

SOCIOLOGY OF INDIAN DANCE

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Dedicated to
teachers and fellow -students of
PUPIL'S OWN SCHOOL , Vile Parle , Bombay .
especially my fellow - devils sent by Mara ,
to enliven the operatic - ballet
VARADANA (librettist : R . Tagore) ;
and particularly my fellow - devils , Jitendra ,
Vasant and Ambalal .
and to
the dance therein
for which we received a standing ovation ,
way back on Excelsior stage in the late thirties ,
and to
that " Once More " , which
resounding in the mind 's ear across the decades ,
was no doubt responsible for
a part of my continuing enthusiasm for dance .

THE TRIMURTI FORM OF ART

Dance is a performing art. It can be notated (Labanotation, or by any other choreutic system), or video taped. But its essence is a quality of ephemerality, frozen for ever or not. In many ways, dance is like the flame, it exists and does not exist at the same time. It is a dialectical entity *sui generis*. It is labour at its most dynamic, at the very moment of performance. Man expresses himself in dance when he himself becomes a labile entity. The dance may be organised or spontaneous, it may have been previously thought out and enacted after many rehearsals, or it may be improvised from moment to moment as the dancer goes along. Either way it is labour at its expressive utmost. It has the appearance of a vector in the state of essential excitation.

But labour is not performed anyhow, anywhere or at anytime. It has to be performed within a specific social context, at a particular moment of historic time, by a person who is undergoing an experience of existence within socio-historic limits, under specific stages of development of forces, relations and modes of production.

Man labours socially in co-operation or in confrontation with other men. He cannot labour alone. Even in the solo dance where he is shown confronting the elemental forces of nature, his thoughts bear a social reference. The confrontation with the forces of nature in the solo dance may be individualised for a moment, but is social in nature. His reaction is that of "a generalised man". His attitude is that of "all men" i.e., "as a common denominator of all men". There would be no empathy from the audience unless "the solo dance confronting Nature" was attitudinising as by "a representative man". And as "a representative man" he cannot think without language, the symbolic form of collective existence.

It has been contended by certain clever ideologues that there are pre-linguistic modes of thought which are pre-social

or non-social. But to the extent that it is so, the so-called nebulous pre-lingual forms of feelings and emotions are even less individualised, and far more common and generalised within mankind. In other words, even in case of a solo dance and even in case of prelingual projections, the social base, the social context, the social movement, the social import and the social impact cannot be eliminated. In other words, dance at its most abstract and at its most individual is still social, collective and symbolic.

The statement that a symbol is social is a tautology, for a symbol cannot but be social. It can only have an existence, if it is generalised and collectivised. A body movement is *ipso facto* labour, and labour is inherently expressive. As soon as man participates in performing an event, he impresses his act with his being. He cannot act or labour without impressing upon the real moment of time, his feelings, aspirations, thoughts, hopes, despairs and frustrations. It is in the nature of the act of movement to manifest expressibility.

By the same token, it is not dance, it is not an artistic movement, unless it is made by man. The bird may "dance" but that is only a transferred epithet. It is man who "thinks that the bird is dancing", whilst the latter is merely carrying out the coded instructions printed on its inherited genetic strands. The bird is not self-consciously expressing itself in a dance, for the bird is incapable of self-consciousness. Man is distinguished from all other forms of life by precisely his ability to possess self-consciousness and by his ability to act out this unique self-consciousness in expressive movements.

In other words, any man-originated movement can be viewed as art, if and when it is viewed as an expressive act of labour under specific material and historic conditions.

The intensity of expression, the degree of stylisation, the facility with which the expressive movement is made, the level of awareness on the part of the performer of the past history of that kind of dance movement, and finally, the acuity and comprehensiveness of the inner vision which is

crystallised as the expressive dance, may vary, thus setting up a graded level of expressions, some ardent, some casual; some deliberate, some careless; some that portend and threaten and are full of hidden meanings, and some that are straight-forward, depthless and merely ornamental. The jerks, the unwitting slides, the accidental staggerings of a child artist are within the domain of the terpsichorean art, but are entirely different from the stylisation of a master choreographer of the Diaghilev Ballet Russe. The child artist is merely learning, the choreographer is articulating a significant symbolic movement.

Every social formation projects, art objects and stylised movements which correspond to the prevalent social climate. **Not any kind of dance can be the projection of a specific society, nor can any type of society underlie a specific dance form.** A feudal society will necessarily project a certain kind of dance composition which flatters the priest and the king, since in such a society, they are the principal patrons of the dancing devadasis and their musician brothers, fathers and sons. The dance performed by her as a devadasi is bound to be different from the dance of a liberated woman in a socialist society.

Contrary to popular notions, no art is eternal or everlasting. Like everything else created by human labour, dance is capable of becoming obsolescent and even dead. The films of Leni Riefenstahl are no longer inspiring or even relevant. They have become merely symptomatic of the sickness of German Society of the 1930s which produced the horrors of Nazism. The over life-size portraits of Imelda Marcos, the busts of Shah of Iran, the Voodoo music and dances favoured by Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvaliers, the monuments to Haile Sellasie and so on are all dying or dead forms of art. They may be kept in some corner of a museum or filmed and preserved in some archives, in order to enable us to make a detailed study of some infamous periods of political rule by these petty tyrants who were American stooges to boot. But they are no longer pulsating forms of art which stimulate either adulation or hostility. They are nothing. The labour incorporated in such recollected dance movements was real and therefore the same can

be analysed as art. But real ideological life has departed from them. They no longer move. They remain works of art so long as we continue to look at them as ideological expressions of labour once patronised by the then members of a ruling elite. But like Kipling's fantasies and idiocies, they no longer count as serious or profound works of art, except to the lunatic fringe of surviving ex-nazis, ex-collaborators of fascism, ex-lovers of imperialism and the "Raj" and such other "exes" and discards of history.

Art has a triadic form - the artist, the art object and the audience - and this is a tripartite dynamic system of vectors. All the three elements come into being and cease to be. Art not only dies, but it is subject to change. An art object may be mutilated as in a ruin, or a part of a literary text of a bygone era may be lost. The resultant 'antique' has often to be fundamentally reinterpreted. The original painted athletic statuary admired by the homosexual slave-owners of Greece and Rome may get eroded into cold white marble figures that boastfully proclaim their pompous nothingness. Such was not their original impact and import, and as "painted dolls", they might have had a greater "naive" charm. They are, as of today, only slightly comic carriers of outdated ideological positions.

In Indian classical dance, a still further possibility, of "living fossilization", obtains. The **Karanas** described in **Bharata's Natya Shastra** around 2000 to 1500 years ago and depicted with varying degrees of authenticity in certain South Indian **gopurams** 800 years ago, are being re-enacted in the 20th century. Feudalism survives to-day as a mere relic, but in a classical Bharat Natyam performance, the attitudes of feudalism loom enormously large. Such "living fossilizations" are a necessary counterpart of our backward economy which is incapable of self-movement. The fossils survive because material conditions have not known a revolutionary break with the feudal past. They have known only comprador bourgeois compromises which have perpetuated the hold of feudal ideology upon transitional capitalist contemporaneity.

The dancer, like all artists, is socially bound and personally brainwashed by his upbringing. He must extract a living under specific constraints, and in order to extract such a living, he must think the thoughts which the ruling class has imposed upon him, his society and his times. If he does not conform, he may get totally crushed; or upon pain of withdrawal of patronage, he will be forced to compromise. In any case, the more sensitive, non-conformist and rebellious he is, the greater will be the pressure upon him to obtain private patronage or state aid; the more difficult it will be for him to find recognition and win awards; and the more certain he is to remain isolated and neglected as a member of a little known minority.

That it why, the ruling ideas and the ruling forms of art of every society, are the ideas of its ruling classes. Of course, at each stage, revolutionary art too exists. But in normal non-revolutionary conditions, such revolutionary artists, and art works or art performances created by them, must necessarily remain the voices of a derided group.

A ceaseless class struggle rages in each nation and every society. This struggle may be overt or covert, it may be relaxed or intense, it may be widespread or confined to a few pockets. Whatever may be its nature, extent or urgency, class society cannot exist without internal turmoil. It is impossible to criticize the politics and economics of such a class society without commenting upon and denouncing the art works and the art performances through which such a society projects and protects its ideological and material interests. In their overwhelming bulk, the recognised artists and the applauded dance performances in each society have been promoted and permitted to be created by the ruling classes of that society to embody their own interests and positions. Not to analyse and attack such ruling class prestige-symbols and message transmitters is tantamount to abject surrender, of the critical faculty.

Great art in the present context has to be revolutionary art. For men become conscious of their own interests, nay, become conscious of themselves, only through the congealations of ideological drives that are art works and art performances.

Men become aware of themselves and their surroundings as they battle. Art can be understood not in the abstract, not at all in class rooms or in ivory towers, but only in **praxis**, in disputations about ideological standpoints. Art is a weapon to be wielded before putting up the barricades and in the course of defending the barricaded positions.

Truth cannot be apprehended by those who are interested in lies and in perpetuation of exploitation, by a minority, of the vast majority. Truth can emerge only from the point of view of those who are interested in exposing the upholders of the status-quo. Thus revolutionary art is not only necessary, but it is inevitable. If society is to progress, exploitation of man by man must end. If society is to be free, oppression of nation by nation must end. In other words, the two major urges of the present epoch are socialism or communism and nationalism. Art in order to be significant has to express these compulsions of our times.

If nation is to cease to exploit nation and if man is to cease to exploit man, the status quo must change and the elite must be overthrown. Unless the expropriators are expropriated, it is not possible to have peace, progress, civilization or general cultural upliftment.

Everything that is beautiful on earth has been created by man himself at labour. Unfortunately, in class-society his creations bear the stamp of alienation, of fetishism. Such dehumanization of art will disappear only when man, the artist, repossesses the creations of his labour collectively, unitedly, lovingly and inevitably.

II

MEDIEVAL MODERNITY OF INDIAN DANCE

As I have shown in my two volume study, "Arts of Transitional India - 20th Century", 1988 (Popular Prakashan), the Law of Fundamental Dichotomy of Modern Indian Art operates to-day. This is largely due to the fact that the upper crust of Indian Society was modernized and compradorized under the bourgeoisieification process carried out by British Imperialism in the 19th Century. The mass of the people were, at the same time, de-industrialised, de-urbanized, barbarized and pauperized.

It was not possible for the submerged mass of the oppressed and the exploited to raise any effective demand for products of visual and literary arts.

They could not commission architects or civil engineers to build huts and slums for them. The masses could not buy sculptures, paintings, furnitures and furnishings for their hovels, called variously **Bastis**, **Zuggi-zonpadis**, **Chawls**, etc., in different parts of the country. They were illiterate and could not buy novels, short stories, poetry, dramas or even news-magazines and newspapers.

The only thing that they could purchase was an evening's entertainment from itinerant **jatra** and **nautanki** troupes, participate themselves in folk music and dance ensembles, listen more or less free to the radio and visit a rare tented **bioscope** show. However, it was necessary for the rulers to communicate with the masses, to strive to brain-wash them and to control their minds through performing art displays.

The recent **Apra Utsavs** in Delhi and Bombay, which are Festivals of India in India, according to Rajiv Gandhi and Pupul Jayakar, are double-edged weapons. They corrupt and control the performers and at the same time brain-wash the urban middle classes and slum-dwellers with a false picture of national gaiety under Congress rule.

Thereby arose the Fundamental Dichotomy of Modernized and Bourgeoisified Visual and Literary Arts in India, while the Performing Arts remained Feudalised.

That is why Indian Music and Dance, and to a large extent the Theatrical Arts, and also surprisingly to a degree, the mass media of the radio, T.V. and films, have remained tethered to feudal stumps. The Indian art scene provides a strange spectacle. Some arts are relatively modernized and appear to be in touch with contemporary reality. These are the arts which involve the lives of the middle classes and the rich especially in the cities. While poverty-stricken rural India revels in art forms that are still medieval in spirit and form.

This is especially true of our Classical Dance which has changed very little from the state in which it was, when Indian feudal society was breaking up. If we take Bharat Natyam as a typical prestigious form of contemporary Indian Dance, we can see that it was revived and reorganised repeatedly in discrete stages :

1. In the 1920s and 1930s a Revivalist Movement was led by E. Krishna Iyer, Balasaraswati and Rukmini Arundale. The dance style had led a more or less underground existence (being practised by Devadasis or temple prostitutes) for a few decades prior to the 1920s. The dance style had been pushed underground especially by those wrong-headed social reformers who were puritanically attempting to suppress Immoral Traffic in Women.
2. The revivalism of Iyer, Balasaraswati and Arundale was itself based upon the Programmatic Format of **Alarippu, Jatiswaram, Sabdam, Varnam, Padam, and Tillana**, formulated in the yearly 19th Century by four brothers; Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Vadivelu and Sivanandan, who were the disciples of the composer Muthuswamy Dikshitar (1776-1835).

If we consider the other so-called Classical Dance Forms or Styles of India, namely, Kathak, Manipuri and Kathakali, a similar picture will be found. In the case of Kathakali, Vallathol Menon led the revivalist movement in the 1930s, when he established the Kerala Kalamandalam. Similarly under the general stimulation provided by the nationalist movement, Kathak which had degenerated into the North Indian Nautch, from the time of Wajid Ali Shah and his Avadh Court (c. 1848), was revived by Kalka Bindadin and the Maharaj family, in the early decades of this century. Manipuri was similarly revived by Rabindranath Tagore and his Shantiniketan School probably from 1927 onwards.

There are five aspects of the semi-feudal ambience of Indian Dance which deserve special notice.

1. Each class society makes respectable, its own form of sexual exploitation of women. Amongst the slave-owning Greeks, the **Hetaerae** and **Dikteriae** represented the equivalents of the call-girls and common prostitutes, respectively, of today. (The **Dikteriae** functioned from state-owned brothels, whilst the **Hetaerae** were independent courtesans). In more recent feudal times, the prestigious prostitutes were the **Kothewalis** of India, somewhat akin to the **Geishas** of Japan (**Kothewali** literally meant "one who owned her own establishment" and entertained guests as independent, wealthy vendor of sexual favours). The transitional form, when feudalism was breaking up in India and the infamous red-light districts of urban areas were yet in the process of crystallisation, was the **Deredar**, i.e., the one who had put up her tent near cantonments for the sexual entertainment of the armed services personnel (these **deredarnia** actually moved with the troops to the front line, and the despatch of such contingents to Mesopotamia during the First World War was a **scandal de celebre** of those days).

All these various grades of prostitutes, from Amrapali and Vasavadatta of early feudal India to Jaddanbai and Sundarabai of yester-years, entertained their clients in diverse ways, with poetry recitations, **dhruvapada** songs and soldier's ditties, as the circumstances demanded.

Along with music, various types of dances were presented, formalized as *Khadi thumri* ("Standing" thumri in contrast to *baithi* or "sitting" thumri), or *Mujra nautch*, or *tamasha* (the form popularized by the Maratha soldiers in the 18th and 19th centuries) or other such equivalents.

It should be noted that the male children of the prostitutes were not only the pimps for their mothers, sisters and daughters, but also were their musical accompanists, and teachers to successive generation of charmers, both in music or in dance.

2. Sexual preversions had their own role to play. Though not as widespread as under slavery, under Islamic Militarist Feudalism because of intensive warring necessitating prolonged living in camps, and the adoption of the *burqua* in later Islamic times, homosexuality became socially acceptable. Further, there were a large number of eunuchs attached to harems who also provided somewhat similar and perverted sexual gratification to powerful clients. Thus the practice of homosexuality and of sodomizing with eunuchs, influenced very powerfully the form of the Islamic Court Dance i.e. *Kathak*. To normal heterosexuals, the gestures and the movements of the *Kathak* dancers euphemistically termed "*gopi-gopa* type of *abhinaya*" or "*Krishna-Lila Abhinaya*", was especially disgusting and offensive.
3. The history of Indian feudalism was extremely complex. On the one hand, primitive communist tribes had gradually projected hereditary chiefs who became the first rulers of the ancient *Janapadas* or incipient feudal states. On the other hand, nomadic tribal pastoralist confederacies had been defeated or absorbed by the rising feudal society. Thus in different regions of India there was a great unevenness of social development and the so-called classical Dances of India represented different stages of feudalization of the societies in which they flourished. For instance, *Manipuri* is a transitional form from the primitive communist *Lai Hairoba*. At its purest, *Manipuri* represents a *Vaishnavite* feudalising overlay upon a more communal

tribal base. In contrast, **Bharat Natyam** is a fully developed, mature feudal form whose climax coincided with the great centuries of temple-building in India, roughly the 7th to 12th centuries, when thousands of devadasis became attached to the innumerable flourishing ecclesiastical endowments. **Kathak** is also a mature classical feudal form, though it is a projection of later Islamic Militarist Feudalism. The fourth style of Indian Classical Dance, namely **Kathakali** was also a late feudal form like **Kathak**, only one still later, one which had already been penetrated by Portuguese Mercantile Capitalism after the latter had established beach-heads on the Kerala Coast from the 16th century.

In other words, when analysing Indian Classical Dance, we must not be satisfied by terming the forms semi-feudal or "fossil feudal". We must carry our analysis deeper to unravel the socio-political conditions prevailing in the different regions of India at the appropriate time of crystallization of the different dance styles.

4. In our work-in-progress, on the History of Indian Arts, we have suggested a Law of Parallax or Double Image in Feudal Arts. This Law is illustrated with particular force in Indian Dance. We have no national feudal dance style. It is not only a Double image but a Multiplicity of Visions into which Indian Classical Dance fragments itself. Not only are there the four major regional configurations of **Manipuri**, **Bharat Natyam**, **Kathak** and **Kathakali**, but there are in addition the more recently revived regional expressions - **Kuchipudi** (Andhra Pradesh), **Mohiniattam** (Kerala), **Yakshaganam** (Karnataka), **Bhagwata Mela** (Tamil Nadu), **Odissi** (Orissa), **Ankiya Nat** (Assam), apart from still more numerous marginal forms, like **Vithi Nataka**, **Kudiyattam**, etc.

At the same time, some of the conventions like the **Hasta Mudras** (signs with hands) and some of the gaits and body movements (**Charis**, **Adavus** and **Karanas**), as well as some of the musical accompaniments (types

of drums, and measures of rhythms) are common to most, or at least to many, of the regional styles (some of these regional styles may hark back to the extremely old and venerated primordial vrittis of the *Natyashastra* i.e., the *gaudi*, the *vaidarbhi*, the *magadhi*, and so on).

5. We have already suggested in our *Arts of Transitional India: 20th Century* (1988, Two Volumes), two further Laws that affect our dance scene. The first is the Law of Degeneration to Folk Form, and the second, the Law of Reversion to Generic Form. These two Laws stipulate that the most prestigious elitist classical style, practised in the Central Great Emperor's Court, is first of all carried to the Subedar's or Samant's Provincial Court in a modified form. From here the style is reinterpreted almost at the district town level by various lower level fief-holders. Ultimately, the Great Style descends to the local Jagirdar's or Zamindar's *Thikana* or *Kothi* ("big house"). At that point the Great National Style merges into what is called in most countries a Folk Style.

This is not to say that a great innovation from an outlying *thikana* may not be picked up to travel back and influence or modify the Central Great Style. That could happen on an occasion, but the major thrust is always in the direction of provincial and subregional and sub-sub-regional reinterpretations of the Great Central Style.

The Law of Reversion to Generic Form informs us that all visual arts tend to merge into a gigantic umbrella-form called *Sthapatya*. All literary arts tends to merge under another canopy *Sahitya*, and similarly all performing arts aspire to become *Natya*.

In other words, Indian Dances have a tendency to absorb musical and dramatic elements and to acquire a composite operatic-cum-balletic form. An Indian Dancer attempts to sing a few lines during her dance, especially in the so-called *abhinaya padam* sections of her repertoire.

Similarly, the dancer will also attempt to include some dialogues of a semi-dramatic nature in the performance, imparting a strange flavour to it.

Picking up the main thread again of the medieval modernity of Indian Dance, let us recognise that dance is a semi-abstract form. People all over the world, in every nation, do not greet each other in the same manner, do not pray in an identical style, do not convey obeisance with the same gestures, and so on. The significance of certain body movements and postures is not inherent, but is socially ascribed. A dance gesture can mean anything which the society concerned has chosen to prescribe to it. The same gesture can be used in widely different contexts and each time it will mean something different, as society chooses (the Nazi salute "Heil Hitler" cannot be understood except as a German societal convention of a specific period [1933-1945]). It takes a long time for a society to establish these conventions of movements, gestures and postures, whereby a certain limb moved in a certain way gets associated with funeral marches, another with wedding festivities, a third with **Kalari** exercises, a fourth with some other social occasion and so on (the **Kalari** of Kerala is the generic source of most of the martial arts of Asia). However, once the link between the two is established, i.e. between the gesture and the occasion, it is almost impossible to disrupt it. That is why, dance is semi-conventional or semi-abstract. Exact ways may differ, but weeping and laughing are very similar in dissimilar cultures.

III

INCIPIENT BOURGEOISIFICATION OF MODERN INDIAN DANCE

When we say that Indian Dance is medieval in form and content, it is not implied that the capitalist conditions have made no impact whatsoever upon Indian Dance. After all, the feudal form of Indian Dance is not to be taken as an absolute. All that we mean when we speak of the "Medieval Modernity of Indian Dance", or of "Indian Dance being a fossil feudal structure", is that the feudal tendencies revealed by Indian Dance are dominant and pervasive. Similarly when we speak of Indian architecture as having been successfully bourgeoisified, we do not imply the total elimination of feudal influences upon contemporary Indian architecture. Residences and residential complexes are still being built with distinct separation of women's quarters from the rest of the house, with separate entrances, exits, staircases, terraces, and even separate courtyards.

Thus Indian Arts present a spectrum of feudal retentions and capitalist intrusions. The visual and literary arts have been deeply penetrated by capitalist ideology. Performing arts, on the other hand and in contrast, have remained pre-dominantly and prestigiously feudal. But cultural forms are forever dynamic. They cannot remain unchanged whilst the whole social ambience is undergoing a series of more or less violent transformations. Thus bourgeois impulses have penetrated the Indian Dance Scene from several directions :

1. In place of the older hereditary caste of **devadasis**, we now have hundreds and thousands of youngsters from all social strata practising the craft. Many young danseuses from the highest social circles become professional dancers every year. They naturally impart a less erotic flavour to their **Bharat Natyam** performances, a less homosexual and eunuch like tone to their **Kathak** whirls; and so on.

2. The costumes, make up and jewellery of the dancers have undergone profound alterations. The heavy nathanis (nose-rings), the formidable mekhalas (waist-bands), the violent colour combinations of upper and lower garments, the weird tattoo marks on the face, etc. have disappeared. Their place has been taken by subtle and lighter make-up, better colour combinations of upper and lower garments, less heavy ornaments and similar multidirectional alterations. All these have naturally influenced the movements, gestures and postures of the dancers.
3. Already, Bharat Natyam is being performed with songs from different regional languages. Modern poetry is being tried as background accompaniment. A young priest has recently attempted to convey the story of the Bible, through Bharat Natyam. Many innovations have been attempted in the presentation of Kathak also.
4. At the same time under the influence of the masala film; the cabaret; and pop, rock and disco music, many bourgeois influences have penetrated the dance scene and hundreds of discotheques and night clubs have mushroomed all over urban India. This kind of dancing, generically related to the older Western ballroom dancing, has come to stay and the influence of such dancing has been carried to the remotest corner of India by the mass media as well as by picnickers and tourists.
5. But the biggest and the most important bourgeois penetration has been by modern ballet. Let us look at the scene a little more closely.

Let us first of all recognise that the entire modern dance movement in the West had sprung up under the influence of Indian Dance, either directly from India or indirectly through South East Asian variations of Indian classical dances. We cannot go into minute details here in this paper, but can generally state that the famous Denishawn School of U.S.A. and its

offshoots, including Martha Graham, Mary Wigman, and all the rest of the avant garde dancers of Euro-America have learnt deeply from Indian dance teachers and dance performers. There would be no modern Euro-American dance if Indian dance had not forced the metamorphosis of classical European ballet into the Modern Movement. This Modern Movement in Dance has now been re-imported by India.

An interesting offshoot of the Hinduising or Indianizing Movement of European dance was the encounter between Anna Pavlova and Uday Shankar in the early '20s in London. Pavlova wanted a few exotic items for her repertoire on her world tours. Uday Shankar was a student of painting in London. Somehow the two came together and a routine was incorporated by Pavlova in her performances which was called a "Hindu Wedding", or with some slight variations, "Radha Krishna".

Uday Shankar picked up from Pavlova as much as he gave. Certain eurhythmic movements were absorbed by him as also the basic principles of showmanship. Very soon Uday Shankar organised his own "World Tours" and opened a centre at Almora, U.P.

Uday Shankar carried his experiments further into the area of film. He made a full length movie "Kalpana" in the early '40s based on balletic movements, with very little dialogue. Absorbing other influences from the far east, Uday Shankar presented to gigantic audiences shadow plays and mixed media spectacles (the later egoistically called Shankarscope because of reliance on slide projections).

In our papers on Uday Shankar and Shanti Bardhan, we have analysed these developments in detail. [See my papers, "Uday Shankar and The Limitations of Bourgeois Expression", *Bhumika*, 1981; and "Shanti Bardhan - The Story of a Thwarted Rebel", 1987.] Suffice it to state here that contemporary Indian Ballet is totally dominated by Uday Shankar and his

pupils (separate troupes of his disciples are functioning all over India, led by wife Amala Shankar, son Ananda Shankar, daughter Mamata Shankar and Chief Assistants Shanti Bardhan, Narendra Sharma, Sachin Shankar and Gul Bardhan - Prabhat Ganguly).

In general all these six or seven dance troupes have borrowed all sorts of movements, gestures and postures from innumerable classical and folk dance styles. To all these borrowings they have added some sort of simplified eurhythmic movements. The gymnastic acrobatic mass drilling techniques are especially popular with Ananda, Mamata, Amala, and Sachin Shankar troupes. The more authentically Indian, exotically romantic and lyrically resplendant techniques have been carried forward by Shanti Bardhan (whose living followers are Gul Bardhan and Prabhat Ganguly) and Narendra Sharma.

IV

THE FIVE ALTERNATIVES FOR THE FUTURE

Thus our dance scene is extremely complex. A small minority at the top of the social tree, English-knowing, affluent, owning durable consumer goods, finds it possible to love and patronize Indian classical dance, western classical dance, the Modern Dance movement of the West, Indian Balletic Dance, filmic dances, cabaret-pop-rock-disco dancing, thumri and mujra concerts and all sorts of minor and major forms of the Indian Performing Arts, all simultaneously. Their taste is rootless, eclectic and hysterical. For them, anything that can while away the time or smother their social uneasiness with loud vulgarity is absolutely fine.

This is the class which has been in power since Independence. They are the new rulers, the brown-sahibs, the kala gomastas, the banians, and the dalals, who have found that the medieval feudal forms of Indian dance are highly respected abroad and in fact have determined the contours the Modern Movement in dance internationally. Therefore, they have no alternative but to accord recognition to the prestigious classical forms of Indian Dance, even if they are "living feudal fossils". At the same time, they want to appear up-to-date and as such must welcome all sorts of "heavy-beat" popularizations. They also know that under the guise of promoting Indian Culture, they can not only control the commanding heights of the Indian political economy, but also successfully persuade the Indian masses that the compradors themselves are natural-born cultural leaders and will be able to take society forward into a bright 21st century.

However, a deep-going malaise afflicts us. Terrible imbalances have developed in every sphere. We have been plunged into an endless economic, political and cultural crisis. There is not a single art in which we are world leaders as we used to be. In the by-gone centuries, Indian architech-

ture and sculpture, Indian music and dance and Indian literature had been globally influential.

We have become tailists and imitators of the West in every way. We have ceased to be creative and innovative. We have been culturally and spritually enslaved.

What are the realistic alternatives before us ?

The first option is for a continuation of the present all-embracing crisis. The National Emergency, which was in operation after the India-China conflict of 1962 for many years, which fully exposed its horrors during 1975-77, which has been imposed in selected parts of the north-eastern states at different times in recent years, and which is in operatioin right now in Punjab, will become fused with the normal law of the country. In other words, we shall come to live perpetually under a state of emergency, Indian prisons will continue to hold thousands of "terrorists", "naxalites", protestors, militants and dissidents. Elections may be held, but always under police and civilian gangster terror, financed by big business through the Congress Party at the centre and through regional lumpen bourgeois leaders like the film heroes MGR and NTR. Under this alternative the economic direction will be in the hands of the non-resident Indian bourgeois from abroad, and of the lumpen bourgeois and the corrupt bureaucrat within the country. Under such conditions, joint-sector enterprises will be rapidly multiplied into a Chiang-Kai-shek type of dictatorial rule, as is to be found today in Taiwan and South Korea, the "economic miracles" of the 3rd World.

Under this eventuality, the arts will acquire a distinctive profile. Pre-censorship will be extended from film and theatre to all the arts. Underground arts and samizdat (self-propagating mimeographed publication) would flourish. Since gangster rule would be extorting enormous sums from all sections of the people, a whole range of assaults would develop against the regime. There will be liberal bourgeois protests against the abridgements of democracy and there would also be Marxist proletarian nascent struggles.

On the whole it would spell out a low level of Indian cultural accomplishment, though bombastically tom-tomed through the Festivals of India Abroad and Apna Utsavs. Music would continue to be, largely, what it is today, with a few more tamed sycophantic courtiers like Ravi Shankar composing a few more offerings to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. In short it would be largely a continuation of our low-level status-quo with the addition of a few more degenerative tendencies.

Under such degenerative conditions, when, sycophancy of the Leader and his Nehru-Gandhi Dynasty will know no bounds and corruption will reach the Chiang-Kai-Shekian crescendo, Indian dance will acquire a frenetic, hysterical climax. Lip-service will continue to be paid to classical dances, but real support will be given to filmic pornography and cabaretic vulgarity. Rajiv Gandhi's taste, at the level of "tamboo mein bamboo", with which Amitabh Bachchan regaled him at a recently-taken holiday by his family at Ranathambore in Rajasthan, will become all pervasive. Completely eclectic combinations will come to the forefront and the most idiotic and hysterical forms of gaiety will be promoted. Hypocrisy will be the guiding cultural trait and the lowest forms of stupid antics will be hilariously promoted, as they are being projected right now by Rajiv and his gang. Only they will become more generalised and made more permanent.

The second possibility is that of a military takeover. This could be a little cheaper for the Indian ruling bourgeois, since the corruption level may be a trifle lowered. It may also be a little more efficient in relation to the current ponderous working of the gargantuan bureaucracy. In such a case, the arts would assume a different form. There would be a great deal of Westernization. Jazz-yatras may multiply. Military band music will be increasingly publicly performed and popularized in concert halls. At the same time, Indian folk dances, that would please the ordinary jawans, would also be encouraged. In fact, for many years now, the Indian army has been looking after the thousands of folk dancers who parade in Delhi on each 26th of January. Architecture would take on a standardized and regimented

contonment style aspect, sculpture would recede to the Royal-Academic manner for the greater glorification of military heroes whether of Jaffna or Male or Siachen, and perhaps Formalist Cosmopolitan Abstractionism may be totally banned and in any case, such expressions would be discouraged. In literature, a simplified story-line may be stressed. In painting, a kind of crude Socialist Realism would be combined with a dash of Royal Academic flavour and possibly films would move closer to the "Sex-and-Violence" ideal. In fact that 'dhisum-dhisum' type would almost become as popular as the erstwhile stunt film, which was the favourite of the jawans in Cantonments and Forward Areas not so long ago.

Music would of course, feel the powerful impact of Euro-Turkish military bands. Gradually this would become the prestigious type of music and while a few classical airs may be retained, most music would use written scores, and everything would be simplified and standardized. The situation would approximate to the one that obtained during the last days of British Imperialist dictatorship over India. That is to say, we would have a revival of sorts of the 1934-47 phase. Some Intellectuals may remain free, but many would be in jail and their jailor-militarists will pretend to possess high intellectual and cultural standards. The latter will lay down the law in all areas of culture. Outside the concentration camps, a regime of dull confirmity and simplified vulgarity would come to prevail.

The third alternative, is of an internal revolt in the Congress Parliamentary Party, together with a combination of several right-of-centre groupings, like the Jana Morcha, and of several regional parties like the Telugu-Desam, the DMK, and the AGP and others, to try out a new experiment of miniscule reforms. The third alternative would be highly unstable and volatile. It is possible that the arts could experience a sort of cancerous and rapid growth in such a case. The state would promote a Gandhian type of anti-intellectualism and encourage some sort of Sarvodayist Puritanism in the Morarji Desai manner. "Pornography", widely misinterpreted, would be banned. Together with such apparently pro-women measures, a lot of hypocritical

suppression of individual liberties would take place. Pessimism and apocalyptic visions of disaster would become prestigious and tragedies may once again flourish on the Indian screen. Classical music may be neglected and may be allowed to wither on the vine, but semi-classical forms especially **bhajans, kirtans, quawalis, etc.** could flourish more vigorously. Under such a left of centre regime, it is more than likely that a whole host of pseudo-leftist and pseudo-militant trends may come to dominate the cultural scene. In other words, under such a regime, the Maharashtra-type **Dalits**, the Andhra-type **Digambaras**, the Bengal-type **Naxalites**, the Hindi-type **Pragatishils**, the Gujarati-type **Nav-Nirmanists**, the Tamil-type **Self-Respectors**, the Oriya-type **Populists**, the Kannada-type **Equalitarians** and the Malayalam-type **Purogamanas**, would flourish as never before.

On the whole, the situation will be of great excitement and immense variety. But it would be extremely unstable and probably would collapse explosively.

The fourth alternative is for a truly fascist take-over. The Congress Party under Rajiv or his equivalent would organise a special force of security guards (such an embryonic force has already come into being). At the same time, professional gangsters belonging to the Congress Trade Union, Student, Youth and Women's Wings will be armed to eliminate all rival formations. A regime very similar to the Banana Republics of Central America, very close to the regimes of the Shah of Iran, Sellasie of Ethiopia and Marcos of Phillipines, would be established.

The arts would be suppressed, strictly censored and put inside a strait-jacket. No dissent would be permitted.

In such a condition, classical music may remain relatively unmolested, since in any case it is isolated from our real life. It has remained divorced from contemporary reality and has never directed attention to the causes of the contemporary cultural crisis. Indian classical music may in fact, be more vigorously utilised for foreign propaganda by the new and uncertain fascist regime of India. However, the low-level cultural taste of the lumpen bourgeois and the gangster political leader would eventually prevail.

Pop, Disco and Rock music should experience unprecedented growth; cabarets should flourish as never before; brothels and bars would multiply; ghazal singers and mujra dancers would have a great time. All state functions would gradually turn into grand cabaret parties.

Each gualetier would decide the policy for his own area. He would seek complete conformity and obsequious flattery. There would be many poems, comparing Rajiv to the sun, moon, and the stars and children would be required to start the day in schools and colleges with a hymn to the Nehru-Gandhi family. Many sensitive artists, intellectuals and scientists would be bought, openly and shamelessly.

The press would be taken over as completely as the radio and the TV. No dissenting voice will be allowed. Commercial cinema, masala-films, and Amitabh-type of acting would not only flourish but would be posed as ideals.

More East-West Encounters would be organised. More foreign troupes would visit India, especially Italian opera companies, foreign television crews, American and French fashion houses, and Neo-Realist film directors. Along with the Indian masala movie, there would develop genres like the spaghetti-Westerns that the post-war Italians made for the American market.

From the point of view of art-culture this would be the blackest alternative. There would be a terrible and permanent destruction of all cultural values. Nothing will remain sacrosanct. "Anything goes" will be the motto of the rulers and their hench-men.

There would be a quick turn-over of favourites. Artists would come up suddenly, shine for a short while and then fade out without a trace, just as ministers are reshuffled endlessly today and Congress party secretaries come and go without rhyme or reason. Favourites in the arts will similarly perform like shooting stars. Nobody will respect or remember anyone else. It will be the scramble of the worst sort and it would take a long time for India to recover from such a fascist trauma, both politically and culturally.

There is of course, a fifth alternative. But in the absence of a nation-wide Marxist and Nationalist Revolutionary Party such a favourable alternative scenario is unlikely to be realised.

If a revolution were to take place and it is very big 'if', the arts would be completely transformed. After centuries of class rule, the Indian artist would breathe freely for the first time, and will reach undreamt of heights of creative endeavour. Man will be on the way to cease exploiting man, and will therefore cease to wield ideological weapons of brainwashing and conformity. I do not wish to elaborate upon this alternative, for the prospect of such liberation simply overwhelms me. All that I can say now is that the total art scene would resemble that of post-revolutionary Russia of 1917-24.

In short the five alternatives are :

- (a) a continuation of the present rotten status-quo, with the prospect of further degeneration;
- (b) a military take-over;
- (c) a mildly reformist centrist regime, highly unstable;
- (d) a fascist victory;
- (d) a revolutionary proletarian triumph.

The most likely course will be some combination of the first and the third alternatives, i.e. the retention of the status-quo with minor reformist changes, in either a negative or a positive direction, which would be highly unstable in either case.

We may sum up the possibilities that lie before Indian Dance in the following succinct chart form :

PROSPECTS BEFORE INDIAN DANCE

	Status Quo with some Degeneration	Military Takeover	Centrist Reformist Triumph	Fascist Solution	Revolutionary Overthrow
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Main Thrust	Hypocritical hysteria of an eclectic nature to the forefront.	Folk Dance forms may be vigorously promoted.	Classical Dances may retain primacy.	Filmic and Cabaretic dancing to hold centre stage.	True flowering of all the visual; literary and performing arts.
2. Revivalist Forms	Tantric Eroticism likely to flourish.	Night clubs and brothels may be openly patronized and a certain kind of "nudie show" may be promoted.	Puritanical censorship code may be imposed.	Strong support to religious revivalist movements.	Religious and Revivalist tendencies would be countered. All types of censorship would be eliminated. True freedom will prevail in all the creative arts..
3. Participatory forms and General Ambience.	NRI influence and promotion of tourism will create many bastardised, short lived, distortions.	Western ballroom dancing and some types of jazz, rock, pop, and disco dancing may be encouraged.	The art scene will be extremely contradictory and occasional cancerous outbursts are very likely, especially of the pseudo-left populist variety.	The most degenerate forms of dancing including depiction of perverse sexual violence would be promoted.	Ballet and similar, Group Dance performances would be vigorously encouraged and new Indian Balletic Forms would be created.

THE CONTEMPORARY AMBIENCE

In contrast to the terrible mediocrity the cheap imitative-ness and the repulsive vulgarity that prevail in the visual and the literary arts, Indian dance, along with music, presents a heartening spectacle.

The 20th century has seen extremely talented performers in every kind of style, like Uday Shankar, Simkie, Ram Gopal, Shanta Rao, Balasaraswati, Ragini Devi, Indrani Rehman, Amala Shankar, Achchan Maharaj, Ojha Amobi Singh, Raman Kutty, Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, Shanti Bardhan, Birju Maharaj, Yamini Krishnamurty, Sonal Mansingh, Uma Sharma, Rita Chatterjee, Kumudini Lakhia, Chandralekha, Bipin Sinha, Mahabir Singh, Rukmini Devi, A. Sharada, Menaka, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Vedanta Satyanarayan, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Roshan Kumari, Damayanti Joshi and many many more.

This talented group has preserved the rich tradition of the Indian feudal dance forms in their immense regional variety. They have played a vital role in maintaining a continuity with the past. Furthermore, as the foremost representatives of Indian Classical Dance, this group has made a significant contribution to world culture, for Indian Classical Dance is one of the glories of mankind.

Therefore, we certainly do not wish to belittle the wonderful task of preservation of tradition that has been achieved by them. We are not here dealing with some miserable little painter or architect who copies the latest from the West and who attempts to elicit our admiration by shock tactics. When we are dealing with Indian dancers, we are not dealing with some absurd group of avant-gradists. On the contrary, we are dealing with true and profound achievers, whose talents can hardly be matched internationally.

Nevertheless, even in the areas of Indian dance and music, our comprador culture imposes severe limitations :

1. Indian Classical Dance remains a "living fossil". No fundamentally new dance language has emerged. No one has really merged several classical styles or created out of the raw material provided by a single style, something that is startlingly fresh. There have been no break-throughs.
2. Certainly small reformist changes have taken place in costume, make-up, jewellery and scenic effects. Lighting has contributed vitally to stage excitement.
3. Even in the direction of bourgeois balletic dance, whilst there have been interesting experiments in particular by Uday Shankar, Shanti Bardhan and Narendra Sharma, no surpassing or lasting achievements have yet occurred. The librettos have been either trite and traditional as in Shanti Bardhan's **Ramayana** or **Panchatantra** and Narendra Sharma's **Hansabalika**. Amala, Ananda and Mamata Shankar have taken to boring mass exercises on stage.

Labour and Machinery by Uday Shankar and Shanti Bardhan had opened partially the door to a new vista. But somehow, under our comprador conditions, the efforts degenerated into puppetry and jocular "witticisms". Similarly, the nationalist edge was blunted in various compositions like **Immortal India**, **Discovery of India**, to create merely touristy titillation, and so on. Such costume extravaganzas invariably relapsed into tourist entertainments.

The difficulty is that our comprador culture is inherently hostile to innovations, just as our economy is incapable of self-propelled movement. Furthermore, being a comprador society, there is a high premium upon aping the West in all cultural matters. Even in dance and music, where the West has so little to offer, and where Indian feudal achievements have been so great, the so-called Modern Dance from Euro-America (itself a bastard child of the interaction between Indian and European dance traditions) is increasingly attracting Indian audiences and choreographers.

On the whole, our dancers have admirably fulfilled museological tasks but have failed to move forward, either in

exploring our current social reality or in exposing the roots of the problems that face us as a nation. Let us look forward to the day when revolutionary convulsions will rock our society so powerfully that willy-nilly our dancers and choreographers and librettists will be forced to take cognisance of the deep-going crisis of our comprador culture.

A few remarks on the current international situation may not be out of place. The first point to be noted is that, the Contemporary Ballet (climax reached in Russian Ballet), was not a pure bourgeois product, but an art form that was born and nourished in the courts of Europe when feudalism was dying and mercantile capitalism was emerging as the dominant social force. In other words, the Western Ballet is itself a transitional form of the feudal bourgeois interface which has continued to linger into the present.

As noted, the interaction between Western Ballet and Indian Classical Dance produced the hybrid Modern Movement.

Thirdly, Indian dance continues to assert its superiority, at every point of contact with both the Western ballet and the Modern Movement. For instance, in the course of the Indo-Soviet Festival of 1988, Indian choreographers like Kumudini Lakhia and others trained and performed with troupes of Soviet Classical dancers very successfully.

In our opinion, the Indian Classical tradition is living and is so dominant, only because capitalism triumphed in a culturally backward area like Europe.

Let us suppose an alternative scenario. Supposing capitalism had first triumphed in sub-Saharan Africa. We do not think that in such a case, Indian Classical dance could have so easily become dominant over all the vital and creative African dance forms.

European legacy in dance has been very poor and that is why one is tempted to predict that in the not distant future, Western Ballet will die a slow death (in Western Europe, and in U.S.-Canada especially, it is already on

its last legs); that the Modern Movement will also follow suit; and both these currents will be displaced by Ethnic Dances, modelled closely upon African, Indian, Caucasian, Central Asian, South-East Asian, Pacific Island, Gypsy, Austronesian Aboriginal, and such other forms (Ethnic Dances are not necessarily Tribal or Folk, but merely the authentic, national [including sub-national and regional], dances from various parts of the world).

Anyhow, as far as India is concerned, we look forward not only to a socially conclusive period, for a breakthrough, but also to vigorous cultural exchanges with the Third World which will enrich our knowledge and encourage absorption of African and many other vital third world dance traditions.

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