women who adored him. And in turn, he noted, ‘Uday adored women who offered themselves to him frequently and openly’.²⁶⁵

Female support and patronage at a number of levels was clearly an important factor in Shankar’s dance career and Beatrice Straight at Dartington was by no means the first to feel drawn to support his dancing aspirations. Despite his lack of formal training in dance he had been enabled to follow his artistic interests through the support of his wealthy, well-educated Barrister father resident in London and his influential contacts with British and Indian society at

²⁶² Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*, 131.

²⁶³ Mazo, *Prime Movers*, 72.

²⁶⁴ Erdman, ‘Who remembers Uday Shankar?’.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

a time of strong colonial unrest in India. While studying painting at the Royal College of Art in London under the patronage of William Rothenstein (an ardent supporter of Tagore and India's artistic heritage), ²⁶⁶ he met, and was invited to join the dance company of Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova in order to lend some authenticity to her desired production of two Indian themed ballets – *A Hindu Wedding* and *Krishna-Radha*. In 1923, he toured with Pavlova's company throughout England, America, Canada, and Mexico before returning to London in 1924 where his attempts to promote his own 'Indian dance career' were again supported by a female mentor - Indian socialite and reformer Lady Meherbai Dorabji Tata whose presence in elite London society and commitment to charitable enterprises was widely known. Through her involvement with the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, he was invited to dance in the 'Indian section' where he apparently made a great impression. 'Without knowing anything about Shiva's dance', he admitted later, 'I just jumped around. What I did God knows, but it proved a great success'.²⁶⁷ British audiences at the Indian Pavilion, says Stephen, certainly delighted in evidence of India's alleged differences from the west, 'including nautch girls, mendicants, magicians and sexually ambiguous Tibetan devil dancers'.²⁶⁸ It appeared that Shankar's early proficiency in packaging Indian culture as a theatrical spectacle for non-Indian audiences 'was perhaps a clear indication that he had received his primary education to Indian culture through English and European mentors, so his identity was largely shaped by Orientalist sources and their articulation of Indian traditions'.²⁶⁹ Indeed, Said's description of Orientalism as a 'style of thought based on ontological and epistemological distinction' that formed the basis of Western perceptions of the Orient helps situate Shankar's performance style, especially his older pieces that were frequently,

²⁶⁶ He recommended Tagore for the Nobel Prize for his poetry in *Gitanjali*.

²⁶⁷ Mukhopadhyay, *Uday Shankar*, 21.

²⁶⁸ Stephen, 'Brothers of the Empire', 182.

²⁶⁹ Bhattacharjya, 'A Productive Distance from the Nation', 483.

albeit loosely, based on Hindu mythologies, within the larger realm of Eastern-inspired or ‘Oriental’ dancing in the West.²⁷⁰ Not surprisingly, it brought accusations in some quarters of continuing complicity in propagating colonial images of Indians and the demonstration of imperial power, an accusation also made sometimes about Tagore, who claimed that ‘to worship my country as a God is to bring curse upon it’.²⁷¹ Nevertheless, Tagore’s efforts in establishing his University, Visva Bharati in 1921 with the claim that it provided ‘India’s invitation to the world’, served to ensure the staying power of classical dance forms like Manipuri and Kathak, and his legitimacy as a pioneer in the area of Indian performance arts.²⁷²

Two years later, while attempting to further develop his dance career in Paris, financial fortune smiled once again when Shankar encountered another wealthy female patron in Alice Boner, well-known Swiss sculptress and painter and authority on ancient Indian sculptures. Fascinated by his dance performances, Boner saw him as a model for her own art and deep interest in the human body, as well as a valuable vehicle for bringing Indian classical art to a Western audience. Together they envisioned the formation of an all- Indian dance troupe and went on an extensive tour of India in search of artistic inspiration and collaborators. Accounts of their travels describe their tours across India and Southeast Asia examining paintings and sculptures as well as observing a variety of classical Indian dances, before assembling a company of Indian dancers and musicians and returning to Paris to display their efforts.²⁷³ For several years, the Uday Shankar Company, including a number of Shankar’s own family, but financially supported and managed by Boner, toured throughout the Western world, successfully presenting a type of Indian dance that could easily be assimilated by Western audiences who

²⁷⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

²⁷¹ Mehta, ‘In the Shadow of the Nations’, 173.

²⁷² Hall, *Anatomy of Ballet*, 278-279.

²⁷³ Boner and Boner, *Alice Boner Diaries*.

were equally won over by Shankar's masculine charisma. Boner, it seems eventually tired of the responsibility of managing the company's affairs, arranging performances, designing costumes and stage effects, and perhaps of Shankar as well.²⁷⁴ Letters between Leonard Elmhirst, Boner and Shankar at the time detail an increasingly acrimonious conversation about the dissolution of the Company and its assets, and demands for the return of certain valuable items to the sculptress.²⁷⁵ Although Boner was initially offered a position on the Board of Trustees for the center, this was revoked by 1939 under unclear circumstances. One can venture a guess, as she did in a letter to Shankar dated March 4th, 1939, that this may have been a result of hearing things 'which made him feel that it was unadvisable to have [her] in that body'.²⁷⁶ More likely, this was due to Boner's demand that she be relieved from all duties and responsibilities associated with the Company, 'be it moral or financial'.²⁷⁷ Shankar himself seemed increasingly interested in abandoning the performance circuit and returning to India to set up his own school of dance.

Extending the Patronage Reach to Uday Shankar's India Cultural Centre

There are various reports on how support for this new venture came to fruition. Shankar's meetings with Rabindranath Tagore and his nephew, Abanindranath, while on his India tour helped provide some authority to his desire to articulate a new and modern Indian identity through dance. Just as Tagore lamented the decline of rural agriculture to Leonard Elmhirst, he complained to Shankar about 'India's cultural decline from a vibrant active artistic society to its current stagnant state', which he attributed to a combination of traditionalists' attempts to

²⁷⁴ Majumdar, 'Remembering Alice Boner'.

²⁷⁵ Correspondence from Alice Boner to Uday Shankar, 4 March 1939, LKE/IN/19/B 1939-1940, South West Heritage Trust: Devon Archive Catalogue, Exeter, UK.

²⁷⁶ AB to US, 4 March 1939, LKE/IN/19/B 1939-1940.

²⁷⁷ AB to LKE, 18 January 1939, LKE/IN/19/B 1939-1940.

preserve ‘corrupt traditions and the damages of colonialism’.²⁷⁸ This was not the first time such notions had been expressed. In a letter sent during his 1927 tour of Southeast Asia, Tagore rather ungenerously compared the ‘remarkable decency and beauty’ of Japanese and Javanese women dancers with the ‘obese bodies’ of Indian dancing girls, whose ‘chewing of pan’ and ways of ‘making eyes’ evidently offended his sensibilities.²⁷⁹ Shankar’s connection to Dartington Hall remained strong however, where a number of his supporters came together in the mid-1930s to finance plans for a dance centre in India. Alice Boner was known by the Elmhursts who, perhaps concerned with the level of Beatrice’s fascination with Shankar, were more than ready to agree to a plan to organize support for his return to India and help finance his plans to develop what was to be called the Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre (USICC). Beatrice herself is credited as the catalyst for the idea of such a centre in India where Shankar could study and teach his own approaches to dance, and she contributed a considerable sum of her own money to the project as well as contacting Boshi and Gertrude Sen in India about potential sites for the centre. It was the Dartington Hall Trust, however, and the Elmhursts’ many connections to artists, art critics, educators, scientists and politicians that together helped bring Shankar’s dance centre to fruition.²⁸⁰

Discussions began in 1936 when Shankar returned to Dartington Hall to join Sigurd Leeder’s Dance School and Michael Chekhov’s Theatre Studio for six months residence with his company. Originally a conception of Margaret Barr, the purpose built Dance School had opened in 1932, reflecting the *Festspeilhaus* at Helerau, the centre of the Jaques-Dalcroze Institute dedicated to modern dance and eurhythmics. Shankar was able to enjoy its expansive and

²⁷⁸ Banerji, *Uday Shankar and His Art*, 62-63; Bhattacharjya, *A Productive Distance*, 491.

²⁷⁹ Purkayastha, *Indian Modern Dance*, 36.

²⁸⁰ Mehra, *Nearer Heaven*, 532.

evocative spaces, as would modern dancer Rudolf Laban on his arrival to Dartington in 1938 following his eviction from Nazi Germany and sanctuary provided by the Elmhirsts.²⁸¹ Michael Chekhov, in particular, had a strong influence on Shankar's approach to teaching and performativity during this time and readily joined in supporting the Elmhirst's blueprint for the USICC.²⁸² According to Khokar, twenty thousand pounds were placed at Shankar's disposal by the Elmhirsts to begin the venture, and a group of twelve influential and illustrious sponsors and patrons of art and literature was enlisted.²⁸³ These included Michael Chekhov; John Martin, international dance critic; Jawaharlal Nehru, leader of nationalist movement and first Prime Minister of independent India; Sir Feroz Khan Noon, High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom and later Prime Minister of Pakistan;²⁸⁴ Sir Chinubhai Madhavlal Ranchhodlal, 1st baronet of Shahpur (and extremely wealthy patron of art and literature); Romain Rolland, French Nobel prize winner in literature and friend of Mahatma Gandhi; Sir William Rothenstein, leading British authority on Indian art and traditions, Leopold Stokowski, celebrated twentieth century conductor; Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel prize winner in poetry and literature; Mr. Whitney Straight, famous aviator and wealthy businessman and his wife Lady Daphne Straight (Dorothy's son from her first marriage and titled English daughter in law). Although Alice Boner was initially offered the position of a trustee for the center, Leonard later rescinded the invitation, perhaps because of an ongoing argument over the finances of the Company.²⁸⁵

Despite the extraordinary reach and patronage of this internationally well-known group of artists, writers and political figures, the USICC would last only four years. There were high

²⁸¹ Nicholas, 'Dance History as an Imagined Space', 137-140.

²⁸² Cornford, 'A New Kind of Conversation', 189-203.

²⁸³ Khokar, *His Dance, His Life*, 95-96.

²⁸⁴ Noon, *Making Britain*.

²⁸⁵ LKE to AB, 13 January 1939, LKE/IN/19/B 1939-1940.

hopes among a number of the influential sponsors such as John Martin who wrote enthusiastically that the Centre heralded a new era in arts education in India, ‘an idea whose time had come’.²⁸⁶ Others recognized a bundle of difficulties from the start. Tagore, for example, was so concerned about Shankar’s naiveté and lack of organizational abilities that he warned Leonard Elmhirst that he was ‘incorrigibly unpractical and needed to be saved from those trying to exploit him’.²⁸⁷ Organizational issues were compounded by the choice of the site for the school at Simtola in Almora.²⁸⁸ Situated in the luxuriant hillside of Uttar Pradesh at the foot of the Himalayas, a utopian location to some, Almora had been proposed by Dr. Boshi Sen and his American wife Gertrude Emerson Sen, long-time colleagues of Leonard Elmhirst during the time he was working on rural reconstruction with Tagore. In his extensive biography of Boshi Sen, Girish Mehra describes him as a plant physiologist, the saintly grandfather of the green revolution in India, a devotee of Swami Vivekananda, close friend of Nehru and Gandhi, and, together with Gertrude, ‘a kind soul in touch with some of the best minds in the world’.²⁸⁹ Not surprisingly, we learn from Michael Young that Leonard and Dorothy had provided financial support to Sen’s Vivekananda Agricultural Research Laboratory at Almora for over twenty years until he finally gained Indian government money to continue his work there.²⁹⁰ His relationship with the Elmhirsts had begun long ago at a meeting at Cape Cod in 1923 where he enlisted their support to set up his Laboratory in India, and it deepened when Dorothy organized an introduction to his future wife, Gertrude Emerson who worked in New York as a journalist for the *Asia* magazine.

²⁸⁶ John Martin, Review, *New York Times*, Dec 27, 1938.

²⁸⁷ Tagore letter, October 24, 1937, 2G LKE archive.

²⁸⁸ Khokar, *His Dance, His Life*, 97.

²⁸⁹ Tandon, *Nearer Heaven than Earth*, 199-203.

²⁹⁰ Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 225; Mehra, *Nearer Heaven*, 310.

Even with the flow of funds from the Dartington Trust, the location of the USICC proved problematic. The centre had opened in makeshift headquarters and efforts made to start a proper building were slowed by wartime activities and collections. Khokar identifies the failure of the centre as a result of Shankar's lack of administrative ability, his ambivalent attitude to education, and wartime constraints on finances. However, it was also generally understood that Shankar was ill equipped by temperament to administer a complex institution.²⁹¹ Among those who took responsibility for trying to work with Shankar during his Almora period was Gertrude Sen who acknowledged the closure of the centre as a direct result of the dancer's inability to save or spend wisely. She labelled him as recalcitrant and financially incapable, and pointed to instances of the dancer taking liberties with the centre's Trust Fund for his personal use. In a letter to Beatrice Straight in 1943, Boshi Sen lamented the dancer's outlandish demands for a £2000 increase in his yearly salary, noting that the center, which had opened only four years prior, was unable to take the financial strain.²⁹² Gertrude was not alone in placing some blame upon Amala Nandi, one of Shankar's dancing partners whom he married in 1942 and who then insisted that he should be demanding more money from his sponsors. 'You are the great Uday Shankar', she reportedly complained. 'You should have had lakhs of rupees by now'.²⁹³ Furthermore, while she increasingly took over the running of the Centre, there were growing complaints that her selection of dancers and musicians did not always prove satisfactory for either its needs or its audiences.

Acknowledging the glaring need for appropriate management to salvage the centre, George Birse was sent by Leonard to serve as an executive Director until such as time as Shankar could

²⁹¹ Hall, 'Honoring Uday Shankar', 337.

²⁹² B Sen to B Straight, 28 October 1943, LKE/IN/19/D 1943-1946.

²⁹³ Quoted in Mehra, *Nearer Heaven than Earth*, 538.

learn to assume control over his responsibilities of the centre. Birse was tasked with preparing financial statements and overseeing all budgetary matters though he became acutely aware of the difficulties posed by wartime expediencies upon their efforts to develop and maintain the centre and would soon leave.²⁹⁴ ‘Poor Birse looks worried and ill’, wrote Gertrude to Beatrice in 1941, ‘he takes the Centre’s misdemeanours terribly seriously and at the same time does not seem to have tact or common sense to correct them’. We may need, she continued, ‘to find a suitable Indian to take over’.²⁹⁵ As it turned out, that would not be necessary since Shankar was already considering shifting his energies to film making, including resigning from the centre and closing down its activities.²⁹⁶ In a letter to Beatrice on October 28th, 1943, he complained bitterly about the lack of help provided to maintain the center, his pending film production contracts in Calcutta, family difficulties, and the constant need for money.²⁹⁷ He faulted the Sens for selecting a particularly unsuitable location claiming that they had thought more about their own interests than his. Mehra recalls a particularly cryptic telegram from Shankar to Boshi Sen a year later concerning his final decision to leave and work on his film. In his absence, the Sens were left to pack up what remained of the center and close it down. And while Gertrude remained exasperated at Shankar’s inability to manage his affairs, Boshi, ever saintly, was said to have burst into tears at the prospect of the venture coming to an end.²⁹⁸

The filming of Kalpana: Uday Shankar loses his patrons

By 1945, Shankar had relocated to Madras to create and shoot *Kalpana*, the film that many

²⁹⁴ Letter from George Birse to LKE, Almora July 1931, LKE archives, Dartington.

²⁹⁵ Mehra, *Nearer Heaven*, 536.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 539.

²⁹⁷ US to BS, 28 October 1943, LKE/IN/19/D 1943-1946.

²⁹⁸ Mehra, *Nearer Heaven*, 539.

believed was his ‘real’ reason for abandoning his position at the center. Initially financed by the wealthy Sir Chinubhai, a trustee for the USICC, a report from Shankar indicates a falling out over finances for the film and a standstill in production even as late as February, 1947. Evidently the budget had been exceeded a number of times, and the Baronet, unwilling to make any further payments ‘washed his hands’ of the project entirely.²⁹⁹ The film, when finally completed, received mixed reviews, and while Purkayastha lauds it as an iconoclastic art-house film, it was never a commercial success.³⁰⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, who attended the film’s premiere, was alleged to have slept through most of it and upon waking to have been informed by his daughter Indira that ‘it was awful.’³⁰¹ Perhaps too subtle to be popular, *Kalpana* was also considered to have been too expensive, too complex and too far from the traditions of Indian cinema to be successful. Interestingly, the film’s release coincided with that of ‘*Chandralekha*’, a film also shot in the same studio. While the latter was reported to be at best escapist entertainment, encouraging a Hollywood-style orientalism, its box office success seems to have reflected a certain expectation from moviegoers for fantasy and extravagance that Shankar had ignored.³⁰²

According to Abrahams, the accumulation of financial problems and psychological backlash from these events led to a decade of emotional upset, creative decay and health problems for Shankar, exacerbated by alcoholism and depression. At the same time, he apparently never gave up his aspirations to recreate a center to study and extend India’s traditional dances and creative arts.³⁰³ In 1956, he accepted a position as the Dean of Faculty at the Akademi of Dance, Drama and Music in Kolkata, later incorporated into the Rabindra

²⁹⁹ Typescript of Production of ‘*Kalpana*’ and its Finances by US, 27 February 1947, LKE/IN/19b/A 1947-1949.

³⁰⁰ Purkayastha, ‘Dancing Otherness’, 70.

³⁰¹ Mehra, *Nearer Heaven than Earth*, 539.

³⁰² Purkayastha, ‘Dancing Otherness’, 87.

³⁰³ Abrahams, *The Life and Art of Uday*, 204.

Bharati University, only to resign the position five years later.³⁰⁴

Although most of his patrons eventually went their separate ways, and not always on good terms, Leonard Elmhirst remained for much of this time steadfast in his belief in Shankar's artistry and creative abilities. Certainly, he had not been alone in viewing Shankar's center as a landmark in the history of dance academies in India with the potential for a comprehensive training program in the performing arts designed to draw from both Indian and European models of pedagogy. Nevertheless, his correspondence showed him to be increasingly aware of the dancer's penchant for lavish spending and poor management, and he complained to Shankar in 1949 that the difficulty in generating support from Indian investors was due to his problems at Almora, which 'had somehow left in their minds that you (Shankar) are not a business man'.³⁰⁵ There was ongoing communication between Uday and Leonard at least until 1954 with regard to reconstituting the USICC trust funds.³⁰⁶ Furthermore, Shankar had gained another potential female patron in Pearl S. Buck, well-known author and founder of the American-based organization, the *East and West Association* devoted to 'promoting a better understanding between people'. Persuaded that Shankar might prove to be an important cultural ambassador for India to the West, Buck agreed to assist in raising funds for a new dance center in India, penning a request to Nehru for \$50,000. Arguments over the proposed site for the center developed between Buck and Shankar, however, and Leonard, who sided with Buck's preference of Bombay, was drawn into the fray. While tempers flared, the support of the *East and West Association* was withdrawn and the project scratched.³⁰⁷

Meanwhile, his other major patron, Beatrice Straight had left Dartington to accompany

³⁰⁴ Mukhopadhyay, *Uday Shankar*, 47.

³⁰⁵ LKE to US, 29 June 1949, LKE/IN/19b/A 1947-1949.

³⁰⁶ LKE to US, 23 September 1954, LKE/IN/19b/C 1953-1962.

³⁰⁷ Abrahams, *The Life and Art*, 205-206.

Michael Chekhov and his theatre company to the United States. Although she continued to communicate at length with Shankar about matters relating to her trust and support for his film, she was warned by her lawyers in 1948 not to concede to Shankar's demands for further financial assistance.³⁰⁸ That same year Shankar made his last visit to Dartington, accompanied by his younger brother Ravi who paradoxically was becoming internationally famous for his sitar playing, ironically achieving the sustained stature in global music culture that Uday Shankar had long sought for in his own career as a dancer.

Conclusion

Shankar may have been an artist par excellence, but he was not a pedagogue like Tagore, whose vision and commitment to education had provided a strong foundation for Shantiniketan, thus securing its future well beyond Tagore's death in 1941. Nor did he hold fast to the demands of his patrons who had played such a large part in the support of his various careers in dance. Dance companies, as Sally Banes points out, 'are born, flourish, and die in a larger historical, cultural and economic context than an esthetic account alone can narrate.'³⁰⁹ In this respect, the writings of Pierre Bourdieu in the sociology of taste, the arts, cultural capital and audience, and Michel Foucault's studies of power and knowledge can all help interrogate the ways in which dance careers such as Shankar's were created, marketed and received through systems of private and public patronage.³¹⁰ Yet, as Fernau Hall has pointed out, the task Shankar set for himself as an Indian modern dancer with roots in both India and the West was an excruciatingly difficult one. His unbridled enthusiasm to create a school devoted to his 'Shankar-style' choreography and techniques in many respects disregarded the political and economic situation of the

³⁰⁸ Baldwin, Todd & Lefferts to BS, 28 September 1948, LKE/IN/19b/A 1947-1949; BS to US, December 1952, LKE/IN/19b/B 1950-1969; BS to US, December 1952, LKE/IN/19b/B 1950-1969.

³⁰⁹ Sally Banes, 'Where They Danced', 95.

³¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Foucault and Hurley, *The History of Sexuality*.

subcontinent as well as the educational aspirations of his patrons who nevertheless supported him with considerable devotion for decades.³¹¹ Nationalism and colonialism were not mere external contexts for Shankar's dance and success, says Erdman, 'they were the context in the midst of which he performed, was reviewed, met his patrons and created his repertoire'.³¹² Hence while Khokar celebrated Almora as the beginning of a revival to bring India's culture to Indian and Westerners alike through dance and music, Erdman suggests that there was in fact little room for new dance traditions such as those brought by Shankar, who was in any case already well past his prime and insufficiently linked to the renaissance in revival of the artistic dances of India that was taking place during this period.³¹³ She points out that Indians continued to question whether Shankar's dance was Indian, authentic, classical or could even be called 'ballet'.³¹⁴ For his part, Shankar attempted to sanction a creative form of dance that complemented rather than succumbed to the infusion of traditional arts techniques and styles. 'My country brought new impulses to me', he claimed, 'and I made a very definite distinction between movement and the dance'. His patrons, however, had successively lost confidence in his ability to sustain the kind of school for dance that he had promised in Almora. And while Leonard Elmhirst remained deeply committed to fulfilling Dartington's educational and artistic mission through patronage to the arts, as he said, 'to make over the small into something better,' no further funds were made available to Uday Shankar.³¹⁵

³¹¹ Hall, 'Honoring Uday Shankar', 326.

³¹² Erdman, 'Who remembers', 3.

³¹³ See for example Shah, 'State Patronage'.

³¹⁴ Erdman, 'Who remembers', 3.

³¹⁵ Abrahams, *The Life and Art*, 176.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari propose a rhizomatic model for thinking about research, emphasizing the importance of multiplicity, connections, and heterogeneity over linear storylines and causal relationships. Engaging the metaphor of a rhizome is particularly helpful when thinking about culture, for it resists searching for single origins and conclusion, or causality along chronological lines. My thesis examines how culture and history become entwined, with no definite beginning or end, like the surface of a body of water ‘...[spreading] towards available spaces or trickling downwards towards new spaces through fissures and gaps’.³¹⁶ It has attempted to illuminate those instances where the transnational movements of physical cultures have also clearly been accompanied by the underlying circulation of certain ideas and beliefs around race, national identity and modernity.

The first case looks at physical educators from the YMCA who brought American sport and physical recreation, as well as larger values and beliefs around the importance of health and wellness, to India during the early decades of the 20th century. The YMCA’s influence in India was considerable, as many of its physical educators were involved as advisers to provincial colonial governments, while graduates from the Y’s School of Physical Education in Madras would go on to become influential physical directors in educational institutions in India, Burma, and Ceylon among other Asian countries. In turn, the activities of missionaries and educators like Harry Buck were continually influenced by the rapidly changing Indian political environment of the 1920s, and the organization’s relationship with both the colonial government and the Indian public. Buck, for instance, believed in propagating physical education programs that were in line with Western scientific principles, and laid the ‘foundation for enduring strenuous physical

³¹⁶ Deleuze, Guattari and Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

education by removing those many devitalizing influences, which have been for so many years a hindrance to India...'.³¹⁷ He was concerned with the physical weakness of Indian school boys, what he frequently dubbed a 'lack of vitality', and as Adviser on Physical Education to the Government of Madras he became closely involved in addressing these issues in schools throughout the country. He had a close working relationship with the colonial government, and in turn he 'caught so much the ears of certain high officials and had so inspired public trust that the Government of the Province made the very generous grant of about sixty-five acres mostly of land' to his School of Physical Education.³¹⁸

Despite the clearly imperialist sentiment evident in much of the Y's work in India, Harald Fischer-Tinë disputes models of cultural imperialism which look at the contributions of educators like Buck as resulting simply from the diffusion or imposition of Western ideals and values onto non-Western contexts, as do I.³¹⁹ I have also shown how Buck's continued efforts in founding and later running the School of Physical Education and developing hybrid programs of physical education which incorporated Western and indigenous activities trouble the usual stories of high-handed missionaries imparting the gospel of muscular Christianity and American sport to 'less developed peoples' in foreign lands. In his 25 years in India, Buck remained deeply committed to providing a sound physical education to his students at the training school in Madras. He personally oversaw the building of the Indian Y's first School of Physical Education, where he was Principal until his death from leukemia in 1943. 'The way he used to watch the construction of Massey Hall...would make you think that he was counting the bricks which were being laid...The YMCA College is the outcome of Buck's tenacity and perseverance'.³²⁰ Indeed,

³¹⁷ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 169.

³¹⁸ Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration Volume*, 65.

³¹⁹ Fischer Tinè, 'Fitness for Modernity', 3.

³²⁰ Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration Volume*, 112-113.

Buck worked assiduously to provide activities that he believed were well-rounded, based on scientific principles and enjoyable to its participants, and in the process incorporated several indigenous games and activities, including yoga, even while recognizing that its relationship with the Y's ethos around muscular Christianity and physical education was somewhat unclear. He was also tapped into a vast network of physical educators, yoga practitioners and researchers across India and the United States; particularly Springfield College, Massachusetts and Teacher's College at Columbia University. It was at Buck's invitation, for instance, that the American physical educator Josephine Rathbone visited India, spending several weeks in summer of 1937 in the training College in Madras. It was also on this trip that she visited the ashram of the Indian *yogi* Swami Kuvalayananda, where she learned his system of *hatha* yoga and eventually incorporated various *asanas* into her own courses at Teacher's College. Given these considerations, the first case study has endeavored to represent Harry Buck as multifaceted; more than an imperialist caricature or overzealous missionary interested only in disciplining unruly 'native' bodies. His, and other Y physical educator's efforts in India, were an amalgam of many intersecting factors, a result of the 'complex local interactions and negotiations between distinct and often oppositional groups of actors, including British colonial administrators and Indian nationalists'.³²¹

The second case examines Indian modern dancer Uday Shankar's spectacular success in the West during the 1930s and 40s against the backdrop of colonialism and heightened nationalist sentiment in India. His particular brand of dance depended, in part, upon his convincingly 'Oriental' appearance, and willingness to incorporate sets and choreography which pandered to Western images and stereotypes around Indian culture. He was particularly adept at

³²¹ Fischer Tinè, 'Fitness for Modernity', 3.

garnering the support of wealthy (and often female) cultural figures like Alice Boner, Anna Pavlova, Beatrice Straight and Michael Chekhov, even receiving patronage and support from Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst to build his culture center in India. His fame and ability to navigate elite social circles, despite a formal lack of training in dance and want of experience with Indian performance traditions, reflected the predominance of Orientalist images and fantasies held by Westerners about Indian dance. He was, however, excoriated by Indian cultural nationalists for failing to conform to traditional modes of dance. The Indian dance critic G.K. Seshagiri for instance, would say of Shankar's performances, 'considered as some kind of dance, was tolerable. But considered as Indian dance, either as Bharata Natya, or Nritya, or Nritya, it was absolutely unconvincing...'.³²² Dance had become central to growing concerns among political figures and nationalists of the time who were looking to establish the authenticity of Indian national identity by affirming its cultural origins in an ancient past. The nationalist movement of the early twentieth-century propagated a reassertion of traditional values and emphasized the 'awakening of an awareness for the country's rich cultural heritage' in an attempt reestablish what they perceived was a dwindling sense of national identity among Indian people. This desire to rigidly maintain certain traditions and 'preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture' has been discussed by Partha Chatterjee as a fundamental feature of the anticolonial nationalist movement in India.³²³ As I have argued, the discussions around dance focused on deriving authenticity from Sanskrit discourses and texts, and Shankar's style of performance, which distinctly incorporated elements from Western theatre and ballet, was never recognized or accepted as 'Indian' enough, and his school soon shut down. We should remember that in the quest for tradition and authenticity, Indian cultural nationalists frequently drew from Western

³²² Purkayastha, 'Dancing Otherness', 70.

³²³ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 6.

sources, including Orientalist scholarship and discourses from the 18th century. Despite a nationalist rhetoric which claimed to draw meaning from an ancient Indian past, Western ideas and beliefs around the meaning of Indian cultural identity also played an important role in establishing a ‘modern national identity’. This is indicated by the overwhelmingly positive critical reception of Ruth St. Denis in 1926 for instance, or the continued support for cultural nationalist and ‘mother’ of classical dance, Rukmini Devi, by the Theosophical Society. Efforts to establish the purity of Indian culture by connecting various traditions with an ancient, pre-colonial past, were tempered simultaneously by attempts to address the perceived inferiority of Indian cultural practices, while also imagining the soon to be independent nation along the lines of Western science and modernity.

The same concerns may indeed be extended to understandings around European modernity during this time as well. If colonialism may conceivably be imagined as the underside of modernity, that vast apparatus elevating the world’s largest economies so its elite may reach the pinnacle of human achievement and progress, it was only held in place by the ongoing subjugation and utilization of various ‘Others’: millions of women, slaves, and colonial populations. Post-Enlightenment beliefs in the power of human reason, in the validity of science and logic over religion and tradition viewed the modern European subject as free thinking, rational and creative. Even while the Others were pointedly excluded from such definitions, they continued to occupy an ‘essential and constitutive role in the construct of the interiority of modernity itself’.³²⁴ ‘The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture’, said Said, ‘...gaining in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of

³²⁴ Gikandi, *Slavery*, 10.

surrogate and underground self'.³²⁵ This study has endeavored to show that modernity bloomed precisely within the messy tangle of imperialism, colonial subjugation and nationalist struggle.

Limitations and Future Directions

During the research process, I have discovered that writing about the history of culture is an effort that is always in progress. If culture is a living and breathing entity subject to the continuous play of power, as Stuart Hall would suggest, the project of documenting its history is ongoing, since it is constituted only within and not outside representation.³²⁶ Indeed, this research endeavor has shed light on a sliver of a much vaster inquiry into the history of Indian physical cultures, and I have consequently looked at this study as one that is in continuous production, always in the process of 'becoming'.

While the scope of this study was limited to two case studies and the time period under consideration restricted to the early decades of the 20th century, references were made to the nationalist movement and colonial dynamics of the mid-to-late 19th century when explicitly required in the study. In the first case, my focus on the physical educator Harry Buck and his activities in Madras during the 1920s emerged after extensive research revealed his importance to the physical culture movement in India between the 1920s and 40s. He set up and later ran the country's first physical education training school, became involved in organizing and coaching the first Indian team for the Paris Olympics in 1924 and setting up the Indian Olympic Association (IOA). Buck arrived in India with his wife Marie, who was also quite involved in running the training school, promoting physical education schemes for women as a 'Women Specialist in Physical Education' to the provincial government of Madras, and teaching at the

³²⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 2-3.

³²⁶ Hall, 'Culture Identity and Diaspora', 225.

Lady Willingdon Training College.³²⁷ During the research process, finding any in-depth information about Marie Buck's activities and professional undertakings proved to be extremely challenging. John Donald Gustav-Wrathall has echoed this difficulty in his own research around the institutionalization of the 'Y wife', claiming that wives of the Association leaders and secretaries were largely ignored, invisible, and encouraged to accept 'YMCA widowhood' in the face of their husband's overwhelming commitment to the service of other men.³²⁸ Future research on Marie would go a long way in bringing some of the more submerged histories of Y wives to the surface, in demonstrating the range and extent of women's contributions to maintaining the Y's overseas missionary efforts, and would provide compelling insight into the implications of the Y's programs for Indian women.

Buck's extensive range of activities in his capacity as Advisor of Physical Education to the colonial government in Madras may also be a potential avenue for future scholarship, since he was involved in setting up a number of programs and building gymnasiums, parks and recreational facilities in public schools and colleges across the province. A visit to the Y School in Madras would likely unearth documents that detail the specifics of these projects, as well as shed more light on the day-to-day operations of the training school, where Buck served as Principal until his death in July 1943. It would also illuminate in greater detail the brief discussion I present in an earlier section on the YMCA's complicated relationship with British imperial authorities, the colonial project, and the Indian nationalist movement. This study primarily used digitized primary sources which were freely available in the Springfield College online archive. This considerably eased the necessity for travel, although there is ostensibly

³²⁷ Govindarajulu, *Buck Commemoration Volume*, 73.

³²⁸ Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger*, 7.

much more data (including a wealth of non-English sources) in India, that would uncover a number of new research directions.

While the second case study made reference to the performing arts in general, particularly in discussions on European Orientalism in the arts and Indian cultural nationalism, the specific focus was on dance. As a result of this, I did not pay as much attention to the trajectory of music, which was part of the broader conversation around Indian national culture during the 20th century. My study focused primarily on Uday Shankar's dance career, as it was what he was best known for. However, scholars like Nilanjana Bhattacharjya have claimed that Shankar's musical compositions remain the 'most tangible record of his views on the role of tradition and innovation' in the performing arts.³²⁹ Examining these compositions within the context of the rest of his performances (including sets, costumes and choreography), would add more nuance to discussions around his eclectic vision of the arts and how they related to his vision of a modern Indian cultural identity.

Future research on the politicization of classical music in India during the early 20th century might also extend some of the discussions around dance from this research to a consideration of the political unrest and complex interactions shaping the evolution of the performing arts in general. There is a long history of collaborative performances within the Indian cultural arts, which blur the spaces between how dance and music have been created, practiced, performed and received. Improvisation, for instance, plays a central role in the practice, pedagogy and performance of both, with performers demonstrating their prowess onstage by 'keeping up with each other while performing established compositions, creating new ones, and at the same time maintaining a connection onstage'.³³⁰ Together, they create affective

³²⁹ Bhattacharjya, 'A Productive Distance from the Nation', 493.

³³⁰ Nimjee, 'Playing Dance and Dancing Music', 182.

spaces through *jugalbandhi*, a term which usually refers to collaboration or conversation between different musicians, though in a manner previously used by Ameera Nimjee may also ‘lay the groundwork for communication’ between musician and dancer.³³¹ However, due to Indian dance’s increasing sexual connotations and affiliation with the *nautch*, music had become increasingly separated from dance during the late 19th century as Indian nationalists sought to emphasize the purity of musical performance and discouraged public performances of musically accompanied dance.³³² While *nautch* performances had long incorporated music, dance, theatre and poetry in some combination to accommodate the desires of their male patrons, by the turn of the 20th century most female musicians might learn dancing as a formality but would seldom perform it publicly.³³³

This brings me to my consideration of female performers and the space they occupied in the nationalist imaginary and debates around the performing arts. In my theoretical discussion, I examined various postcolonial works on dance, particularly those which looked at the anti-*nautch* movement of the late 19th century, and at attempts by Indian scholars and intellectuals to revive the image of dance by erasing these problematic histories and redefining the performing arts within the narrow schema of ‘classicization’. I discussed the construction and propagation of the ‘dominant narrative’, and the nationalist enthusiasm for seeking authenticity in ancient Sanskrit dramaturgy texts and discourse. While Chapter 4 referred to female performing communities insofar as they intersected with Uday Shankar’s story and illuminated some of the debates among Indian cultural nationalists, future research on specific regional communities of *nautch* girls, and their interactions with colonial authorities, missionaries and nationalist groups

³³¹ Ibid, 179.

³³² Post, ‘Professional Women’, 104.

³³³ Ibid, 105.

during the early 20th century, can be useful in tracing the development of the performing arts in India as well as changing ideas and values around modernity, national identity and cultural representation. Future research could also consider contemporary groups of *nautch* performers, and the modern Indian state's impact on their social lives and dance practices. Anna Morcom, for instance, has traced the history of 'exclusion/inclusion' in Indian performing arts by focusing on the *nautch* girl's marginalization by mainstream Indian dance culture during the 21st century and subsequently considers their growing involvement in the sex trade.³³⁴

Another potential research direction could involve examining the major historiographical developments surrounding Indian dance scholarship through the 20th and 21st centuries. It would be particularly useful in showing how debates around the *nautch* have evolved from the colonial to the postcolonial period. While early to mid 20th century historical works on classical dance tended to further the 'dominant narrative' and ignore the contributions of the *nautch* girl, by the 1980s and onward, the *nautch* was examined by feminist academics from diverse disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. Walter Benjamin notes how tradition itself is 'thoroughly alive and extremely changeable', and indeed this feminist and postcolonial 'turn' in the realm of academic scholarship moved away from the dominant narrative and focused on the *nautch* girl's significant contributions to the development of the Indian performing arts.³³⁵ The changing trend in dance scholarship from the 20th to the 21st centuries demonstrates a limitation iterated at the beginning of this section of the paper; the definitions and understandings around Indian cultural identity can never be comfortably reconciled. Dance, its historicization, and

³³⁴ Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance*, 29.

³³⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 223; Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues*, 87-95; Oldenburg, 'Lifestyle as Resistance'; Post, 'Professional Women'.

ultimately the perception of Indian culture itself remain inconvertibly tangled in the politics of populist nationalism, imperialism and colonial struggle.

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