



INDIA AND THE TRANSLOCAL MODERN DANCE SCENE

1890s–1950s

TRANSLOCALITY

Arjun Appadurai conceptualized *translocality* as a condition tied to the production of locality, allowing us to focus on the *local*; that is on the place in which people are or go to, and where they do things. Furthermore, his insistence on locality being *produced* reminds us that there is no locality without people coming, going, staying and connecting with other people, thinking and doing things (Appadurai 1996: 178–199). Here I look at translocality as a process constantly flowing between international and local ‘neighborhoods’—a term Appadurai uses to describe places where locality is produced—and at how this process made it possible for Indian classical and modern dance to emerge in the first half of the twentieth century. The international dance scene of the end of the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s was in this sense a translocal scene. It took place simultaneously in different regions of the world at specific localities, some of which were in India. Indian local scenes were part of the larger translocal dance scene, and each cluster shared many elements, across national boundaries, with the others. Dance scenes, including Indian dance schools and groups of dancers, continue to be translocal today (perhaps even more so), and here I am tracing only the beginning of that particular process.¹

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Universidad Autónoma
de Yucatán
Merida, Mexico



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1174-0357>

1. Neighborhoods for Appadurai are “life-worlds constituted by relatively stable associations, by relatively known and shared histories, and by collectively traversed and legible spaces and places” (1996: 191). They are not tied

The lives of the modern dancers of the late 1800s and the first half of the 1900s, such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Rabindranath Tagore, Anna Pavlova, Ted Shawn, Uday Shankar, Madame Menaka, Rukmini Devi and others have been well documented, partly by autobiographical texts and other media they produced themselves.² Admirers and dance historians have also written extensively on them. A wealth of books and articles on Indian classical and modern dancers exists, written by anthropologists, sociologists, historians and dance scholars who often are dancers themselves. Pallabi Chakravorty (2008; 2013), Uttara A. Coorlawala (1992), Janet O’ Shea (2009), Priya Srinivasan (2012), Margaret E. Walker (2014) and Katherine Zubko (2014) are only a few of the many academic dancers who have published works on particular dance styles of India. Several of them have made points related to the one I am making here, even using Appadurai’s concepts of translocality and of the production of locality, probably because the material fits the concepts so well. For example, O’Shea (2009) specifically develops the theme of the production of locality through Bharatanatyam dance.

Here, I do not focus on classical Indian dance itself but rather on the more general context within which it emerged: Along with Anna Pavlova and the writer, choreographer and dancer Rabindranath Tagore, the modern dancers whose careers peaked during the first half of the twentieth century greatly influenced the development of modern dance around the world. India is presented here as only one among many possible cases. To some extent, each of the localized dance scenes replicated the others, and the strategies that the leaders of the dance companies used to validate their art were all similar. This can be explained, at least

to specific geographical places but rather purposely constructed by people, so that specific geographical places become part of them because of locals’ purposeful actions and because of their relation to other neighborhoods.

2. While in the literature on Indian dances “classical” and “modern” are considered two very different types of dance, here I am taking both to be part of the larger context in which contemporary modern dance styles emerged around the world. Tagore was a writer, choreographer and educator, as well as a dancer. Meduri (2005) also treats Indian classical dance styles as modern, and so does Purkayastha (2014), who also writes about Tagore as a modern dancer.

in part, by their shared ideas, aspirations, and networks. They borrowed dance ideas and techniques from one another even as they were in competition for many of the same admirers, supporters, impresarios, venues and public response. The strategies used by Indian artists to validate dance as art were not very different from the ones used by dancers elsewhere, including in Europe and the Americas. Indian dance artists and schools of the first half of the 1900s cannot be seen then (or now) as a mere subset of the modern dance world, but rather as participants in a larger, translocal dance scene, encompassing localities in many nations.

THE TRANSLOCAL MODERN DANCE SCENE, 1890S-1950S

In *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* Richard E. Peterson and Andy Bennet define a music scene as “the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans, collectively share their musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others” (2004: 1). Here, I will apply their definition to the modern dance scene that emerged at the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, which included impresarios, producers, dancers and their public. Peterson and Bennet, along with Timothy J. Dowd, et al. (2004), Tim Gosling (2004), Paul Hodgkinson (2004), and Kristen Schilt (2004), all consider translocal music scenes to be those that practically replicate each other across different locations. In all of Bennet and Peterson’s examples, the newsmedia, travel, and the personal exchanges between persons and groups, made possible the reproduction of the same songs and performances in different locations. All these elements, including the new means and facilities for long-distance travel, were already present at the end of the nineteenth century, and they made it possible for the transnational dance scene to consolidate in the 1900s. Dance companies could tour, lead dancers could learn about and from one another, and they borrowed rather freely from each other’s styles, visions and choreography. Classical ballet became, for a few decades, part of the modern dance scene, as Anna Pavlova, Vaslav Nijinsky and other famous ballet dancers formed their own companies and went on commercial tours, entering the circuits and networks of the modern dancers. These dancers and their

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Universidad Autónoma
de Yucatán
Merida, Mexico

companies systematically sought to disassociate themselves from other earlier or less *artistic* forms of dance.

While the older translocal modern dance scene has become fragmented into a myriad of specialty dance scenes, many of them also translocal, at the beginning of the twentieth century both classical and modern dance forms were part of the same artistic context and were undergoing similar processes of cultural validation. Both ballet and Bharatanatyam, for example, were being adapted to commercial stages and dance tours. While Bharatanatyam borrowed conceptually from ballet, resulting in a form of dance detached from the association of dance with *devadasi* and *nautch* women by the Indian middle classes, ballet borrowed from folk dances and vaudeville in order to become a commercial spectacle for the masses while distancing itself from them. Here I will focus on a few of the dancers who were part of this translocal dance scene, some of whom were Indian: Rabindranath Tagore, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Anna Pavlova, Uday Shankar, Leila Roy Sokhey and Rukmini Devi Arundale. All of them spent much of their lives travelling between cities and between countries, and they all have left an important mark on today's dance world.

At the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s, many nations were looking at art as one of the main places where the 'soul' of the nation could reside. Composers such as Richard Wagner, Frédéric Chopin, Franz Listz and Giuseppe Verdi had shown that art, especially music and opera, could be tied to nationalist sentiment, and their work paved the way for nationalist projects looking for 'the art of the people' as a pillar of their larger agenda (Randel 1986). Like other artists, dancers sought to speak to issues of the day, including politics, through their art. The mixing of art with philosophical ideas, and in particular with romantic notions of nationalism was an aspiration shared by intellectuals and artists in different nations, including India, Mexico, Japan, Hungary, Poland, and Russia (later the Soviet Union). In them modern dance, particularly that which related to older folk dances, could be promoted to the stages associated with 'high culture' with the approval of the middle- and upper-classes and, if not always explicitly, then at least with the implicit support of the state.

A shared framework of thought to which many of these translocal dancers made reference during their speeches and memoirs included the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, the music of Wagner, the physical and acting exercises of the François Desaltre method, the writings of American Transcendentalist writers, and the application of kinetics to music developed by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, which he called *Eurythmics* (Banerje 2011; Duncan 2013; LaMothe 2006; Shelton 1981). After 1912, this framework also included the poetry and the works of Rabindranath Tagore translated into European languages. Because they followed similar international paths, either personally or through mutual friends and acquaintances, the dancers knew each other and each other's work. So too were they compared to one another and to other renowned dancers whose careers will not be reviewed here but with whom they shared the same or similar circuits. They lived in a translocal neighborhood that was not fully localized in any one place during their lifetimes and that would only become recognizable over time as the modern dance movement of the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Universidad Autónoma
de Yucatán
Merida, Mexico

THE DANCERS

Isadora Duncan (1878–1927) was one of the first modern dancers. She was born in San Francisco, California, as Angela Duncan, and decided at an early age to become a dancer. Although in her autobiography, first published in 1927, she says she only took three ballet lessons (Duncan 2013), Mary Simonson has found that she studied ballet and gymnastics before launching her solo career (2012:13). Between 1895 and 1897 she was part of the Company of Augustine Daly in New York, but she quit because she felt constrained by its environment and she had to play parts assigned to her by the stars of the company. These included acting, singing and reciting, and only seldom dancing (Duncan 2013, Simonson 2012: 514). Duncan thought that Greek art showed a more natural way to relate to nature and felt inspired by it. She made the Greek tunic her dance costume—and her regular clothing—of choice (Aco-cella 2013; Duncan 2013). According to Joan Acocella, and by her own account, she travelled with her family to London, where she and her brother Raymond spent several weeks studying Greek

art pieces at the British Museum (Acocella 2013; Duncan 2013). She then used this knowledge to develop her own dance steps and dance pieces.

Duncan created *locality* through her art and her life by dancing at the houses of the rich, befriending socialites, artists, and other dancers, as well as by joining dance companies for periods of time, relying on the press to amplify the public impact of her performances. At the start of her solo career she sought dance engagements in private homes of the rich, first in New York, and then in London. After her first public performances in London, in 1902 she was hired by Loie Fuller as a dancer in Fuller's Company, but left shortly thereafter on a solo tour through Hungary and Germany, sponsored by show impresario Alexander Gross (Duncan 2013). From there, her fame grew. She eventually toured through Europe, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Russia and the United States (Duncan 2013; Loewenthal 1979–1980; Souritz 1995). She always tried to have family members accompany her, especially her mother and her brother Raymond. At one point, according to her autobiography, she also took a group of Greek boys to Germany to accompany her dance performances. She opened a school in Germany in 1904, and then one in France in 1914, which she later moved to New York (Acocella 2013; Duncan 2013). She lived for a few months in Nordwyck, Switzerland, while waiting to give birth to her first child, in the company of her niece Temple and a couple of friends (Duncan 2013; Loewenthal 1979–1980). She met and mixed in wealthy social circles with famous personalities from the worlds of literature, theater and dance, including Anna Pavlova, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and Cosima Wagner (Duncan 2013). In 1921, she opened a school in Moscow, which at the time was part of the Soviet Union (Simonson 2012: 527). Her dance had great impact on the performance and appreciation of dance in general, including ballet (Souritz 1995).

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was a philosopher, novelist, poet and playwright (Fraser 2019). He was also a writer of dance drama, a choreographer, and a dancer who invented his own dance style, Rabindranritya (Banerjee 2001; Chakravorty 2013). He set up an elementary school in Santiniketan, in Bengal, in 1901, where he made dance an important element in his pedagogy (Banerjee 2011: 71; Chakravorty 2013). His thoughts on and style of dance

were influenced by Isadora Duncan who, in turn, was influenced by his dance style to the extent that some of her dancers eventually came to study with him at Santiniketan (Nussbaum 2009: 438). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, gaining him international fame (Fraser 2019: 7). In 1920 and 1921 Tagore toured Europe and the United States seeking funds for Visva-Bharati, his Indian International University, which he thought could create a connection between the rich cultural heritage of India and the best in knowledge and art from around the world (Fraser 2019: 144–146). He finally opened his university in 1921 (Fraser 2019: 155). In 1922 Leonard Elmhirst (1893–1974), whom Tagore had met in the United States, came to India and became Tagore's close friend and secretary. Together, they founded the agricultural college of Sriniketan in 1922 in the village of Surul (Banerjee 2011: 19).

Tagore's daughter-in-law Pratima Devi and the choreographer and dancer Santidev Ghosh were the two main artists who helped bring to Santiniketan and to Visva-Bharati dance styles and techniques from other parts of India and from around the world, making it possible for Tagore to translate his ideas into dance and drama performances (Banerjee 2011). Pratima Devi began creating dance dramas with Tagore's work in 1923. In 1926, Tagore brought Manipuri dancers to Santiniketan, and in 1936 the first dance drama, *Chitrangada*, produced by Tagore's program, was staged at the New Empire Theatre in Calcutta (Mukherjee 2017; Ohtani 1991: 302). Also in 1936, Santiniketan implemented a four-year dance curriculum based on the Manipuri Dance style (Banerjee 2011: 97; Chakravorty 2013: 247).

Tagore lived, worked and travelled with his relatives and relied on his friends to help him and his family fund and run his education initiatives. Tagore's father had originally established Santiniketan as a place of prayer, and then his siblings, children, children's spouses and then grandchildren continued to help Tagore further his vision for a new education (Banerjee 2011; Fraser 2019). During his travels, Tagore met with famous personalities, artists, scientists, and world leaders and socialites (Banerjee 2011: 21). He made a point of inviting to his school first and later to his university the scholars, and especially the artists and dancers who visited India (Banerjee 2011: 37–40; Das Gupta 2014; O'Connell 2010: 72–73). Scholars

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Universidad Autónoma
de Yucatán
Merida, Mexico

and artists from around the world, including engineers, scientists and social scientists, humanists, writers, musicians and dancers came to teach courses and open institutes at Visva-Bharati (Fraser 2019: 155–156). Tagore’s involvement in the vindication of dance as an art worthy of enjoyment and admiration by the middle and upper classes of India helped, through his prestige and stature, the efforts of all modern dancers and dance teachers in India. Furthermore, his ideas on art and creativity as a necessary component of education had impact well beyond India (Moraga Valle 2016).

Anna Pavlova (1881–1931) was a prima ballerina of the Tsar’s Russian Ballet Company when the company went abroad on tour in 1908. She had seen Isadora Duncan perform in 1905 and then met her personally—a meeting that would make a great impression on both of them (Duncan 2013; Krasovskaya 2017: chs. 15 and 16). At the time, Russian Ballet choreographers and dancers were already doing ‘white-tunic’ rehearsals and choreographies, but Duncan’s movements and ideas were new to them (Casey 2012: 14–18). In 1909 the Russian Ballet performed in Paris, and in New York and London in 1910 (Allen 1997: 93). In 1911, Pavlova left the Russian Ballet to found her own company, and began to tour ceaselessly the worlds’ stages, often performing under very difficult circumstances (Allen 1997: 93).

From 1912 on, Pavlova kept a house in London, where she rarely stayed due to her touring schedule. Between 1922 and 1923 she toured Japan, China, the Philippines, Malaysia, India and Egypt with her company, returning again to Asia during her 1928–1929 world tour (Balme 2020: 249; Krasovskaya 2017). Her company’s performances often took the form not of ballet recitals, but of short dance acts in larger variety shows (Casey 2012: 11). Everywhere she went she tried to find dances she could learn and then incorporated elements from them into her own choreography. She also learned from the work of dancers she admired, including Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, creating her own dances in those styles (Coorlawala 1992: 144; Krasokaya 2017). Pavlova trained several English dancers in London, but her influence on ballet schools everywhere extends well beyond her direct teachings, since she encouraged young people around the world to become dancers and to search for the dance legacy in their countries of origin. Indian artists Uday

Shankar, Rukmini Devi and Leila Roy acknowledge Pavlova having stimulated them to research Indian dance traditions and create their own dance styles from them (Joshi 2011).

Ruth St. Denis (1879–1968), born Ruth Denis, was a dancer first in August Daly’s company and later in David Belasco’s Company; Belasco added “Saint” to her name on his shows’ advertisement (Shelton 2008). She quit Belasco’s Company and started her solo career in 1905, specifically trying to develop dance pieces based on what she imagined was ‘Oriental art.’ She knew of the ‘Oriental’ dances performed by Isadora Duncan, based mainly on Greek art and mythology, but her own ideas of “the Orient” included India, which she saw as a repository of ancient dance traditions and mysticism (Srinivasan 2012). In 1906 St. Denis created *Radha*, a dance piece inspired by Hindu texts (Allen 1997: 86). Writing for the Indian periodical *Hinduism Today*, social historian Kusum Pant Joshi says that upon discovering her attraction to India and its dances during a visit to Coney Island in 1904, St. Denis began to explore Indian themes (2010). She was invited to perform at the home of Jal Bhumgara, whose father was an Indian import merchant. According to Joshi, Ruth St. Denis’ Indian-inspired dances were enjoyed and encouraged that night by the Maharaja of Baroda, a guest of the Bhumgaras. In 1914 Tagore’s book *Chitra, A Play in One Act*, was published (Hay 1962: 439). A picture dated 1914 at the Jerome Robins Dance Division collections of the New York Public Library shows St. Denis as Chitra, performing her solo dance piece based on Tagore’s character of an Indian female warrior. In her biography of St. Denis, Suzanne Shelton describes how St. Denis based her dances on concepts borrowed from the Desaltre system, from other societies (in particular from ‘the Orient’), and on the work of other dancers, including Duncan, Pavlova and Nijinsky. Also, Priya Srinivasan (2012: 83–102) has demonstrated how St. Denis employed male Indian dancers in precarious working conditions, learning from them as much as she could in order to present more ‘authentic’ renditions of the Indian dances she portrayed.

In 1914 St. Denis married her student Ted Shawn (Allen 1997: 87; Shelton 2008). In 1915 St. Denis and Shawn opened the Denishawn Academy in Los Angeles, California, where they taught ballet fundamentals, dance, meditation and “music visualization” (Shel-

ton 2008). In 1926 St. Denis and Shawn toured India with their dance company as part of a larger tour, which included Japan, China, British Malaya, Burma, India, Ceylon, Indonesia, Indochina, and the Philippines (Shelton 2008). According to Uttara Asha Coorlawala, in India they visited many cities and did over one hundred shows, rekindling the interest of Indians in their own dance forms by putting them in a new, positive light (1992: 123). Rabindranath Tagore was so taken by the Denishawn Company's performances, which he attended in Calcutta, that he invited St. Denis to come to Bengal and teach at his Visva-Bharati University (Allen 1997: 88; Chakravorty 2008: 49). Apparently, this possibility did not materialize, but Tagore and St. Denis stayed in touch. There is evidence that in 1929 she created and danced "A Tagore Poem" as part of her regular repertoire, and in 1930 Tagore appeared on a show that St. Denis staged at Carnegie Hall, in New York (Allen 1997: 88, Coorlawala 1992: 142).

Uday Shankar (1900–1977) was a promising student at the Royal College of Art in London, and he helped his family stage private entertainment shows. In 1923, Anna Pavlova was returning from her first tour through Asia and she wanted to create dances about India. She was impressed by Shankar, and begged his art professor, William Rothenstein, to let him go with her on tour. She told Rothenstein that "what Rabindranath Tagore, India's greatest poet is doing for poetry, what Abanindranath Tagore, India's greatest painter is doing for India's painting, I want Uday Shankar to do for the dance of India" (Abrahams 2007: 377). According to Abrahams, Shankar choreographed *A Hindu Wedding* and *Radha-Krishna* and went on tour with Pavlova, dancing these pieces with her. Shankar wanted to be included in other dances, but Pavlova refused and told him that he should go to India to study the local dance traditions in order to create dances for his own company. Shankar left Pavlova's Company in 1924 to live in Paris, and in 1926 he and two female dancers toured France, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland to great acclaim (Abrahams 2007: 383–388). After this, he went on an extensive tour of India with his friend, the sculptor Alice Boner, who became his publicist and manager. Rabindranath Tagore suggested to him to stay in India and open a dance academy there. He learned from local

dance styles and incorporated Indian musicians into his company, and he toured Europe in 1931 and the US in 1932 and 1933. After that, he returned to India, again touring extensively and learning about music and dance. He went to Europe once more and then decided to open a dance academy in India. Purkayastha writes that Shankar and his company had spent some time in England with the Elmhirst family. Leonard Elmhirst was a long-time friend of Tagore's, he had lived and worked with the poet helping him create and run an agronomy college in Bengal. With his wife, Dorothy Straight (a wealthy philanthropist and social activist), he had opened an institute in Devon based on the lessons learned in Bengal. Beatrice Straight, Dorothy's daughter, befriended Shankar. With financial help from the Elmhirsts and others, Shankar created the Uday Shankar Indian Culture Center in the Almora forest of the Himalayas (Abrahams 2007; Purkayastha 2014). The school lasted four years, and then he embarked in the production of a film, *Kalpana*, about a dancer who dreams of having his own dance company. He finally settled in Calcutta, from where he went on tours of England and the United States. According to Hall, Shankar's last important work, *Prakriti and Ananda*, was a Buddhist ballet inspired by one of Tagore's stories (1984–1985: 341).

Leila Roy Sokhey, who became known as Madame Menaka (1899–1947) was the daughter of a lawyer from Bengal. Her mother was English, and Roy grew up between England and Calcutta. She was an accomplished musician before she became a dancer. She met Anna Pavlova in London, and the ballerina encouraged her to study the dances of India ("Leila Roy Sokhey"; Fisher 2012: 62). She was inspired by Ruth St. Denis and Pavlova to dance, and she chose to master Kathak, a type of dance that had been associated with the Mughal courts of India, where it was performed by dancers known as *tawa'if*, courtesans who by the end of the 1800s had come to be called *nautch* and considered prostitutes, and whose dance had fallen in disrepute. According to Chakravorty, in 1892 an anti-*nautch* movement began in Madras and soon extended to Calcutta, although the dance continued to be practiced and taught, but by male specialists (2008).

At the end of the 1920s, after her marriage to Captain Sahib Sing Sokhey, Roy Sokhey started studying Kathak with Guru

Pandit Sitaram Prasad, bringing him to her house in Bombay. Both Suman Bhagchandany and Chakravorty note that this was an inversion of the teacher-student relationship in Indian dance, as traditionally the student was expected to live in the house of the teacher (Bhagchandany 2018: 46; Chakravorty 2008: 51). Roy Sokhey also studied with several other renowned dance gurus. Between 1935 and 1938, she toured Western and Eastern Europe and South Asia (Dalmia 2019: 377–378). She is now considered part of the modern dance avant-garde movement in Europe. Amsterdam-based Impresario Ernst Krauss, who had also organized European tours for Anna Pavlova and Uday Shankar, backed her solo tours, as well as her 1936–1938 tour with the Menaka Indian Ballet Company. Krauss staged approximately 500 performances of the Menaka Ballet through Western and Eastern Europe at over 100 locations (“Leila Roy Sokhey”). Home from her European tours, Menaka opened her dance academy, Nrityalayam, in 1941 in Khandala, a town nearby Bombay. Like Rukmini Devi, Menaka drew inspiration from Sanskrit texts and especially from the *Natyashastra*, an ancient book of dramatic arts. Also, like Rukmini Devi, she created a curriculum through which Kathak could be taught through systematic advance from simpler to more complex movements, and the dances and dance dramas could be replicated by their students and taught again by their former students to their own students in the future (Chakravorty 2008: 52–54). In 1942, she became ill and died in 1947. Chakravorty and Walker both point to the nationalist character of the revival of Kathak dances, and of *nautch* dances in general, by Menaka and other elite women (Chakravorty 2008: 20, 52–55; 2013: 251–252; Walker 2010). Chakravorty also tells us that after Menaka’s death Kathak became once more a dance style dominated by male dance gurus. It would take several decades for women to reclaim their place at the center of this type of dance (2008: 55).

Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904–1986) was born in a South Indian Brahmin family (Allen 1997: 70). Her father, upon his retirement, took the family to Madras and they all became involved in the activities and undertakings of the Theosophical Society, which was then becoming active in the Indian Nationalist Movement. At the age of sixteen, Rukmini Devi married George Arundale, a prominent

member of the Theosophical Society of Madras. Rukmini became a prominent member of the Theosophical Society herself. In 1924 Devi and her husband attended a performance by Pavlova at London's Covent Garden. In 1928, Arundale was doing a lecture tour of Australia and the East Indies, and they happened to be traveling with Pavlova's company. They became friends with the dancers and Rukmini Devi began studying ballet with Cleo Nordi, one of the dancers of Pavlova's company. Arundale, Devi and Pavlova finally met one another on a boat sailing from Surabaya, in Indonesia, to Australia. Devi told Pavlova that she would like to dance ballet, but she knew she would never do so perfectly. Pavlova told Devi that she could become a ballerina too, but it would be better if she tried to learn the dances of her own country. Around 1931, Rukmini Devi attended dance recitals at the Music Academy, where choreographer, dancer and show impresario E. Krishna Iyer presented on stage dancers who were students of Minakshisundaram Pillai. Devi asked Pillai to take her on as his student. Devi also studied with the *devadasi* dancer Mylapore Gowri Ammal, who was renowned as a performer of *abhinaya*, a performative language involving gestures of the body, words and music, costumes and stage props, and psychophysical expressions (Allen 1997; Srinivasan 2012: 109–113; Vatsyayan 1967, 2005).

Devi decided to have her debut dance sometime between December of 1935 or March of 1936, as part of the Theosophical Society's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations (Allen 1997: 73). In 1936 Devi and Arundale established an International Institute for the Arts, which they later named Kalakshetra (Allen 1997: 73). Rukmini Devi transformed the regional dance, using the *sadir* dance as the basis of the new style, into Bharatanatya, which is now known as Bharatanatyam. Srinivasan (2012: 110) writes, "Far from mimicking *sadir*, Rukmini completely transformed it into a modern form." This was possible because of the existing political and cultural climate then prevalent in India and particularly in Bengal, which Srinivasan believes included "nationalist movements, women's reform movements, and orientalist consolidation in the form of the Theosophical Society" (2012: 110). Following the system of ballet, Devi developed a codification of movements and dances that the teacher would demonstrate for the students to replicate. She brought Sanskrit

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Universidad Autónoma
de Yucatán
Merida, Mexico

texts to be the foundation of the dance and the dance dramas she choreographed. In this way, Bharatanatyam could claim a history beyond recent Indian history, and that could be incorporated into the regular curriculum at a dance academy (O'Shea 2009: 40–47).

COMMON THREADS

There are several common threads in the lives of all the important modern dance personalities presented here. Each performer became an impresario who could format dance pieces into full, program-length 'concerts' and portable spectacles that could be staged in different theaters. They could also fit their shows to the format of the variety theater. Jennifer Fisher tells us that even Anna Pavlova had to fight for respectability because even if "dancers were prized in elite circles of Russian society, they were never full-fledged members of it," and outside Russia people were suspicious of the skill and seriousness of performers. She believes that Pavlova's constant remarks about the hard work ballet requires were her way of defending the validity and respectability of her art (2012: 56).

From this point of view, what are now known as the 'classical' dance schools and styles in India were an integral part of the modern international dance scene during the first part of the twentieth century. Translocality, in the form of both a system of 'neighborhoods,' but also of traveling troupes composed of heterogeneous people, characterized the lives and sociocultural surroundings of these modern dancers. This translocality was both an aspiration for these dancers and a result of their own personal charisma and their purposeful work and efforts. The dancers themselves lived in and created their own social environments, through their families and friends, and sought to reframe dance as 'high art' by mobilizing their social and cultural capital, courting the favor of the wealthy and famous. Pierre Bourdieu writes that this strategy characterizes the lives of people who seek upward mobility, as well as those born into the upper classes who educate their children to discern between traditionally 'high' and 'low' culture. These renowned dancers, including those in India, tried to validate themselves and their art using similar resources: they sought to surround themselves with people unaligned with local points of view regarding

dance and dancers, in order to 'elevate' dance to what was then the contemporary understanding of 'art.' Ballet, then the only type of dance considered 'art,' and the romantic idea of an exotic 'Orient' of a past extending beyond the known, immediate past, were tools used by both non-Indian and Indian dancers at the time. They were certainly used within India for the creation of 'classical' dance styles as well as a cultural heritage of which Indians could be proud (Chakravorty 1990, 2000–2001).

The dancers whose lives and careers I have sketched here were only a few of those who struggled at the time to give dance the status of 'high art.' Other dancers, like Helen Tamiris and Albertina Rasch in the United States, were trying to make dance the rightful property of the poor and working classes, as much as of the middle- and upper-classes (Casey 2012; Cooper 1997; Ries 1983), sometimes taking positions in seeming opposition to those dancers discussed here. However, the fact that they were all taking dance to new places had an impact on their respective careers—a subject that has been explored by scholars writing on Bharatanatyam and Kathak (Chakravorty 2008; O'Shea 2009; Srinivasan 2012; Zubko 2014). Vaudeville, modern art dance and ballet do not only exist side by side, but also continue to feed each other in many ways. All dancers had to navigate the different stages with as much grace as possible. In 1916, for example, Anna Pavlova danced at the Chicago Hippodrome at a show featuring trained elephants, acrobats and jugglers (Casey 2012). Meanwhile, in India the emergent schools of classical dance still had to contend with the established lineages and schools of dancers and dance gurus, but also these two strands, as O'Shea and Srinivasan have shown, had more in common from the start than it is usually assumed.

Advertising, long-distance travel and the development of the film industry were all additional factors that would further contribute to the ways in which these dancers and their companies left their mark on our world. They all helped develop the traveling dance concert, which could be modified according to the reaction of the public. They all relied on the same networks of impresarios and theater venues around the world. They all tried to court the favors of the rich and famous, identifying 'art' with

the taste of the upper social classes. They all sought to reframe dance into something worthy of consideration as high art. In order to do this, they all, including those in India, relied on their families and their friends for emotional support, often going as far as to ask them to become members of their dance companies as dancers, musicians, technicians, or managers. They all called on the art and the spirituality of the ancient past to validate their own dance as belonging in the category of an art that transcended human history. Because of this, Indian classical and modern dance as it came of age at the beginning of the twentieth century must be seen as belonging to the international translocal dance scene. It was from this translocal scene that the phenomenon which came to be known as 'modern' dance in the Americas and in Europe eventually emerged. At the same time, in India it branched out further to become—on the one hand—the 'classical dance' scene and, on the other, to evolve into 'modern dance' schools and styles. In the end, both these phenomena arise from the modern dance translocal scene of the late 1880s and the first half of the 1900s.

WORKS CITED

- Abrahams, Ruth. "Uday Shankar: The Early Years, 1900–1938." *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2007, pp. 362–426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472520701638508>
- Acocella, Joan. "Introduction." *My Life. The Restored Edition* by Isadora Duncan. E-book, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013. Location 16–227.
- Allen, Matthew Harp. "Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance." *The Drama Review*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1997, pp. 63–100. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1146609>
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Bhagchandani, Suman. "Institutions of Change: Kathak Dance from Courts to Classrooms." *The Chitrolekha Journal of Arts and Design*, vol. 2, n. 1. 2018, pp. 41–55.
- Balme, Christopher B. *The Globalization of Theatre 1870–1930. The Theatrical Networks of Maurice E. Bandmann*. Cambridge UP, 2020.
- Banerjee, Utpal Kumar. *Tagore's Mystique of Dance*. Niyogi Books, 2011.
- Bennet, Andy and Richard E. Peterson, editors. *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*. Vanderbilt UP, 2004.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard UP, 1984.
- Casey, Carrie Gaiser. "The Ballet Corporalities of Anna Pavlova and Albertina Rasch." *Dance Chronicle* vol. 35, n. 1, 2012, pp. 8–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2011.650618>
- Chakravorty, Pallabi. "Hegemony, Dance and Nation: The Construction of Classical Dance in India." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1990, pp. 107–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856409808723345>
- . "From Interculturalism to Historicism: Reflections on Classical Indian Dance." *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2000–2001, pp. 108–119.
- . *Bells of Change. Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity in India*. Seagull Books, 2008.

- , "Intercultural Synthesis, Radical Humanism and Rabin-
dranritya: Re-evaluation of Tagore's Dance Legacy." *South
Asia Research*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2013, pp. 245-260. [https://doi.
org/10.1177/0262728013504663](https://doi.org/10.1177/0262728013504663)
- Coorlawala, Uttara Asha. "Ruth St. Denis and India's Dance Renaissance." *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 123-152, 1992. [https://www.
jstor.org/stable/1567671](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1567671)
- Cooper, Elizabeth. 1997. "Tamiris and the Federal Dance Theatre 1936-
1939: Socially Relevant Policies and Politics of the New Deal
Era." *Dance Reserch Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1997, pp. 23-48.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1478733>
- Das Gupta, Uma. "Connecting with Tagore's Life and Work." *India
International Centre Quaterly*, vol. 41, no. 2. 2014, pp. 97-112.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1567671>[https://www.jstor.org/
stable/24390753](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24390753)
- Dalmia, Vashudha. *Fiction as History: The Novel and the City in Modern
North India*. State U of New York P, 2019.
- Dowd, Timothy J., et al. "Music Festivals as Scenes: Examples from Serio-
us Music, Womyn's Music, and SkatePunk." *Music Scenes:
Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, edited by Andy Bennett and Rich-
ard A. Petersen, Vanderbilt UP, 2004, pp. 149-167.
- Duncan, Isadora. *My Life. The Restored Edition*. E-book, Liveright Publish-
ing Corporation, 2013.
- Fisher, Jennifer. "The Swan Brand: Reframing the Legacy of Anna Pav-
lova." *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 44, 2012, no. 1, pp. 50-67.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767711000374>
- Fraser, Bashabi. *Rabindranath Tagore*. Critical Lives Series. Reaktion
Books, 2019.
- Gosling, Tim. "'Not for Sale': The Underground Network of Anarcho-
Punk." *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, edited
by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Petersen, Vanderbilt UP, 2004,
pp. 168-183.
- Hall, Fernau. "Honoring Uday Shankar." *Dance Chronicle* vol. 7, no. 3, 1984-
1985, pp. 326-344. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1567655>
- Hay, Stephen N. "Rabindranath Tagore in America." *American Quaterly* vol.
14, no. 3, 1962, pp. 439-463. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2710456>

Hodkinson, Paul. "Translocal Connections in the Goth Scene." *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, edited by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Petersen, Vanderbilt UP, 2004, pp. 131-148.

Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. "Ruth St. Denis as Chitra, based on the Tagore poem, at the estate of Marcia Leonard." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1914. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-8673-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>. Accessed 15 July 2020.

Joshi, Kusum Pant. "How India Inspired a Dance Pioneer." *Hinduism Today, Magazine Web Edition*, Mar. 2010, <https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=5055>. Accessed 15 July 2020.

----- . "Culture Giants who Reawakened Indian Dance." *Hinduism Today, Magazine Web Edition*. Apr.-Jun. 2011. <https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=5159>. Accessed 15 July 2020.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
Universidad Autónoma
de Yucatán
Merida, Mexico

Krasovskaya, Vera. *Anna Pavlova*. Translated by Maria K. Cleveland. E-book, TSK Group LLC., 2017.

LaMothe, Kimerer L. *Nietzsche's Dancers. Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and the Reevaluation of Christian Values*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

"Leila Roy Sokhey ('Madame Menaka')." *The Menaka-Archive: The Indian Ballett Menaka in Europe 1936-38*, <https://menaka-archive.org/en/personen/leila-roy-sokhey-madame-menaka/>. Accessed 15 July 2020.

Loewenthal, Lillian. "Isadora Duncan in the Netherlands." *Dance Chronicle* vol. 3 no. 3, 1979-1980, pp. 227-253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472527908568769>

Meduri, Avanthi. *Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986): A Visionary Architect of Indian Culture and the Performing Arts*. Motilal Banarsidass, 2005.

Moraga Valle, Fabio. "Las ideas pedagógicas de Tolstoi y Tagore en el proyecto Vasconcelista de educación, 1921-1964." *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 65, no.3, 2016, pp. 1341-1404. historiamexicana.colmex.mx/index.php/RHM/article/view/3184/2589

- Mukherjee, Nilanjana. "From Nautch to Nritya. Dance Subversion in Tagore's Dance Drama." *Economic and Political Weekly* vol. 52 no. 3, 2017, pp. 85-92.
- "Nationalism." *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, edited by Don Michael Randel Harvard UP, 1986, p. 527.
- Nusbaum, Laura. "Commentary: 'A Piece of the Pie': Women, India, and 'the West.'" *New Literary History* vol. 40, no. 2, 2009, pp. 431-448. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27760265>
- Ohtani, Kimiko. "'Bharata Natyam,' Rebirth of Dance in India." *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1991. <https://doi.org/10.2307/902452>
- O'Connel, Kathleen. "Tagore and Education: Creativity, Mutuality and Survival." *Asiatic* vol. 4, no. 1, 2010. pdfs.semanticscholar.org/02ba/4e53caa3048a6a13667f65e8bdbafcf7fc09.pdf
- O'Shea, Janet. *Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage: At Home in the World*. Motilal Banarsidass, 2009.
- Purkayastha, Prarthana. *Indian Modern Dance, Feminism and Transnationalism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Peterson, Richard E. and Andy Bennett, "Introducing Music Scenes." *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, edited by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Petersen, Vanderbilt UP, 2004, pp. 1-15.
- Ries, Frank W. "Albertina Rasch: The Broadway Career." *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1983, pp. 95-137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472528208568858>
- Schilt, Kristen. "'Riot Grrrl Is...': The Contestation over Meaning in a Music Scene." *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, edited by Andy Bennett and Richard A. Petersen, Vanderbilt UP, 2004, pp. 115-130.
- Shelton, Suzanne. *Divine Dancer: A Biography of Ruth St. Denis*. Doubleday, 1981. E-book, American Council of Learned Societies, 2008.
- Simonson, Mary. "Dancing in the Future, Performing in the Past: Isadora Duncan and Wagnerism in the American Imagination." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol. 65, no. 3, 2012, pp. 511-555. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2012.65.2.511>

- Souritz, Elizabeth. "Isadora Duncan's Influence on Dance in Russia." *Dance Chronicle* vol. 18, no. 2, 1995, pp. 281–291. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1567881>
- Srinivasan, Priya. *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor*. Temple UP, 2012.
- Vatsyayan, Kapila. "The Theory and Technique of Classical Indian Dancing." *Artibus Asiae*, 29, no. 2, 1967, pp. 229–238. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3250274>
- Vatsyayan, Kapila. "The Natyasastra: Explicit and Implicit." *The Natyasastra and the Body in Performance: Essays on Indian Theories of Dance and Drama*, edited by Sreenath Nair, McFarland, 2015, pp. 19–43.
- Walker, Margaret E. *India's Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective*. Ashgate Publishing, 2014.
- Walker, Margaret. "Revival and Reinvention in India's Kathak Dance". *MUSICultures*, vol. 37, Feb. 2010, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/MC/article/view/20234>
- Zubko, Katherine C. *Dancing Bodies of Devotion: Fluid Gestures in Bharata Natyam*. Lexington Books, 2014.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
 Universidad Autónoma
 de Yucatán
 Merida, Mexico

