Welcome to the second edition of South Asian Dance Intersections (SADI). We look at globally relevant, overarchingly creative, nationalistic, and pan-cultural in scope: the democratizing spaces of the internet and film, critical note on nationalism, and the rise of censorship during an era of hyper-cultural nationalism. This volume is our attempt to continue decolonizing dance discourses, in the belief that colonization is not just about material conquest—where land, air, and water are mere “resources” as Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang argue in their essay “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” (5)—but that colonization creates the canon as well. Unlike some settler colonialisms that “own” the domain (Tuck and Yang 9), native supraneries come from entitled positions often pre-empted as natural; therefore, need to be resisted more firmly. SADI attempts to resist the tendency for naturalisation and valorization of cultural elitist practices.

SADI’s editorial journey has been an exhilarating one, as we have discovered, collaborated, and especially co-edited, a journey to reach the second issue. This essay, the opportunity to write about their own dance practices and intersections with other forms, disciplines, and pedagogies. This edition has a selection of essays—five journal-length articles and one brief review—from six countries—Pakistan, United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, and India—and brings several new voices to the fore. Manipuri dancer and anthropology student Debanjali Biswas presents a media-based ethnography in which she studies the digital in relation to the “material, sensory, and social worlds” in people’s everyday lives (Pink et al. 2021). According to Harmony Bench and Alexandra Harlig, editors of the International Journal for Screendance (2021), “In 2020, the screen was seemingly the only venue, and its logics of geography and access to movement communities across the globe suddenly shifted in ways that will likely reverberate for years to come.” Dance seems to have escaped its limitations, a finding throughout all media forms including film and video within movement/rhythm contexts. The sensitivity of his writing, the everydayness of his metaphors and his embedded mysticism and spirituality was affirmed by many. Tagore, quintessentially a dancer, via dance, and the emotions invested in Tagorean humanism, gave these digital sharings the effulgence of a lamp in darkness. Admittedly, being able to dance and film at that time was an act of privilege, but it created an unexpected solidarity, a powerful safety net and a source of possibility for those who survived the pandemic. In the wake of backsliding from democracy seen in India according to The Global State of Democracy 2021, Biswas’s work on democratizing digital spaces has a thematic relevance to our volume given the retreat of democracy and democratization in India, evidenced by the “backsliding” and the “violations.”

Meghna Bharadwaj’s essay, “Teaching Dance as a Multi-spatial/Multi-media Practice: Reflections on Devising Contemporary Dance Pedagogy in University Spaces,” addresses pedagogy in higher education. Bharadwaj’s piece predates National Education Policy 2020, the latest experiment in India where dance gets institutional valence as early as at the school level. In India, dance and music have always been part of the cultural fabric of society, but with little to no curricular integration. Most of the learning was left to specially interested students who pursued art forms through the traditional system of apprentice-learning, in institutions of varying tangibility and certification. Pedagogy for some dance practices and lineages has been controlled primarily by those gurus.

For the last decade, the main discussion on pedagogy in India has been about policing of state critique, politicized curricular scrutiny, as well as irrational measures and additions in state-mandated syllabi. How different are these changes from the prescriptions of Macaulayian education? In her seminar essay “Decolonizing the Curriculum? Unsettling Possibilities for Performance Training,” dance scholar O’Shea has referred to the university as “colonial and corporate,” and points to its links with the “precarity of neoliberalism” (O’Shea 2021). Most Indian universities, including iconic liberal institutions and even some in the private space, have fallen victim to the ideological divide, and lost their cutting edge in the liberal art and education industry. They seek to be pre-colonial and corporate. Yet they retain their interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary forms of research, and an unpredictable scope for upsetting traditional hierarchies and trajectories of dance pedagogy, while challenging the exclusive notion of dance itself.

While dance is significant as a self-standing discipline of body and space, a university setting also validates dance as a valuable methodology for research. During her own stint at a private liberal arts university, Bharadwaj realized that the understanding of dance as a research methodology lies in how it can enable the researcher to knowledge her spatial and sensorial experiences within the network of her research activities involving knowledge, language, and text. Describing her access to contemporary dance training as “an identity-refuge” vis-a-vis a lack of Indian dance lineage in her practice, she claims that the term “contemporary,” identifies her as a practitioner belonging in not one, but a multiplicity of vocabularies, as well as in a here-and-now time frame. The rubric of contemporary dance offers space for diversity, experimentation, inquiry, and novel expression. It provides tools to challenge old dominance as well as to envision alternatives to the hegemony of more fixed dance ecologies. As this dance program was located in a visual arts department, the author was encouraged to interpret contemporary dance as not just an inquiry of multiple dance techniques, but as a multi-spatial and multi-sensorial process. She was thus encouraged to evolve a contemporary dance pedagogy, grounding it into a reservoir with camera, site, sound, and text, in addition to the dancing body. She came to understand that the university as a site whose unique architecture, inside and outside, provides exciting spaces for creative work; that writing, theorizing and documenting dance are part of practice; and that digital space has emerged as the dominant space following the university’s challenging experience with the pandemic.

French artiste Annette Ledyard and Cyrille Larrieu’s filmic exploration Dance India Today (2021) comprises of SADI’s feature: Hybrid Footprints. You can find it at the end of the journal in a special page it shares with the CFP for the next edition. The film contains the fantasies that an artiste like McRuvie is trained in while dancing contemporary dance. It stirs in the mind some of the multivalent understandings of the term contemporary dance, that SanSan Kwan prospects in her piece “When She Moves” (2021). Aslam writes about her guru Indu, the nonagenarian icon of dance in Pakistan. The article acquaints the reader with the trailblazing work of Milha who adapted her training in bharatanatyam from India for her new home in Pakistan, where North Indian music was more familiar than Carnatic music. There are few dance stories from Pakistan and even fewer writings. In fact, in intransigent Pakistan, at times, even the sheer act of dancing, is not without risk. In our first edition board member Sheema Kermani wrote about the stigma about dance experienced by male dancers and by extra-female dancers. The dance of women and those who dance about Hindu symbols is even more risk prone. Dance has been ubiquitous in all of South Asia and Pakistan is no exception (Gera Roy, 2010). Well-known dances include Dhammal, which is danced by Pashtun men, and only has female dancers. The dance of women and those who dance about Hindu symbols is even more risk prone. In our first edition board member Sheema Kermani wrote about the stigma about dance experienced by male dancers and by extra-female dancers. The dance of women and those who dance about Hindu symbols is even more risk prone. Dance has been ubiquitous in all of South Asia and Pakistan is no exception (Gera Roy, 2010). Well-known dances include Dhammal, which is danced by Pashtun men, and only has female dancers. The dance of women and those who dance about Hindu symbols is even more risk prone. Dance has been ubiquitous in all of South Asia and Pakistan is no exception (Gera Roy, 2010). Well-known dances include Dhammal, which is danced by Pashtun men, and only has female dancers. The dance of women and those who dance about Hindu symbols is even more risk prone.
was enacted through the laws that eliminated hereditary artist communities and professional women performers from mainstream practices of dance and sanitized those practices to be worthy of the labels of "high art" and "classical." In an argument that has also been proffered by Deepa Mahadevan, Chakravarty argues that this mode of censorship also influenced popular forms of dance, through citizenship families—often initially musicians accompanying renowned female hereditary dancers—gained in social equity; and the ways in which upper-caste dancers created their own aesthetic lineages by ascribing to the lineage of the hereditary male nattavunar from whom they had learnt the art after the female dancers of the community were disenfranchised. This essay is a seminal addition to the burgeoning field of bharatanatyam studies that is seen considerable churning in the field of Indian dance.

Among covert pathways the author includes pathways of patronage, of funding and making available other resources which in the absence of a clearly enunciated policy can be ascertained rather such ways subscribe to the deeply embedded caste and class hierarchies and in more recent times communitarian categories compelling dance to fit its practices within the nationalist framework of a normative Hindu-Brahminial. Sustained efforts towards these ends have resulted in standardization of codes of aesthetics that through repetitions have constituted de facto policy. She concludes her argument by establishing how censorship has not just played a repressive role but also a productive role, especially through art washing, patently evident in the fact that due to the centrality of dance in the national cultural discourse, it has been successfully used as propaganda to censor negative actions or perceptions of the government. For example, the danced face of the idea of Amritkaal, and the priority of Hindu majoritarian nationalism seeking to launder its cultural identity that is predominantly Hindu and Brahminial. Sustained efforts towards these ends have resulted in standardization of codes of aesthetics that through repetitions have constituted de facto policy.

SOUTH ASIAN DANCE INTERSECTIONS

This edition of SADI would not have been possible without the contributors, the peer reviewers, the board of SADI and the members of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, especially Savannah Lake, Wendy Fishman, Gretchen Alterowitz, and Ritika Prasad. I would be failing in my responsibilities if I were not to thank Kaustavi Sarkar, Assistant Professor of Dance at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, soloist Odissi dancer and educator, who has taken on this issue as SADI's Interim Business Manager. We make a good team and an unexpected benefit of this initiative is the close friendships it is fostering among the South Asians.

I want to remind our readers that SADI is open to receiving articles written in regional languages. If selected, your work will be translated into English for our global readership. SADI also is proud to offer year-long mentoring to emergent scholars, writers, practitioners, and activists. SADI is available only on line and via free and open access, to enhance its unrestricted and democratic reach. We believe that knowledge needs to be dispersed unfettered to seed new ideas and enquiries. Should you like to write an essay, review, photo feature, or can come up with any another imaginative mode of academic dissemination, turn to the end, which will inform you of this year's themes and the process of submission.

Till then, happy reading!

Arshiya Sethi (PhD)
Editor-In-Chief

Works Cited


Mekhoda, Arundhi. “Hierarchies!” In two essays, one in the introductory section, and the other in the conclusion, the author Arundhi Chakravarty invades into the hegemonic forces of nationalism that determine patterns of privileging, excluding, and erasing. Chakravarty argues that a double-pronged effort is necessary to de-territorialize, break imaginaries, de-shackle dance studies from jaded labels by initiating exciting forays into the unfamiliar, while redefining the pithy, trite and jaded. Read the announcement at the end of the journal about the year-long array of symposiums coming up in 2024 around troubling the term, choreography.

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