
Introduction



Flourishing or Fragile? The Contradictory Context of Classical Indian Dance Forms in Britain

9 May 2015 saw the Grand Final of the first ever series of the televised competition *BBC Young Dancer*, held at Sadler's Wells theatre in London. A show loosely modelled on *BBC Young Musician*, launched in 1978, it aimed to discover 'the UK's most gifted and dedicated dancers aged 16–21 in four categories: Ballet, Contemporary, Hip Hop and South Asian Dance' (BBC 2023).¹ For this final, the winners from each category, together with two 'wildcards', performed in front of a 'judging panel made up of some of the biggest names from the dance world' (ibid.).

The choice of categories was inevitably contentious, but for the world of South Asian dance,² to be one of only four categories chosen by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)³ to represent British dance was momentous. Mira Kaushik, former director (1989–2019) of Akademi in London, an organization committed to the promotion of South Asian dance in Britain,⁴ felt that it was 'the best news for the position of South Asian dance in this country' (Kaushik 2017a). The selection of South Asian dance was all the more significant thanks to the framing of the show, as a serious event with strong and realistic links to the dance profession – unlike more spectacular or celebrity-driven dance talent shows like *The Greatest Dancer* or *So You Think You Can Dance*. *Young Dancer* self-consciously considered 'throughout the process . . . what the professional life of a dancer is like', because 'these young people will hopefully enter the professional world in a year or two' (Hackett 2015). This alignment with 'the professional world' is partly what made the inclusion of South Asian dance as a category both so important and so gratifying. To quote Kaushik again,

All this time South Asian dance has been perceived to be a community activity. In this context, where it is put alongside ballet, contemporary

dance and other forms where professionals are working and in a field where professionals are aspiring to create professionals, the inclusion of South Asian dance is big and good news. (Kaushik 2017a)

While this competition effectively elevates South Asian dance to a status comparable to that of ballet or Euro-American⁵ contemporary dance, a very brief exploration betrays a different story. In 2015, while all ten of the contemporary and ballet finalists were either enrolled in or about to commence specialist full-time training courses in their respective dance forms and had their sights on a professional dance career,⁶ the position of the South Asian dancers was much more equivocal. Of the five finalists, only one, Vidya Patel, was clear about pursuing dance as a career. Of the others, one was studying physiotherapy,⁷ one was studying sports science while hoping to ‘pursue [dance] further’, a third was studying civil engineering and a fourth was studying for A levels and went on to take up a degree in dentistry.⁸ The situation for the second round of the competition in 2017 was very similar.⁹ Again, all the contemporary and ballet dancers were engaged in or about to embark on full-time professional training. Of the South Asian dancers, two were enrolled in medical school and hoped to combine a career as a dancer with a career as a medic. The remaining three aspired to a career in dance, but their pathway to achieving this was far from clear.

There is still no vocational training school available for classical Indian dance forms in Britain (see Chapter 3) despite efforts to create one, meaning that while the 2015 South Asian dance category winner Vidya Patel expressed a desire to pursue a ‘dance degree’, she was not able to pursue a degree in her own style, kathak (at least in Britain), because there was no such course available.¹⁰ The *Young Dancer* 2017 category winner Shyam Dattani likewise voiced his intention to take a vocational qualification and train full-time. A year later he had enrolled in a Business Management degree, working overtime to maintain his dance practice while studying for his degree.¹¹

Even if such a course were to exist, in terms of subsequent employment opportunities, there remain very few companies in Britain that are able to offer dancers who have trained in classical Indian dance forms regular paid work. Shobana Jeyasingh’s and Akram Khan’s dance companies continue to be referenced as providing such opportunities.¹² However, while Jeyasingh’s earlier work was rooted in and explored the vocabulary of bharatanatyam (the dance form in which she herself trained), her choreographic interests have taken her work away from a focused exploration of this form, and the company now employs predominantly Euro-American contemporary dance-trained practitioners.¹³ Khan’s work has a more explicit connection to kathak, the first dance form in which he was trained. His website describes the company as ‘embracing an artistic vision that both respects and challenges the Indian kathak form and contemporary dance’ (Akram Khan Company 2019). In practice, however, most of his dancers are

again primarily Euro-American contemporary dance-trained. In fact, in 2019, there were only three companies that could be argued to represent classical Indian dance forms operating within the comparative security of being Arts Council National Portfolio Organizations (NPOs), a significance I discuss at greater length below.¹⁴ Two of these, Leicester Dance Theatre (whose artistic director is the kathak dancer Aakash Odedra) and Sonia Sabri Company, frequently tour solo shows, thereby limiting the need to employ more dancers, and Odedra's first ensemble piece, *#JeSuis* (2018), used exclusively Euro-American contemporary dance-trained practitioners. The third company, Balbir Singh Dance Company, like Khan's, has a dual focus on kathak and contemporary dance and again uses at least as many Euro-American contemporary as classically Indian-trained dancers. Thus, while for Euro-American contemporary-trained and ballet dancers, excellence in the competition can lead to career opportunities (2017 competition winner Nafisah Baba, for example, was subsequently offered a role as guest artist in Phoenix Dance Company's production of the *Windrush*, Sharon Watson, 2018), such opportunities are limited for classical Indian dance practitioners because of the lack of training schools or dance companies to offer them. Kathak dancer Vidya Patel has had continuous employment since her success in the *Young Dancer* competition highlighted above, but a significant part of this employment has been as a guest kathak artist for Euro-American contemporary dance companies or as a kathak dancer within contemporary dance works. While South Asian dance has benefitted from the profile and the kudos of being an equal fourth professional dance category alongside ballet, contemporary dance and hip-hop, the reality behind the dancers sharing the stage space in the finale is one of very different levels of opportunity, infrastructure, visibility and acceptance.

As I argue throughout this book, the story of the emerging professionalization of South Asian dance, or of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, is one in which contradictions such as those seen with *BBC Young Dancer* are pervasive. South Asian dance is sufficiently significant to have been selected as one of only four categories chosen to represent British dance and yet there is no vocational training school in classical Indian dance forms for the young dancers it showcases. The dance forms have received considerable mainstream recognition – Akram Khan, a choreographer whose roots are in the classical Indian dance style kathak, is considered one of Britain's 'leading triumvirate of choreographers' (Jennings 2015);¹⁵ in 2006, the classical bharatanatyam artist, teacher and choreographer Nina Rajarani won the Place Prize, 'Europe's most prestigious award for choreography' (Lim 2006) for a piece rooted 'completely in bharatanatyam and Carnatic music' (Manch UK 2020c: 32:47); and a growing number of members of the South Asian dance world have been honoured for their contribution to dance in Britain.¹⁶ And yet there remain very few companies to offer young dancers employment.

Given this status quo, it is perhaps hardly surprising that although hundreds of students each year attend classes in classical Indian dance forms (see Chapter 3) and undertake examinations held either by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) or by their own institutions, there remain very few who take up dance as a career. A lack of vocational training means that companies that might be interested in employing South Asian dancers struggle to find dancers trained to a high standard due to lack of supply.¹⁷ Younger students who might consider taking up a course in South Asian dance are put off by the lack of obvious career progression due to the small number of companies, and therefore the apparent lack of demand. The sector is thus caught up in the archetypal ‘vicious circle’.

In this way, despite the high profile of sector members and the influence the sector has undoubtedly had on the wider world of British dance, South Asian dance in Britain remains in many ways a fragile and tentative entity. Almost fifty years after researcher and arts policy advisor Naseem Khan¹⁸ wrote her influential book *The Arts Britain Ignores* in 1976 (a work that highlighted the vast array of cultural activity that took place in Britain, unfunded and largely unacknowledged),¹⁹ and despite the Arts Council’s explicit commitment to cultural diversity for over thirty years,²⁰ many classical Indian dancers still feel that classical Indian dance is ‘not what is wanted in the UK’ (cited in Gorringe, Jarrett-Macauley and Srivastava 2018: 35). This book has at its heart these contradictions – the tension between a sector that apparently flourishes but still feels ignored; between the numbers of children up and down the country who flock to attend classical Indian dance classes and the handful who go on to make it a career; between the perception of some that ‘British dance is defined by its diversity’ (Wayne McGregor on *BBC Young Dancer* 2019) and the perception of others, as evidenced by the dancers cited above, that Britain’s dance culture remains essentially homogeneous.

The Challenges of Professionalization

The key questions that drive this book are what it takes to make a viable working life as a performing dance artist – and whether it is possible to do so in Britain today as a practitioner of an Indian classical dance form. In a world that increasingly demands what choreographer and dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster calls the ‘hired body’, or one that ‘does not display its skills as a collage of discrete styles, but rather homogenizes all styles beneath a sleek, impenetrable surface’ (Foster 1997: 255), what does this mean for any dancer, but particularly for the practitioner of classical Indian dance? Is it possible for practitioners of these forms to find a niche in the world of British professional dance on their own terms, without being reshaped within the hungry eclecticism of Euro-American contemporary dance? More fundamentally, is professionalization necessarily a desirable outcome? This question is especially pertinent when professionalization involving engaging with the wider world of professional British dance arguably imposes as many constraints as it offers advantages.

As an illustration, take *Shivoham* (lit. ‘I am Shiva’), choreographed by Akshay Prakash and Prakash Yadagudde in 2017, a solo bharatanatyam recital performed at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (the Institute for Indian Culture based in West Kensington, London)²¹ in July 2017 to a packed auditorium. The audience members were overwhelmingly of South Asian heritage (I was one of fewer than ten audience members of non-South Asian heritage in an audience of about three hundred; fieldwork notes, July 2017).²² Several in the audience displayed the depth of their connection to, and knowledge of, the codes and conventions governing bharatanatyam by keeping the *talam* (time or measure in Carnatic music) with their right hands; others shook their heads or ‘tutted’ in appreciation.²³ The artists in the meantime were evidently likewise enjoying themselves. Performing for an audience that they knew would have a basic level of competence with their art forms’ conventions and codes allowed them to take the space to play with their forms. The *mridangist* (mridangam player M. Balachander) excelled in conjuring percussion accompaniments to Prakash’s *abhinaya* (briefly, expressive dance)²⁴ – the stumbling walk of an old man; a swarm of bees; the sudden and incandescent anger of Shiva. Dancer and percussionist riffed with each other – throwing each other suggestions to be run with or discarded in that moment. Watching the performance therefore involved the thrill not only of strong technique and narrative, but of risk. These performers were figuratively throwing each other juggling balls. Would they keep them up in the air, or would one drop? The context of the Bhavan permitted such play and improvisation, leading to a forty-five-minute *varnam* (literally figure/shape/colour – the longest and



Figure 0.1. Akshay Prakash presenting a moment of abhinaya in *Shivoham*. 2018. © Dinesh Mahathevan.

most challenging piece of the bharatanatyam repertoire, interspersing bursts of abstract dance with an extended exploration of the emotional state of the character portrayed – and something performers confess to avoiding for inexperienced audiences).²⁵ What would happen to this playfulness and invention if the piece had to tour in theatres less flexible on time frame? What is the impact on the improvisation that is the creative heart of the *varnam* when one needs to honour technicians' contracts for a specific time period or consider an audience mindful of parking meters or the time of their last train home?

The performance of *Shivoham* started late. Equally, several of the audience members arrived 'late'. Would a prompt start have breached the implicit contract between the performers and the audience established for this particular event? There were long speeches during the interval, which from one perspective could be considered 'unprofessional'. From another perspective, however, these speeches that customarily honour the performers (including the musicians) and their lineage (by naming their gurus or teachers) are fulfilling an important aspect of expected etiquette. To not have them could be seen as equivalent to failing to present a cast list – or in other words, could be construed as highly 'unprofessional'. If 'professionalization' is not to mean adherence to a culturally arbitrary set of rules, it is clearly vital to establish what in fact it does mean, which will allow a better understanding of whether or not it is important.

Critical to the development of any art form is, of course, the provision for training – and how classical Indian dancers in Britain are trained is a further central concern in this book. In 2003, dance scholar Christopher Bannerman commented, echoing the findings of the Leverhulme-funded *South Asian Dance in Britain* report (Grau 2001), that

Of course, there are barriers to the continued development of South Asian dance in Britain. One of these is the lack of a school for professional training and, as a result of this, the lack of a clear pathway of professional opportunity. This will continue to be an inhibiting factor until proper provision, mirroring that available for ballet and contemporary dance, is established. (Bannerman 2003)

The following year, a memorandum submitted to the British Parliament by the South Asian Dance Alliance (SADAA),²⁶ as part of the sixth report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, made this point a parliamentary concern, noting 'A serious barrier to the continued development of South Asian dance in Britain is the lack of a school for professional training and, as a result of this, the lack of a clear pathway of professional opportunity' (Select Committee on Culture Media and Sport 2004).

Indeed, the issue was highlighted far earlier. Naseem Khan wrote in her 1976 report that 'A school of Indian classical music and dance could have many

advantages, not least of providing a recognised standard of tuition . . . a central institute . . . would be able to train teachers, set standards and act as a focus of interest for Indian music and dance’ (Khan 1976: 64). Even in 1976, Khan observed that ‘people in the field have talked *for years* of the value of a well-run, demanding and disciplined music and dance school that could provide a high standard of tuition’ (ibid., my emphasis). I discuss the attempts that have been made to achieve this and how the shape of training impacts the shape of the professional sector.

Through a discussion of this specific case study of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, I consider wider questions about what it means to professionalize, and what it means to professionalize an art form. This question is complicated by the positioning of the arts within what the sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu calls the ‘reversed economy’, or a field that places value on (at least the apparent) disinterestedness in and independence from economic market constraints – a context particularly relevant for classical Indian dance (see Chapter 2). I consider the environment required for an art form to develop successfully as a profession, how professional practice adapts across national boundaries and how far art forms are tied to or transcend a particular national identity. This in turn feeds into further-reaching discussions about migration and identity, about universalism and particularism in art forms and about the endeavour to resist cultural homogenization while avoiding separatism. While the focus of this book is unapologetically the British context, I hope that the discussions of the professionalization of an art form, the relation of the arts to national identity and the importance of representation will speak to the context of the arts beyond this small island.

The Arts Britain Still Ignores?

This is the title of a 2018 article written by director, actor and theatre scholar Jerri Daboo – in this case considering the continued gaps in diverse representation in British theatre forty years on from Khan’s report (Daboo 2018). In it she asks, ‘There have been advances made in the visibility of BAME [Black, Asian and minority ethnic] practitioners across the theatre sector since 1976, and yet how much has really changed? Are we still repeating the same issues that Naseem Khan raised forty years ago?’ (ibid.: 6).

Within dance likewise, this was a question that interviewees raised throughout my research. Despite the talent in the sector, the energy of the agencies, the commitment of teachers and the (overall) good intentions of the Arts Council,²⁷ how much has really changed?

It is easy to point fingers, and many in the sector do so. The lack of progress is attributed to Asian parents and their unwillingness to support a child’s choice to pursue a career in the arts (Courtney Consulting 2020 37); to the fractious relationship with the dance agencies, accused of pursuing their own agendas at the

expense of a vision for the wider sector (ibid.: 80, 81); to the lack of commitment among dancers, accused of a sense of entitlement and a lack of preparedness for hard work (ibid.: 104); and to the Arts Council and the marginalization of classical in favour of ‘innovative’ dance work (Kedhar 2020; Courtney Consulting 2020: 85).²⁸

There may be an element of truth in each of these accusations or explanations, but none of them represents the whole story. In 2016, I attended a major sector conference, Navadisha 2016, organized by Sampad Arts in partnership with New Dimensions Arts Management. At this conference I experienced both the excitements and the frustrations of a sector that has come so far and has so much to offer, and yet in some ways remains stuck with the same challenges and questions it faced when it made its first steps to anchor itself in Britain. How do we ensure high-quality training – and who determines what this is? How do we produce work with a sufficient appeal to tour widely and sustain the costs and demands of touring without compromising the artistic and aesthetic integrity of our forms? As I shared in the highs and lows of the conference, immersed in common exhilaration and indignation, a part of me wondered whether if the sector could only have access to more information – to the stories of the journeys of other dance forms, of the wider narrative of migration and diaspora; if it could remember so much that seemed forgotten of even relatively recent battles and victories; if it could understand the way it has been positioned by the history of colonialism and therefore the narrative of power in which it is placed (Thobani 2017; Purkayastha 2017b) – could this provide some sort of self-understanding to give it the clarity and the determination to move forward?

It was and remains a lofty ambition, and yet this is my hope. This is because my interest in this field, in its thriving and surviving, is not only academic, but also personal. I address this below, considering my personal investments in the field as part of a broader consideration of my methodology. First, however, I situate the following discussion by giving a broad overview of the early history of Indian dance forms in Britain and explaining the context of funding for the arts in Britain, including the role of the Arts Council.

A (Very) Brief History of Indian Dance Forms in Britain

The first recorded performance of ‘Indian dance’ in Britain was by a troupe of hereditary dancers (*devadasis*, or as they were called in Europe, *bayadères*),²⁹ who made their British debut at the Adelphi Theatre in London on 1 October 1838. They had initially been brought to Europe by the French impresario E.C. Tardivel, and were leased from Tardivel for £5,000 by the then manager of the Adelphi, Frederick Yates (Bor 2007: 55).³⁰ In both London and Paris, they performed in major theatres, were celebrated by royalty, the press and the artistic cognoscenti, and were well looked after and accommodated and comparatively competitively paid.³¹

Yet in spite of the interest from the great and the good, as well as the largely positive attention from the press, the Adelphi performances appear to have benefited largely from their status as a curiosity, rather than indicating any deeper audience interest and engagement. For a contemporary critic, though he felt that the performance of the *bayadères* had been the ‘most interesting he ever saw’, nonetheless,

We suspect that there is something in the performance not entirely consistent with our English tastes and feelings . . . The interesting dancers themselves may attract notice – the curious tattoo of their hands, their jewels and dress . . . but 9 out of 10 think nothing at all of the dances . . . and they can’t tell what to make of it. (*Brighton Herald*, 19 January 1838, cited in Bor 2007: 65)

As a consequence, for almost a century after this, ‘there is little evidence in Britain of performances of Indian dance by Indian dancers’ (David 2005b: 30).³² Dancer and scholar Anusha Kedhar draws attention to archival records showing that a performing troupe from Bombay was contracted in November 1867 for three months by two brothers from Manchester to perform in Egypt, Malta, France and England (Kedhar 2011: 8). There were also the displays of dancers at Imperial Exhibitions such as the *Empire of India and Ceylon Exhibition* held at Earl’s Court, London in 1886 and the Franco-British Exhibition in 1908 at White City, among others (see Purkayastha 2019), where the displays had resonances of the Roman imperial displays of the captured conquered. There is, however, no sustained interest in and engagement with Indian dance in the manner that may have been expected from ‘Oriental’ fascination of the time. Thus, musician and musicologist Joep Bor comments wryly, ‘Clearly it was not the real Orient that appealed to audiences in nineteenth century Europe, but an imaginary Orient: a world composed of sylphs, nymphs, shades and other supernatural beings’ (Bor 2007: 66).

Indeed, the only reason for the invitation to the hereditary dancers in 1838 had been the Western European preoccupation with ‘the Orient’, present since at least the seventeenth century. The ‘exotic’ foreigner, of uncertain geographical provenance, was tremendously popular in Western entertainment through much of the eighteenth, nineteenth and into the twentieth century, with the *bayadère* in particular cropping up as a recurrent figure (Grau 2011). This enchantment was one that remained among American and Western European audiences into the beginning of the twentieth century, with the same preference for an ‘imagined’ rather than actual representation of difference. As literary theorist and dance historian Elizabeth Kendall claims of the American dancer Ruth St. Denis, who gained her reputation through her portrayal of ‘Oriental Dances’, ‘It was to Ruth’s advantage that she wasn’t Indian or trained by Indians; the audience pre-

ferred her to be American, like their home brand of Orientalia' (Kendall 1979: 78, cited in Shay 2008: 60).

The first Indian performer to present 'Indian' dance in the West after the hereditary dancers initially did nothing to discourage such Orientalist fantasies, but rather, with a degree of panache, charm and talent, exploited them – in a similar model to Ruth St. Denis. This was Uday Shankar (older brother of the sitarist Ravi Shankar), who, being male, educated and middle-class, could not have come from a more different background than his precursors. Shankar had been sent to London from India to continue his training as a visual artist at the Royal College of Art. His decision to pursue a career in dance rather than in visual arts was largely thanks to the prima ballerina Anna Pavlova, who wanted to include some Indian-themed dances in her repertory. Shankar was introduced to her as an enthusiast – and the resulting collaboration led to Shankar choreographing two Indian-themed dances, *Krishna and Radha* and *A Hindu Wedding* (Mackrell 2013), which premiered in Covent Garden in 1923 and went on to tour America (Shankar also performed in the first piece). The experience with Pavlova was enough to convince Shankar to swap art for dance, and he set off to Paris to try and make his living as a dancer. As he had no classical training and little more than his recollections of watching Rajasthani folk dances as a child to guide him (Abrahams 2007), there does not appear to have been a great deal to distinguish Shankar's early choreographies from those of the white purveyors of Orientalia, other than his masculinity and brown skin. Shankar did subsequently take time to train in different forms of Indian dance and music so as to root his performances in a firmer basis of technique rather than, as in his earlier years, simply playing to the 'popular European imaginary of the Empire' (Purkayastha 2012: 75). Nonetheless, it took the dancer Ram Gopal's arrival in London in 1939 to finally bring the discipline and idioms of Indian dance forms to the British stage for the first time since the hereditary dancers in 1838.

Gopal made his London debut in the West End's Aldwych Theatre and appears to have taken the capital by storm. In her monograph on Gopal (in which her meticulous research is enhanced by her personal friendship with Ram in his latter years), dance anthropologist Ann R. David notes that for his shows, there were 'queues outside the door' of the Aldwych, along with a sign saying 'House Full' (the Aldwych seats an audience of twelve hundred). The two-week run had to be extended to four to 'accommodate the audiences flocking to see him dance' (David 2024: 49). For South Asian dancers in Britain today, Gopal's standing is legendary – and it is he, rather than Shankar, or the dancers Amani or Sundaram of a hundred years earlier, who is usually credited with first putting classical Indian dance on the British radar.³³ There are a number of factors that contribute to his near-mythic status. Long-limbed, with distinctive half-Burmese, half-Indian features, often clad for his performances in a short skirt-like costume, bejewelled and frequently with an ornate headdress or even wings, Gopal had a larger than

life quality that comes across even through faded black and white images from the 1930s and 1940s.³⁴ Together with this was his phenomenal success as a performer, which was at a level that South Asian dance practitioners in the UK today can only dream of, including the sell-out success in London's prestigious West End theatres described above. In a documentary on Gopal, David observes, 'Indian dance in a West End stage for two weeks would be unheard of now'. Kaushik comments similarly, 'Ram arrived and had up to six months' worth of shows at venues like Aldwych', pointing out that today's South Asian dancers have 'not yet reached [the] West End'.³⁵ In addition, unlike several other classical Indian dancer artists who performed in Britain at a similar time – Mrinalini Sarabhai (1949), Shanta Rao (1964) and Balasaraswati (who performed to packed houses and audiences, including Merce Cunningham and Margot Fonteyn at the Edinburgh Festival in 1963) – Gopal was the first to make Britain his home (Uday Shankar did so, but only briefly, as his time in Europe was spent primarily in Paris).

Gopal's career bridged a period of critical change in Britain, in particular in relation to perceptions of 'distant lands', the 'foreign' and the 'exotic'. When Gopal first started touring in the late 1930s, it was in the context of a continuing fascination with *Orientalia*. Gopal's tremendous popularity must be understood against this context. Prior to Indian independence, there is also, as David (2001: 20) observes, a suggestion of 'colonialist pride in the display of cultural wealth' in his enthusiastic reception. When Queen Mary invited him to tea, there was certainly a sense of her celebrating the 'jewel in the crown' (*ibid.*).

By the time of the end of Gopal's career in the 1960s, the social context in Britain had changed dramatically. Britain was no longer an empire. The Empire had been replaced by the Commonwealth – and the 1948 Nationality Act ruled that all citizens of countries within the British Commonwealth were also 'all full British subjects', entitled to settle in Britain (Marwick 2003: 132). Indeed, immigration and settlement of workers from outside of Britain was actively encouraged by the British government in the late 1940s and early 1950s to combat the acute labour shortage that Britain faced after the war, and was followed by immigration of 'British subjects' from the West Indies, India and Pakistan. Then, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Africanization policies of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, seeking to establish African sovereignty after independence from Britain, led to the enforced migration of large numbers of East African Asians. For Indian dance forms, this migration was galvanizing – as Naseem Khan (1997: 26) puts it, here 'almost overnight' was a new audience for the forms, a new demand for training and classes. It was the 1970s that really saw the emergence of the groups that later turned into the institutions that form the focus of this book. The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in London was founded in 1972, acquiring and moving to its present premises in a disused church in West Kensington in 1978. Akademi (then the Academy of Indian Dance) was formed in 1979 (see Appendix 3).

While the presence in India of Britain's East India Company and subsequent imperial rule meant that there had been an exchange of populations between India and Britain since the beginning of the seventeenth century (Visram 2002; Fisher, Lahiri and Thandi 2007), immigration after the Second World War was on a much larger scale. Kedhar (2020: 6) explains, 'from 1948 to 1981, migration from South Asia to Britain within thirty years surpassed anything seen in the previous three hundred years, increasing from forty-three thousand in 1951 to approximately one million in 1981'. Suddenly 'race' was an issue in Britain, as it was already in other parts of the world. The 'Lure of the East' was not so easy to sustain in the face of the reality of people from the 'East', who, far from fulfilling their roles as figures of improbable opulence and mystique, set about on the necessary grind of earning a living, as owners of corner shops or labourers in textile mills. In August 1958, in what social historian Arthur Marwick (2003: 163) describes as a 'landmark' indicating the 'point of change between the post-war age of consensus and the new age of cultural change', violent race riots broke out in Notting Hill in West London.³⁶ Ten years later, in 1968, the Midlands-based member of parliament Enoch Powell made his now infamous 'rivers of blood' speech, in which he predicted grave consequences if immigration was allowed to continue (see Chapter 3). Against this backdrop, while in the post-war London of the late 1940s and 1950s, David (2024: 120) records a 'fresh readiness' among audiences 'to respond to artistic creations from abroad', and Gopal continued to perform successfully until the mid-1960s, there was now a whole other context to the performance of Indian dance. Such performances no longer necessarily evoked the lavish spirituality of a distant land, but came accompanied also by associations with race riots and the realities of a rapidly changing world. The 'exotic dancer' had become the 'ethnic dancer'. A new phase in the history of South Asian dance in Britain had begun. The dancers seeking to make their way in this book carry with them this legacy – the legacy of the 'Other' as fantasy, together with the 'Other' as threat; of Indian dance forms as holding the promise of an Oriental escape, while containing also the threat of a potentially overwhelming 'foreignness'. As I discuss, the need to navigate these two equally undesirable frames of representation necessarily shapes the way young dancers practising these forms enter their working lives.

The Patron State – the Context of Arts Funding in Britain

The period following the Second World War also saw a dramatic change to Britain's sociopolitical structures through the foundation of a comprehensive system of social insurance 'from the cradle to the grave', including the formation of Britain's National Health Service and commitments to comprehensive education, social security and social housing. The same period also saw the foundation of the Arts Council, an arms-length governmental body that has played a critical role in funding the arts in Britain since its foundation by Royal Charter in 1946.

Initially the Arts Council of Great Britain, it arose out of the Council for Encouragement of Music and Arts (CEMA) set up as an emergency measure to keep the arts alive and support morale during the war (Heilbrun 1984). The great economist John Maynard Keynes was instrumental in its creation, and in ensuring its status as an institution funded and guided by, and yet independent of, the state.³⁷ Since its foundation, the Arts Council has gone through a number of restructurings and transformations, notably changing from the Arts Council of Great Britain to the Arts Council of England in 1994 (renamed Arts Council England in 2003), with the accompanying formation of the Scottish Arts Council and the Arts Council of Wales.³⁸ In 1994, the Arts Council also acquired responsibility as one of the distributors for the National Lottery Good Cause funding (initially only for capital investment in construction, infrastructure and film production, but in 1996 extending this remit to investment in ‘human capital’, enabling the current National Lottery Projects funding discussed below).

The Arts Council started out with four administrative departments: Drama, Music, Literature and Visual Arts, with dance managed by a Dance Advisory sub-committee to the Music Panel. The Arts Council only created a separate dance department with its own director and a full panel in 1979/80, reflecting ‘a burgeoning enthusiasm which has characterised the dance scene over the last few years’ together with a ‘demand for dance classes [that] has never been higher’ (Arts Council of Great Britain 1980: 29). A few years later in 1984, Akademi (then Academy of Indian Dance) made their first (and successful) submission to the Arts Council for funding for a full-length Indian dance production, *The Adventures of Mowgli* (V.P. Dhananjayan, Pratap Pawar, Priya Pawar, 1984).³⁹

Arts Council funding remains vital to the arts sector in Britain today, along with ticket sales, commercial sponsorship, donations and grants from trusts and foundations, and local public investment through local authorities (though this has been considerably reduced since 2010).⁴⁰ The Arts Council now falls under the remit of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), distributing money received from DCMS as Grant in Aid, as well as distributing National Lottery funds. It operates a range of funding programmes, including a funding stream for capital projects. For the purposes of this book, the most pertinent funding stream is its portfolio investment, whereby organizations that are properly constituted and that help to serve the Arts Council’s aims can apply to be in the ‘national portfolio’ as a ‘National Portfolio Organization’ (NPO),⁴¹ receiving regular annual funding for three to four years, and potentially longer if they are successful in successive portfolio rounds. For individual practitioners a key funding stream is National Lottery Projects Grants (NLPG, or Grants for the Arts until 2018), a funding stream open to organizations and individuals for which individuals need only be over 18, living in England and in possession of a bank account to apply for grants for discrete projects for anything between £1000 and over £100,000.⁴² The role of the Arts Council is key to the following discussion,

not least in the way that its portfolio of organizations can be seen as a kind of cultural canon (see Chapter 5).

I turn now to outlining the broader theoretical framing of this book, in particular addressing the centrality I assign to the thinking of French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu.

The Theoretical Framework: Squaring Decolonization with Bourdieu

This book, as discussed above, is about dancers and their work – how they prepare themselves for work, how they find work and importantly, how their work is valued. As such, it focuses less on the specific dance pieces that a dancer might perform and more on why they decide to perform what they do; less on individual dance companies and more on why it is that certain dancers and dance companies receive more attention than others; on why within the broader landscape of dance in Britain, certain companies thrive while others languish.

My work falls therefore across the areas of dance studies, cultural studies and sociology, and draws on scholarship in all three areas. As is indicated by the brief history of Indian dance forms in Britain above, in considering the representation and reception of art forms originating from a former colony (India) within the context of a formerly colonizing power (Britain), I have swiftly and inevitably come up against the continued power imbalances that are the legacy of colonization. The book is therefore also necessarily situated within the growing discourse around decolonization and the journeys that countries and peoples make to shake off the structures and conditioning imposed by colonial rule. Indeed, while my discussion of ‘professionalization’ takes its starting point from sociologists of profession (Wilensky 1964; Brante 1988; Ackroyd 2016; Evetts 2013, 2014), it soon becomes evident, as I point to above, that when discussing the professionalization of South Asian dance forms in Britain, what is important is not so much *what* might be considered professional but *who* determines what this is. A significant factor in both facilitating and recognizing the ‘professionalization’ of South Asian dance forms rests, I argue, not so much on anything the sector itself can or should do, but on the need for the wider British dance (and cultural) sector to recognize that there are ‘many professionalisms’, rather than accepting as unarguable the understanding assigned to the term by Euro-American former colonial powers.

My work has also become increasingly rooted, in ways I did not anticipate, in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). Since, not to put too fine a point on it, the theoretical model of a dead white man may not seem an obvious starting point from which to theorize South Asian dance in Britain, I will briefly explain both why I found myself drawn to his thinking and why I feel it provides a helpful and appropriate framing. Though Bourdieu himself resisted biography, his work is nonetheless usefully contextualized by reference to his personal circumstances. While he rose to the highest echelons of French academia, he was raised in a small French peasant village by a postal worker father who

never completed his schooling and a mother who left school at 16 (Friedman 2016a). He never forgot his origins and within his acquired sphere of academic privilege battled with a sense of unease all his life (*ibid.*). This apparent poster boy of meritocracy perceived all too clearly what he understood as the fallacies of this ideology, and the philosophical underpinning provided it by rational action theory (RAT), briefly, a philosophy that privileges the ability of the individual agent to make sovereign choices about their life on the basis of rational analysis.⁴³

For Bourdieu a serious problem with RAT was its ahistoricism. As he put it, ‘this narrow, economist conception of the “rationality” of practices ignores the individual and collective history of agents through which the structures of preference that inhabit them are constituted’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 123). In other words, there are systems and structures beyond the individual that shape our thought processes and limit our existence as ‘free agents’, which prevent us from neatly analysing and ordaining our lives as if following an abstract set of mathematical principles. There is also the presence of other agents with whom we must negotiate to attain status or power. Bourdieu vehemently resisted philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of the ‘original project’, which he read as ‘this sort of free and conscious act of self-creation whereby a creator assigns to himself his life’s designs’ (*ibid.*: 133). His sociology is premised therefore on a profound recognition of the structural limitations on an individual’s choice and ability for self-fulfilment. Against the meritocratic conviction that ‘the best will make it’, and despite his own phenomenal success in this respect, Bourdieu reminds us again and again of the limits of unconscious, unacknowledged and unspoken structures of domination that seat themselves insidiously (or, to build on Foster’s (2009: 7) wordplay, in(sinew)ously) in our very musculature. Yet this recognition is not a counsel of despair. On the contrary, Bourdieu’s repeated summons to reflexivity urge us to examine our unexamined thoughts and practices as a way of contesting a dominant culture, which, though tending to inertia, remains a ‘site of struggle’, a state of ‘no more than a temporary equilibrium’ (Bourdieu 1990: 141). If we recognize the systemic patterns that limit us, we are more likely to be able to challenge and transcend them. To use contemporary terminology, one could say that Bourdieu is urging us to be ‘woke’.

Bourdieu’s commitment to the use of his theoretical concepts as tools, evolving in response to their use (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), has meant that they possess a malleability that allows their use in ways that he himself did not envisage (Thatcher et al. 2016). The now ubiquitous spread of his concepts of ‘social’ and ‘cultural capital’, for example, in itself points to their value and to how, whatever the limitations of his framework, it remains ‘enormously good for thinking with’ (Jenkins, cited in Wainwright et al. 2006: 553). His constant probing into structures of domination, particularly those so ‘rooted in our collective unconscious that we no longer even see [them]’ and ‘so in tune with our expectations that [they] become hard to challenge’ (Bourdieu 1998), has meant

that I have found his theoretical tools of great help in the attempt to radically ‘unmask and deconstruct the western hegemony’ in the field of the humanities and other disciplines (Mbembe 2010), an unmasking that is so necessary for decolonization. His emphasis on embodiment, meanwhile, through his concepts of *habitus* and *hexis* (see Chapter 4), makes him especially useful when considering the embodied art of dance. While Bourdieu’s own work did not focus much attention on issues of race and ethnicity, giving greater attention to questions of class (1984) and gender (2001), as sociologist Derron Wallace (2016: 38) remarks, despite this, ‘his concepts have long been used to interpret the outcomes of racial, ethnic and class minorities’. Thus, ‘perhaps he has more to say on issues of race and ethnicity than we give him credit for’.⁴⁴ The twin focus in his work on the use of his theoretical tools as, firstly, inherently malleable and intended to be adapted to circumstance and, secondly, a means to reveal structures of domination is in part why they have been used so productively by more recent theorists such as Sara Ahmed (2007), Ghassan Hage (2000) and Wallace (2016). These writers bring his concepts into the twenty-first century and into the work of decolonization and the recognition of the violence inherent in colonialism’s ‘laws of race’ (Mbembe 2010). As the focus of this book moves from the tensions within the concept of professionalism associated with class and income to the related yet distinct tensions associated with ethnicity and race, my work draws more on Bourdieu as reflected and refracted through these more recent thinkers.

Methodology: Ethnography, Auto-Ethnography and Self-Consciousness

The research for the specific purposes of this book took place primarily between 2016 and 2020. It draws on interviews with fifty-one dance artists and arts administrators in the sector, and the attendance of forty-nine live performances across England, in theatres, temples, community centres and town squares, as well as many more online.⁴⁵ I have taken part in sector conferences (Navadisha 2016), round table meetings and discussions, and have attended classes both in person and latterly (during the Covid-19 pandemic) over Zoom. I have largely taken the role of a ‘participant observer’ (Becker and Geer 1957; Whyte 1979; Jackson 1983), a research practice by which the researcher gathers material as much by participating in activities in the field (e.g. taking part in discussions, participating in classes) as by gathering material as a researcher positioned outside the field. Such ‘performing as a way of knowing’ is particularly important in acknowledging that ‘not all knowledge is verbally based, and that people use kin-aesthetic as well as intellectual intelligence to process information’ (Grau 2001: 35). It recognizes that an embodied experience of a dance form allows for a richer ethnography (David 2013b). It is also important in accessing the unedited and sometimes more authentic views of people in the field gleaned through gossip, hearsay and informal conversations (Lancaster 1994; Hamera 2011; Kedhar 2011). This intensive period of research builds on a much longer-standing rela-

relationship with classical Indian dance forms in Britain developed over more than thirty years. In this way my ethnography also takes the character of what dance ethnographer Peter Harrop (2013: 3) calls ‘long ethnography’, meaning the acquired understanding of a field over an extended period of time.

My relationship with classical Indian dance, specifically bharatanatyam, began when I was 7. My father’s work placement in the temple town of Madurai in Tamil Nadu,⁴⁶ South India, meant an end to the ballet classes I had been taking in Birmingham in Britain – leaving my parents looking for the nearest available equivalent. This, they were told, was bharatanatyam – and since that time, this has been my dance form. By the time I returned to Britain as a teenager, I had embraced bharatanatyam, Tamil and Madurai to the extent that clinging to bharatanatyam was a way of holding on to a place I had not wanted to leave. I therefore spent several years stubbornly trekking from my home in Oxford to the Bhavan in West Kensington (referenced above) every weekend to practise my *adavus* (basic movement units/steps within bharatanatyam) with my guru, Prakash Yadagudde. My first job after university was as Education Officer for Akademi, under the leadership of Mira Kaushik. I then worked as a research assistant for Andrée Grau on the Leverhulme-funded project on South Asian dance in Britain⁴⁷ before returning to Akademi as Dance Development Officer, working with Kaushik to produce, among other things, the conferences South Asian Aesthetics – Unwrapped (2002) and Negotiating Natyam (2005). I combined this with working variously as a dancer, dance animateur⁴⁸ and dance teacher in London, Exeter and Birmingham, including a stint as Education Officer (and briefly apprentice dancer) for Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company and a memorable summer spent working on *Images in Varnam* (2001) with Mavin Khoo Dance.

In many ways, therefore, this story of the changing fortunes of working as a classical Indian dancer in Britain is inextricably intertwined with my own personal story. I have known some of those interviewed, both personally and professionally, for over thirty years. I met one of my interviewees, my teacher at the Bhavan, Prakash Yadagudde, when I was 16 – and another, Bisakha Sarker, as a 14-year-old in Oxford, participating in a dance performance on Tagore. I have known Amina Khayyam since my early twenties, when we both attended classes at the Bhavan (she in kathak) and worked together on combining kathak with bharatanatyam, fuelled by her particularly potent brand of ginger chai. Shane Shambhu has been a friend since, along with the dancer Jasmine Simhalan, we toured the country’s backwaters in a rickety minivan for the rural touring scheme Live Music Now! At one time or another I have worked, both as dancer and as writer or administrator, for all three of the organizations that formed the core of the aforementioned ‘South Asian Dance Alliance’ (Akademi, Sampad and Kadam, South Asian arts organizations based in London, Birmingham and Luton respectively).

My long-standing embodiment of bharatanatyam means that the daily ache in my knees reminds me of the toll that intensive training can take on the body,

especially when undertaken on hard floors or in insufficiently heated rooms. I relate all too closely with the battle to motivate oneself to practise, alone and in the confined space of one's living room because there is no available group class. Similarly, the humiliation and frustration of being assessed on one's deficit – judged for what you cannot perform rather than credited for what you can (see Chapters 4 and 5) – is something I relate to from personal experience.

While in this way an insider to the field, I have at the same time always been positioned as somewhat apart – because I am white, and because I have two white, London-born parents who had never heard of bharatanatyam before I started learning it. My engagement in bharatanatyam and fluency in spoken Tamil as a blonde, blue-eyed child earned me entirely unmerited attention while growing up in Madurai, and the status of something of a curiosity. My technical lapses were sometimes overlooked due to my sheer novelty, and the most banal Tamil conversation was sufficient at times to earn myself and my siblings extra fizzy drinks (at that time Limca or Thums Up) in restaurants. On one occasion, after my return to Britain, I was given £1 by a stranger of South Asian heritage because I had spent the bus journey singing my old school songs to myself (which were variously in Hindi, Bengali, Sanskrit, Tamil and English). My engagement in bharatanatyam has therefore always been accompanied by a certain self-consciousness, and an awareness of myself as 'Other'. In this way, even before I placed a deliberate distance between myself and the field by looking at it as an ethnographer, I have always been an 'insider-outsider'.

Of course, as cultural anthropologist and novelist Kirin Narayan (1993) eloquently reminds us, the character of 'insideness' and 'outsideness' is as subject to variation as any other form of identity, such that the ethnographer, as with the subjects of their field of study, exists in a permanent dance of alienation and belonging, of 'insideness', of 'outsideness' – and primarily, of 'shaking it all aboutness'. Where I felt my 'outsideness' on the grounds of my 'whiteness', many of my (brown) interviewees revealed their equally complex relationship to the cultures and subcultures of the practice of classical Indian dance forms – speaking of times they felt accepted, and times they felt 'Othered' on account of their gender, their sexuality, their Britishness, their Indianness, their 'being from a different part of India-ness', their economic background, their religion, their lack of religion. Akram Khan has spoken of feeling like an 'outsider' on account of being 'Bangladeshi',⁴⁹ while Nina Rajarani describes a sequence of levels of acceptance almost like a stack of Russian dolls.⁵⁰ Having said this, the visible and non-negotiable epidermal difference of my skin colour marks a more substantive difference between my experience and that of many of my fellow practitioners – because of the very societal white-centredness that this book explores.

As discussed in Chapter 3, dancers of classical Indian dance forms in Britain overwhelmingly have a South Asian heritage – and are brown-skinned. Without wishing to reduce to a white–brown binary the multiplicity of narratives that

unite and distinguish individuals' experiences of the world, it is nonetheless the case that as a white bharatanatyam dancer, I have not had to contend with the day-to-day racism of being told to 'go home' or being asked where I am 'really' from.⁵¹ My experience has been marked by sometimes extravagant delight at my (unremarkable) accomplishments from some (particularly Tamil) communities, and by sometimes extravagant disappointment at my white skin from some (particularly white) audiences. During a season I spent performing in an Indian restaurant as part of the Edinburgh Festival (1999), I was told both 'to colour my skin with teabags' and that 'I danced very well', but that 'it was a shame I was white'. My own response has inevitably varied by context. There have been times when I have shamelessly basked in unwarranted attention, and many times when I have wholeheartedly wished to be shorter, dark-haired and brown-skinned – to be less conspicuous, to 'fit in'.

Where my experience aligns with that of many of my interviewees is in the discrimination I have faced because of the codes and conventions of my artform: through embodying the dance form that a school will bring in for the students to learn about 'India', but not book as a regular after-school activity; through the assumption that anyone who is a dancer 'must be able to do the splits'; through the refusal to see that the reinterpretation of a *padam* (a lyrical, often slow expressive piece, in which the dancer explores a character's emotions) about a woman spying on the love affairs of her neighbour can have as much contemporary relevance as a dance piece about risk in the modern world.

Through this 'long ethnography', my research draws both on deliberately recorded field notes and formal interviews, together with years' worth of less formal 'head notes' (Sanjek 1990; Grau 1999): lived experience, snippets of conversation and friends' realities. Just as inevitably, this has presented me with both the 'gains and losses' (Hastrup 1995: 157) of the participant observer. The role has often allowed me 'privileged' access to the field (*ibid.*) and has supplied me with a real passion to understand it better. At the same time, there have certainly been occasions when I have been reticent to ask questions that I know touch upon sensitivities within the field, such as which caste an artist might belong to, or how much they might charge for a performance. There has also been the risk of exploiting or misusing information gained from participants in the vulnerable informality of day-to-day exchange rather than from the clearly signalled formality of an interview, and there have been times when I have almost forgotten myself and my role and had to suppress the urge to dispute an (in my view) particularly ill-judged opinion.

The best I can say is that in recognizing these shortcomings, I have attempted to overcome them. As all data is incomplete, and all data in being presented is interpreted, there seems to be no perfect way out of this conundrum of being an 'insider-outsider', compassionate yet critical, searching for belonging while seeking to remain separate. As the social anthropologist Kate Fox (2004) ob-

serves, it is now almost a requisite part of any ethnography that the ethnographer prefaces their work with a penitent disclaimer emphasizing the limitations and unavoidable subjectivity of their work. I can only echo her wry conclusion that ‘while participant observation has its limitations, this rather uneasy combination of involvement and detachment is the best method we have for exploring cultures, so it will have to do’ (ibid.: 4). Having said this, I attempt to mitigate some of my implicit bias by ensuring that my interviewees come from a range of contexts in the field – independent dance artists, representatives of institutions, young artists still learning their art forms and established artists secure in their position. Information gained formally from interviews, from curated or recorded conversations, is balanced by information gained informally by standing around in theatre lobbies, in changing rooms for dance classes and in late-night conversations in hotel rooms.⁵²

A proper understanding of where we are demands at the very least a broad knowledge of our history. Along with ethnographic research, therefore, a part of my research has been historic, and there are points at which my ethnographic interviews have crossed into the arena of oral history. What were classes in classical Indian dance forms in Britain like in the 1960s and 1970s? What was the audience response to specific performances? What were the primary motivations behind a certain (historic) decision? In making sense of the now, this work moves back and forth between history and ethnography, the past and the present. The third point of this triangulation is theory – or those different lenses that can help make sense of data in different ways. These lenses are taken, as discussed above, from sociology, in particular Bourdieu, as well as from theories of decolonization.

I highlight some of the specific boundaries and limitations of my research below. Before that, however, I address the perennially vexed topic of the label ‘South Asian dance’ (David 2005a; Meduri 2008a, 2008b) and the equally unsatisfactory collective term ‘classical Indian dance’.

‘South Asian’ or ‘Classical Indian’ Dance Forms?

‘South Asian Dance – what the fuck is that?’

—Akram Khan, Navadisha 2016

This was a question Akram Khan pondered in his keynote address at Navadisha 2016. As he makes clear, ‘South Asian dance’ is not a term with a self-evident meaning – and it is one that many within the sector have been and remain unhappy with. Despite this, throughout this work I refer variously to both ‘South Asian dance’ forms and ‘classical Indian dance’ forms, the justification being that in doing so, I follow the model of the sector itself. The London-based organization Akademi is ‘Akademi – South Asian Dance in the UK’. The Birmingham organization Sampad champions ‘South Asian Arts and Heritage’. An invitation was sent out in 2018 by Dance Hub Birmingham asking for tenders to

research the feasibility of a ‘South Asian dance’ degree. The competition *BBC Young Dancer* had as one of its dance categories ‘South Asian dance’. The phrase ‘classical Indian dance’, though slightly less prominently used, is nonetheless well recognized. Notably, the relevant dance faculty of the ISTD is now called the Classical Indian Dance Faculty (CIDF), changing from the name ‘South Asian Dance Faculty’ in 2002 (see David 2013a). The Liverpool-based arts organization Milapfest advertises its summer school, Dance India, as offering a ‘renowned intensive training programme in Indian classical dance’, not South Asian dance (Milapfest n.d.a.). The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is the home of ‘Indian classical arts’ (Bhavan n.d.).

Pragmatically, ‘South Asian dance’ is the term used in Britain, by those within and outside the ‘South Asian dance’ sector, to refer to the range of dance forms originating from the Indian subcontinent (which includes India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal), including folk dance forms, bollywood dance and other forms not considered ‘classical’. Emerging from the US State Department, based on a bureaucrat’s term used to refer to post-partition India and its neighbours (Khilnani 2003; Meduri 2008a), this unpoetic phrase (Khilnani, cited in Meduri 2008a) crossed into academia and thence into the British arts establishment, adopted by dancers and arts officers in Britain in the late 1980s (Grau 2004). For a while, dancers and institutions within the sector seized upon the term almost with a sense of defiance (see for example Meduri 2008a, 2008b on Akademi’s decision to change its name, mentioned above) in that the more geographically vague term ‘South Asian’ seemed to offer space for exploration beyond the sometimes stifling constraints of ‘Indian’ dance. More recently practitioners and institutions have, with equal determination, rejected the term, proud instead to champion the specificities and parameters of being ‘classical’ and ‘Indian’.

The label ‘classical Indian’, however, as suggested by the need to escape ‘stifling’, brings with it its own challenges (Lopez y Royo 2003; Purkayastha 2017b). The specificity of ‘India’ can be seen to exclude countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, where the classical dance forms, particularly, in the case of Pakistan, kathak, have also emerged and evolved. At the same time the term obscures the regional provenance of the separate forms within the vast reach of the Indian subcontinent. Meanwhile, the term ‘classical’ is an uneasy adoption of a European term, which ‘needs to be divested of its total Eurocentric bias’ before providing a ‘more fruitful avenue of understanding’ (Jeyasingh 2010: 182). Though often presented as equivalent, the indigenous categories *margi* and *desi* clearly do not fully translate to ‘classical’ and ‘folk’ in the loaded sense that both these terms have within Euro-American dance studies, carrying with them the idea of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art.⁵³ The importance of being labelled a ‘classical dance form’ in itself was politically driven and only arose as an issue for Indian dance forms ‘as part of the movement to reinscribe Indian dance forms in modern ar-

tistic practice and give them a status, equivalent to that of classical ballet in the West' (Lopez y Royo 2003: 156).

In relation to both these collective terms, for several practitioners, the very label 'dance' is unhelpful. As dance anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler (1999: 13) has argued, 'traditionally in many societies there was no category comparable to the Western concept [of dance]' (see also David 2014; Meduri 2019). For many practitioners the line between what in Euro-American terms are 'dance' and 'drama' is, in Indian performance art forms, so blurred as to make the division unhelpful. These performance forms could or should as readily be considered 'drama' as 'dance' by a Euro-American classification, both labels fitting the forms as well (or as inadequately). Bringing these points together, dancer and scholar Anurima Banerji (2021b) succinctly argues that 'the phrase "Indian Classical Dance" is a misleading misnomer, given that it is not "Indian", but regional and transnational in character; not "classical", but a confluence of ritual, folk, court, and concert forms; and not "dance", but interdisciplinary performance.'

There is an increasing recognition of the justice of this argument, and an increasing frustration within the sector at the need for a collective label at all, accompanied by a desire for dance forms to be referred to by their individual names of kathak, kathakali, kuchipudi and so on, thereby avoiding the connotations and constraints of imperfect labels.⁵⁴ The lack of a critical mass of practitioners however means that for many initiatives and institutions (e.g. the Centre for Advance Training (CAT)⁵⁵ training schemes, the ISTD, *BBC Young Dancer* or even the dance agencies), it is simply not viable to treat each style entirely independently, economically or infrastructurally. To attain the visibility, or at times the economic subsidy, that attaches to such initiatives, therefore, disparate and often very different dance forms (such as kathak and bharatanatyam) make at times uneasy alliances to make sure that their presence counts. In this respect, the sector shares a dilemma faced by the Association for Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD). Needing a more generic signifier than the individual names of a panoply of dance styles, both South Asian and African diaspora dance forms in Britain have settled for labels they are less than happy with, which nonetheless help to situate them within the broader field of British dance.

Which imperfect 'collective' might be preferable has long been a subject of discussion – and the question as to which label is politically and aesthetically most apt has been debated by the sector for over twenty years, without conclusion. In 2004, Akademi organized a symposium to discuss what might be meant by 'South Asianness' (No Man's Land – Exploring South Asianness), and several of those present expressed their dissatisfaction with the label (Meduri 2008b), a dissatisfaction still felt today, as Khan's opening question makes clear.

For the moment, while recognizing the problems with both labels, I meet the sector where it is and swap between names, following the lead of the artist or organization discussed, for example when discussing the 'South Asian dance'

category in *BBC Young Dancer*, or Akademi's 'South Asian Dance in the UK'. The term I use more consistently is 'classical Indian dance' – for two main reasons. Firstly, my work looks primarily at bharatanatyam and kathak – and to a lesser extent odissi and kuchipudi – all forms (however unsatisfactorily) counted among the now eight dance forms commonly labelled 'classical' dances of India.⁵⁶ Secondly, in considering these forms, my focus is on their 'classical' technique, even when this technique is used within a (Euro-American) contemporary dance context. Using the term 'classical Indian dance forms' retains this focus. As others have observed, the term 'South Asian dance' has latterly been increasingly understood to refer particularly to that hybridized form that constitutes 'South Asian contemporary dance' (Thobani 2017; Kedhar 2020). While I use the term, I acknowledge its several limitations and challenges, so clearly articulated by Banerji. Wherever I am referring more specifically to a discrete form, such as bharatanatyam or kathak, I use these specific names. A possible collective noun, avoiding culturally inappropriate and geographically tethering terminology, could, I suggest, be 'Natyam' (Sanskrit for 'dance/drama'). I touch on this possibility in Chapter 5. For the moment, however, I adhere to the labels the sector has adopted for itself.

Boundaries and Limitations

Before outlining the contents of the book, a note about what it is not about. As mentioned above, the focus of this book is on the so-called 'classical' dance forms. Thus, while bollywood and bhangra, among other forms, have an increasingly significant role within Britain, it is beyond the scope of this project to consider these forms. Of the 'classical' forms, while both odissi and kuchipudi have a growing presence in Britain, they have not yet been incorporated into the institutions of, for example, Yuva Gati (the South Asian strand of the CAT scheme) or the ISTD. This has meant that, although I consider odissi and kuchipudi, my engagement with these forms has been limited, and my research has inevitably engaged more with bharatanatyam and kathak than other forms.

In analysing work as a dancer, while appreciating the importance of work as a teacher, dance movement therapist or dance animateur, my focus has been on performance. This is because an important part of professionalization is necessarily 'how dances come to be seen' (Lepecki et al. 2004), and more importantly, 'what dances come to be seen'. Performance dictates training, so has an inevitable impact on the role of teaching. Thus, while not diminishing the critical role of the dance animateur, and the all-important role of the teacher, the particular focus of this work has been on the dancer as professional *performer*.

Finally, it is important to note that the focus of this work on a few select classical dance forms reflects the pattern by which these dance forms have come to stand in for Indian dance heritage at the expense of multiple subaltern, Dalit and minoritarian⁵⁷ dance knowledges. Where classical Indian dance forms are mar-

ginalized by the white-centred structures and aesthetics of contemporary Britain, these dance forms are themselves the instrument of marginalization in dominating the representation of what it means to be Indian or of Indian heritage – both within India and in the diaspora. This domination, as my book touches upon, is intimately related to the transfer within India in the early twentieth century of the practice of ‘classical dance forms’ to the high-caste and the well-heeled. This process, the gender and sexuality scholar Shefali Chandra (2020: 1195) suggests, was one of ‘re: colonization’ – by which Brahmanism was ‘rendered according to the mandate of whiteness: universal and transparent’. Where this book argues for the decolonization of the British canon through the making of space for the aesthetics and artistic narratives of Indian classical dance forms, the fuller work of decolonization must look also to confront this pattern of ‘re: colonization’, both in the context of India and the diaspora (Prakash 2019; Chandra 2020; Banerji 2021a).

Chapter Outline

I start by ‘setting the scene’ and providing the context for the book through a closer consideration of the place of South Asian dance within *BBC Young Dancer*. I then turn to a detailed examination of what is meant by ‘professionalism’ and ‘professionalization’. This is succeeded by chapters broadly centred around each of the three key features of professionalism I identify: learning, livelihood and legitimacy.

Chapter 1 (‘Context’) sets the context for the book by presenting a snapshot of the place of South Asian dance in Britain by analogy with the place of the South Asian dance category in the competition *BBC Young Dancer*. Drawing on the critique of televised competitions within dance and cultural studies (Penman 1993; Morris 2008; Redden 2008, 2010; Weisbrod 2010, 2014; Elswit 2012; Dodds and Hooper 2014; Foster 2014), I consider how far the *Young Dancer* competition avoids the susceptibility of other televised competitions to spectacularized conformity. I argue that several of the challenges evinced by the position of the South Asian dance category within the *Young Dancer* competition apply equally to the position of South Asian dance within the broader field of British dance. These include the paradox of high achievement and a high profile resting on a fragile infrastructure and the limited awareness of the specific artistic narratives of South Asian dance forms within a wider audience. Efforts at equal representation, I argue, can only go so far while the legacy of colonialism in ideologies that deny coevalness (Fabian 2014) and subscribe to the ‘rhetoric of modernity’ (Mignolo 2007) remains unchallenged in our cultural sphere.

Chapter 2 (‘Professionalism’) unpicks the vexed question of ‘professionalism’. A topic acknowledged as contentious at the best of times – hence sociologist Thomas Brante’s statement, ‘Perhaps it is not an overstatement to say that there are almost as many theories of professions as there are scholars of professions’

(1988: 126) – it is further complicated in the context of the arts, and yet further in the context of South Asian dance (in Britain). I acknowledge the increasing scrutiny of the concept owing to its disciplinarian force (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2013) and return to the question Bourdieu raised in 1992, which is how far this Anglo-American, culturally laden value should be abandoned in favour of a concept less prescriptive. In this light, I propose a reading of ‘professionalism’ in line with the Tamil concept of *virutti*,⁵⁸ meaning a ‘way of life’, ‘conduct’ or ‘behaviour’, ‘employment’, ‘business’, ‘devoted service’ or ‘means of livelihood’ (Agarathi n.d.), leading me to propose three core features of professionalism: learning (or excellence), livelihood, and license (or legitimacy).

Chapter 3 (‘Learning’) takes a sociohistorical approach, looking at how classical Indian dancers are trained in Britain today and the institutions involved in providing such training. I focus on the Classical Indian Dance Faculty (CIDF) of the Imperial Society for Teachers of Dancing (ISTD), the South Asian-focused Centre for Advanced Training (CAT), Yuva Gati and the failed attempt to establish a BA in Contemporary Dance with a South Asian dance strand at London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS). Starting with a historical reflection on how hereditary dancers were trained and considered to attain proficiency, I then look at some of the early efforts to establish classical Indian dance classes in Britain. I argue that similarly to the situation in the United States (Srinivasan 2012), British cultural policy from the 1970s led to a repositioning of classical dance forms from being ones with a universal appeal to being ‘minority arts’ for a ‘minority’ people. This framing reinforced the ways in which the dance forms were used by migrant communities as a form of ‘cultural long-distance nationalism’ (Wong 2010). Such positioning, I argue, has had long-term repercussions in terms of circumscribing the available pool both of potential performers and potential audiences for classical Indian dance in Britain. This has had a knock-on impact on standards of dance due to the lack of demand for classical work, and hence a lack of a critical mass of candidates to make a vocational training school for the dance forms a viable entity.

In Chapter 4 (‘Livelihood, Learning, Embodiment’), I address two related questions. The first is how far the technique of a professional dancer is influenced by the context within which they live. What happens when the cultural contexts in which the dancer lives are mismatched or non-aligned with the cultural context in which their dance technique was formed? The second is what the professional demand for the versatile dancer means for the performance of dance technique, particularly of techniques that do not form part of the dominant dance discourse – such as classical Indian dance forms in Britain. How far can the versatile dancer embody distinctive dance techniques without being co-opted into that ‘wonderfully unifying and legitimizing aesthetic category of “contemporary dance” (really meaning Euro-American modern/contemporary dance)’ (Chatterjea 2013: 10)? This chapter deals therefore with livelihood insofar as it highlights the constraints

placed on dancers (and their techniques) by the need to meet a particular market demand. In considering these questions, I use Bourdieu's concept of habitus (as extended by Wainwright, Williams and Turner 2006, 2007). Contrary to dance anthropologist Brenda Farnell (2000) and to Foster (2009), I argue that this concept is too useful for the theorization of dance technique to be abandoned.

Chapter 5 ('Legitimacy') looks at the role played in 'professionalization' by 'consecration' (Bourdieu 1991) or legitimacy, in particular through absorption into the 'national cultural canon'. While, as I discuss, there are multiple factors that have contributed to the failure to form a professional field for the pursuit of classical Indian dance forms in Britain, this chapter argues that their position will remain precarious until they are considered more integral to national cultural capital. Following Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage's argument in his book *White Nation* (2000), I propose that these dance forms need to be perceived more as what Britain *is* than as what it *has*. To achieve this, I suggest, will first necessitate a decolonization of national cultural capital and the cultural canon by means of unsuturing (Yancy 2017) or delinking (Quijano 2007) from a canon and an aesthetics dominated by 'white' (Anglo-European) values. This will then permit a true broadening of the 'horizon of expectations' (Mignolo 2007) and a shift from 'multiculturalism' to 'pluriversality', allowing for the development of a 'British Natyam'.

Notes

1. The competition has now changed to be open to dancers of any genre. See afterword to Chapter 1.
2. I use both 'classical Indian dance forms' and 'South Asian dance' as collective terms to refer to the dance styles of (primarily) bharatanatyam and kathak, but also odissi and kuchipudi. I recognize the multiple problems with these labels, which I discuss at greater length later in the introduction. My use of these terms does not signify agreement, but, as I explain below, as far as possible follows current usage by the sector.
3. The BBC was established in 1922 by Royal Charter. While the broadcasting dominance of the BBC has been increasingly threatened in recent years by the explosion of broadcasters in the form of Netflix, YouTube, Amazon and Apple to name a few, the BBC retains an institutional and symbolic status meaning that its programming choices remain significant (See Chapter 1).
4. Akademi is the only organization exclusively devoted to promoting South Asian dance in Britain. There are several other organizations promoting South Asian arts, but they promote both music and dance, or dance as one of several South Asian art forms.
5. I thank dance artist Jane Chan for highlighting to me the importance of using this term rather than cementing the binaries of 'East' and 'West'.
6. The career intentions and experience of all dance artists in the competition can be found on the BBC website. For the 2015 dance artists, see: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/3tRg7qMclgMJ0ZY4HBjrQQS/2015-dance-artists> (retrieved 3 July 2024).
7. This dance artist, Anaya Bolar, has subsequently decided to take up dance professionally.

8. See 'Jaina Modasia', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/3y0fSYWMHyg8hgryZk5n552/jaina-modasia> (retrieved 3 July 2024); 'Sivani Balachandran', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/fj5tZY8kFSv2w7gbbqK4qw/sivani-balachandran> (retrieved 3 July 2024); Ranjan, personal communication, April 2018.
9. Information on the 2017 dance artists is available here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/4BGhz5dvR804r5hPK10tzZq/2017-dance-artists> (retrieved 3 July 2024).
10. It should be noted however that she has worked continuously and very successfully as a professional dance artist since this point even without such additional training, featuring in works choreographed by Richard Alston (*An Italian in Madrid*, 2016), Gary Clarke and Shobana Jeyasingh, and in commissions by Akademi and Sampad. In Akademi's contemporary dance production *The Troth* (2018) (choreographed by contemporary dance choreographer Gary Clarke) Patel was one of two classical Indian dance-trained performers.
11. Shyam Dattani, personal communication, 6 March 2019. Shyam has, however, subsequently gone on to a successful career as a dancer working extensively with Akademi and companies such as Nina Rajarani's Srishti, Urja Thakore's Pagrav and Amina Khayyam Dance.
12. At Navadisha 2016, for example, a member of Arts Council England (ACE) put forward these companies as options when I raised with them the problem of employment opportunities for South Asian dancers (field notes, 20 May 2016).
13. In the company's description of its work, there is no reference to a particular interest in South Asian dance forms. Rather, the company self-defines as 'restless, inquisitive and intrepid', taking its inspiration from 'the complexities and contradictions of the world around us' (Shobana Jeyasingh Dance n.d.). It is difficult to see what more Shobana Jeyasingh needs to do to show that, while she may draw on bharatanatyam when her exploration takes that direction (for example, she used bharatanatyam and odissi dance artist Sooraj Subramanian in works such as *Material Men* (2015), *Material Men Redux* (2017) and *Bayadère – The Ninth Life* (2017)), this is no longer her primary interest.
14. These are Leicester Dance Theatre (LDT), also known as Aakash Odedra Company; Sonia Sabri Company; and Balbir Singh Dance Company. LDT emphasizes its specialism in 'South Asian dance' (Aakash Odedra Company n.d.). Sabri's company self-defines as 'presenting Kathak dance in a contemporary context' (Sonia Sabri Company n.d.). Balbir Singh's company, like Khan's, emphasizes a focus on two dance forms – kathak and contemporary and an 'interest in exploring the creative potential of synthesising the two forms' (Balbir Singh Dance n.d.). There are many more companies that work with classical Indian dance forms (particularly bharatanatyam and kathak), including Urja Desai Thakore's Pagrav, Nina Rajarani's Srishti, Amina Khayyam Dance Company, Seeta Patel Dance and Kamala Devam Dance Company. In 2019, all these companies continued to operate within the precarity of project-based funding, though a number have since joined the portfolio. Indeed, the number of organizations with NPO status representing classical Indian dance more than doubled for the 2023–26 portfolio. See afterword to Chapter 5.
15. This characterization of Khan as a top British choreographer is widely accepted – he is referred to elsewhere as Britain's most famous choreographer and is listed as one of four named artists and companies 'in demand on a global level' in the Arts Council report

- Dance Mapping* (Burns and Harrison 2009: 378). The others are contemporary choreographers Wayne McGregor and Hofesh Shechter along with DV8 Physical theatre.
16. These have been Queen's honours, somewhat ironically awarding the recipients varying degrees of authority in relation to the British Empire (Order of the British Empire, Member of the British Empire, Commander of the British Empire and British Empire Medal). Recipients include Ram Gopal, Nilima Devi, Shobana Jeyasingh, Mira Kaushik, Akram Khan, Naseem Khan, Nina Rajarani, Piali Ray, Bisakha Sarker, Sunita Golvala, Geetha Upadhyaya, Sujata Banerjee, Pratap Pawar, Pushkala Gopal, Vikas Kumar, Chitra Sundaram, Anand Bhatt and Aakash Odedra.
 17. Jeyasingh observed back in 1993 that 'One of the greatest challenges I face every year is recruiting dance artists' (Jeyasingh in Brinson 1993: 56). In 2021, the situation has shifted, but not so very much. Dance artist and choreographer Amina Khayyam comments: 'As I start to make a transition from performing to "choreography", I find myself in a dilemma. I have at least five years of work ahead, and the issue for me is that I haven't been able to find dancers that are a good fit for my work. Though dancers are trained well in kathak, yet they are not versatile and are too hung up on their training and relationship with their "Gurus"' (Khayyam, personal communication, 21 May 2021). Dance artist and choreographer Seeta Patel feels similarly. For her, it is not only a question of the calibre of dance artists, but of their availability to commit to a touring project – 'there are good dancers coming up . . . but without availability to work in the way I need – i.e., 8 consecutive weeks' (Patel, personal communication, 2019). Tellingly, for her 2019 ensemble production of *The Rite of Spring*, four of the six dance artists in the ensemble were recruited from outside Britain. Seeta Patel Dance's 2023 tour of *The Rite of Spring* featured twelve dancers and was performed live to accompaniment by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – a first for bharatanatyam in Britain. The piece was very well received with 4-star reviews, and advertising for the piece broadcast on billboards at Piccadilly Circus in the heart of London. Hearteningly, three of the twelve dancers (Aishani Ghosh, Shree Savani and Adhya Shastry) were born and primarily trained in the UK.
 18. Naseem Khan worked for a number of years for the Arts Council, acting as Head of Diversity from 1996 to 2003.
 19. This report was jointly funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Commission for Racial Equality.
 20. In the same year that she published her report, Naseem Khan set up the Minority Arts Advisory Service (MAAS), which advised artists and arts organizations (including the Arts Council) to help improve the representation of ethnic minority arts in Britain. MAAS closed in 1994, shortly after which the Arts Council formed its own diversity department, of which Khan was head between 1996 and 2003.
 21. The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in London was established in 1972, moving to its current premises in 1978. It is one of 110 Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan centres worldwide, 105 of which are in India (Bhavan n.d.). The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan was founded as an educational trust by politician and activist K.M. Munshi in Gujarat, India in 1938.
 22. The Mountbatten Hall, the main theatre space of the Bhavan, has a capacity of 294.
 23. Whereas in the Anglo-European context shaking one's head and 'tutting' connotes disapproval, in the Indian context shaking one's head and a particular pattern of 'tutting' can often signal intense enjoyment or appreciation. These are just a couple of examples of the contingency of embodied language, which I discuss further in Chapter 4.

24. The Sanskrit word *abhinaya*, made up of the prefix *abhi* (to, towards), together with the verb root *nii* (to guide, conduct, lead, direct), means literally ‘to lead towards’ or ‘to convey’. It is the word used within the Sanskrit compendium on drama, the *Natyashastra* (200 BCE–200 CE), to refer to the expressive aspect of dance and drama and is a central element in the performance of Indian classical dance forms.
25. The Bharatanatyam dance artist Uma Venkataraman, for example, tends to choose shorter pieces for performances in Britain (‘I try not to do a single piece that is longer than say fifteen minutes’) on the basis that ‘audiences may not necessarily be prepared for sitting through a forty-five-minute *varnam* – they might be uncomfortable’ (Venkataraman 2018). In adopting this approach Venkataraman adopts the same strategy as that employed by artists such as Ram Gopal and Uday Shankar in the 1930s and 1940s. To make his performances more accessible to Euro-American audiences, Gopal ‘prune[d] the traditional dances of all repetitive movement’ (Gopal 1957: 55). See David (2001) for more on Gopal’s approach.
26. An alliance formed ‘to provide a visionary development path for South Asian dance in the UK and internationally, through a programme of strategic initiatives’ (Akademi n.d.b.). It was launched through an Arts Council development initiative (see end note 27 below). See Appendix 3 for full details of SADAA’s current membership.
27. Whatever the impact of Arts Council initiatives, as I discuss later, it can hardly be accused of not trying to make a difference. Naseem Khan’s 1979 report for example was partly funded by the Arts Council; and the Arts Council initiated a three-year development strategy for South Asian dance in 1987/88 (Arts Council of Great Britain 1988: 10) at the same time as launching a further three-year plan that included a focus on South Asian dance in education (*ibid.*). There was another three-year initiative (Chaturang, focused on the north-west of England) in 1997 in which year it also commissioned a significant review of South Asian dance in England leading to a further national three-year initiative focused on South Asian dance development (Arts Council England 2000). This initiative saw £303,000 distributed among four organisations (Aditi, Akademi, Kadam and Sampad) between 1999 and 2002 (though Aditi closed in 2001). It was this development programme that led to the launch of SADAA, initially with these four organisations as core members. More recently the Arts Council commissioned the South Asian Dance and Music Mapping Study (Courtney Consulting 2020), designed to consider how the sector might be best supported. It was Arts Council funding that enabled the initial research that led both to the creation of the Classical Indian Dance Faculty of the ISTD and to the short-lived BA in South Asian and Contemporary Dance Forms at London Contemporary Dance School (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 2). In 2018, South Asian dance forms were explicitly named as a priority in Arts Council corporate strategy. I qualify my reference to ‘goodwill’ because of the constraints that restrict any policy based on ‘goodwill’ without attention to systemic change. The 1987/88 development strategy, for example, though well intended, was damaging in its focus on the development of the South Asian dance artist as a ‘professional’ in precisely the way this book contests – by reference to a very specific notion of professionalism that encouraged an embrace of the norms of Euro-American contemporary dance (see Kedhar 2020, particularly Chapter 1).
28. This last factor can be seen as being particularly influential, as I discuss later.
29. *Devadasi* (literally translated from Sanskrit as ‘female servant of god’) was one of the names used for the hereditary dancers employed in temples and courts across India (who

- were however known by different names) from at least the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. The term *bayadère* comes from ‘the Portuguese *bailador*, from *baila*, to dance, whence comes the term *bayadère* (Port. *bailadeira*) for temple-dancing girls’ (Puri 2014: 223).
30. The UK inflation calculator gives this as equivalent to almost £700,000 in 2024.
 31. Gautier reports that the contract between the *bayadères* and Tardivel was for eighteen months, during which time each performer was entitled to ten rupees a day together with a lump sum, once at the beginning and once at the end of the engagement, of five hundred rupees each (Guest 1992). It is difficult to give an exact equivalent of how much this would equate to today, but inflation calculators suggest that the purchasing power of ten rupees in 1850 would be about £300 today (as a comparator, the Equity minimum day rate for a performer working outside of London in 2023/24 is £116.34). As an example of their being looked after, they were taken to the theatre to see a production of *Le Dieu et la bayadère* laid on especially for them – apparently, they were unimpressed (Bor 2007: 58).
 32. To arrive at this conclusion, Ann. R. David ‘examined and analysed all available editions from 1910–2000 of the two prominent dance magazines published during this period, *The Dancing Times* and *Ballet* magazine, for reviews pertaining to Indian dance or interpretive “oriental” dance. This was the conclusion drawn from the little evidence available’ (David 2005b: 57 n. 5).
 33. This was the view of dance historian Cyril Beaumont, who wrote in a programme note for Gopal’s 1956 season, ‘It was Ram Gopal, through his initial London recitals in 1939 who first opened our eyes to the various styles and rich vocabulary of Indian dance’ (cited in David 2024: 50).
 34. As David (2010b: 2) points out, his personal beauty was a large part of his appeal – and led to a number of scopophilic reviews of his work.
 35. Quotations from David and Kaushik taken from SADAA (2016).
 36. In this case, the tension was focused on West Indians rather than Asians. However, Marwick’s point about the shift in attitudes remains apposite.
 37. How far an organization funded by and ultimately responsible to government can be genuinely independent has been much debated, most notably by the sociologist (and one time Arts Council vice-chair) Raymond Williams (1979), who argued that while it is at arm’s length, the arm is still attached to, and controlled by, the body, and felt a better description of the relationship would be ‘at wrist’s length’. Nonetheless, the principle of the separation of the Arts Council and thereby its intended insulation from party politics is important.
 38. When I refer to the Arts Council throughout this book, this can be understood to refer to the Arts Council of Great Britain prior to 1994 and to the Arts Council of England after this.
 39. Previous successful funding applications to the Arts Council had been made both by the Academy of Indian Dance and other classical Indian dance artists. For example, the kathak dancer Alpana Sengupta was given an award in 1977 as part of the small-scale touring scheme (Arts Council 1978). *The Adventures of Mowgli* was the first full-scale Indian dance piece to be funded (Arts Council 1985).
 40. See the report from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, ‘A New Deal for Arts Funding in England?’ (Pec: 2023).

41. Until 2012, these organizations were called ‘Regularly Funded Organizations’ or RFOs.
42. For the 2023–26 portfolio, 990 organizations receive a share of £446 million each year. It should be emphasized that while Project Grant funding is deliberately designed to be as open access as possible, this does make it an extremely competitive programme.
43. Also known as rational choice theory.
44. Derron Wallace, interviewed on *Thinking Allowed: A Special Programme on Pierre Bourdieu*, BBC Radio 4, June 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07gg1kb> (retrieved 3 July 2024). I am indebted to Wallace and all the contributors to the excellent volume *Bourdieu: The Next Generation* (2016) in helping me to grapple with and reach a deeper understanding of Bourdieu.
45. A list of all interviewees happy to be named can be found in Appendix 4.
46. My father went to India with a mission organization, USPG (or the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel), and worked within a theological college, Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary (TTS), which promoted liberation theology and sought actively to disentangle Christianity from Eurocentrism. My earliest bharatanatyam performances were in the TTS chapel, to a Tamil Easter song composed by the campus’s resident musician, Swamikannu, in the Carnatic music tradition.
47. This resulted in the report *South Asian Dance in Britain – Negotiating Cultural Identity through Dance* (Grau 2001).
48. ‘Dance amateurs’ are skilled dance artists who encourage public participation in dance. The dance animateur movement really took off in Britain in the early 1980s in response to another 1976 report on the arts, in this case by Lord Redcliffe-Maud, emphasizing the importance of public participation in the arts. This led to a period of local authority (local government) and Arts Council of Great Britain funding for dance animateur roles. The animateur movement also played a critical role in the blossoming of ‘community dance’ in Britain. Community dance in the British context refers to dance practised with a focus on social engagement rather than the art market, led by principles of group creativity and participation.
49. ‘When I went to Kathak Kendra [India’s national institute for training in and developing kathak, based in New Delhi] I would always hear whispers that “he’s Bangladeshi . . . he’s not real” – almost like I’m not from the family, not from the lineage of the great masters’ (Talk with Akram Khan as part of Darbar, Lilian Bayliss Studio, Sadler’s Wells, London, 11 November 2017).
50. ‘So, there is that mindset that the best dancers come from India. Then if it’s bharatanatyam, it has to be South India – so I am not someone who lives in India, nor am I South Indian – nor do I have an artistic family background’ (Rajarani 2018).
51. I have, however, been with my (brown) husband when he has been called a ‘terrorist’ and a ‘Paki’ and taunted with an extremely poor simulation of *adimi* (the sliding side-to-side neck movement of bharatanatyam). This taunt was all the more ironic considering that of the two of us, *adimi* is indisputably more part of my embodied repertoire than my husband’s.
52. I was very aware even before I started writing this book of the all-important voices of my interviewees – and of how, where the book might contribute anything at all, it would be through the shared wisdom and experiences of these artists and cultural leaders. For this reason, I asked all my interviewees for permission to use their names in the publication – in part to ensure I gave credit where credit is due. Where the material used is

sensitive, sources have been anonymized. The majority of the fieldwork for this book was conducted as part of research at the University of Roehampton and adhered to the ethical standards specified by the university.

53. They do suggest different levels of formalization, with *margam* translating to 'of the route or pathway', and *desi* to 'vernacular' or 'provincial'. *Desi* also translates as 'seen', supporting the commonly held belief that *margi* forms relate to texts such as the *Natyashastra* or *Abhinaya Darpana*, while *desi* forms are passed down without such written codification.
54. Shane Shambhu, personal communication, February 2024.
55. A government-funded dance training scheme. See Chapter 3 and *passim*.
56. The others being mohiniattam, kathakali, manipuri and sattriya.
57. Dalit, meaning 'crushed' or 'broken', is the self-appointed name for people formerly known as untouchables, a people so othered that they are considered to lie outside the fourfold caste classification system as set out in the Hindu religious texts such as the Laws of Manu.
58. I am indebted to Avanthi Meduri for urging me to look more closely at this Tamil concept and its relationship to 'professionalism'.