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REDEFINING HYBRIDITY IN CONTEMPORARY KATHAK DANCE[1]

Abstract: The article aims to examine the extent to which the present day mobility of dance professionals and global, cultural flows hybridize Kathak art and practice in India. It focuses on innovative approaches and cross-cultural productions of selected Indian artists, highlighting the significance of their entanglement in the global networks of dance professionals and cultural markets as key factors of refashioning Kathak tradition. I shall explore the emerging pursuit of these artists toward pluralistic aesthetics, juxtaposing it with the phenomenon of the colonial mimicry (Bhabha 2004). I intend to address the following questions: What motivates the choreographers to use the hybrid language of dance? Is this language a strategy of innovation, consciously and willingly chosen by the artists, or rather the inheritance of colonial past, nowadays unwittingly reproduced through globalization? Does the cultural hybridity facilitates liberation of the dance from Orientalist and colonial discourses? What is its potential to reproduce national identity and to raise intercultural dialogues through the dance? Are these two objectives irreconcilable?

This essay is based on fieldwork conducted primarily in Kolkata in 2015. Among several leading metropolitan centers of Kathak development, that I have researched (New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Bangalore), Kolkata appears to provide an environment particularly susceptible to the influx of concepts, techniques and practices from other cultures. This is apparent in the stage productions of Padatik, Rhythmosaic Dance Company, and Anurekha Ghosh Company, which will be discussed here as examples illustrating the dynamics of cultural hybridization and contextualized against changing, socio-cultural and economic conditions.

Keywords: cultural hybridity, transculturality, Indian dance, Kathak

Over the last two decades, one could observe an increasing number of cross-cultural dance productions, in which the various dance forms, categorized as "ethnic" or "national dances" are being fused with each other. Such practices seem to become more and more popular in the world of South Asian dance, taking variety of trajectories: from deliberate remixing of different dance techniques to the more concealed forms of transculturation within dance traditions.

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The theorists of subaltern studies (Nandy 1983, Chatterjee 1993, Bhabha 2010) have pointed out that the cultural hybridity is not a recent consequence of globalization. It is much a corollary of colonialism and a result of an application of the dominant Western paradigms of nationalism in the process of constructing postcolonial, national, "high cultures". In the context of India, this phenomenon can be traced back to the "revival" of classical performing arts, initiated in the early 20th century by cultural nationalists. Since the 1930s, various South Asian dance forms have been refashioned as an emblem of "Indianness". In the course of this process, the architects of classical Indian dance have sought to match it with the European criteria of classicism in art.[2] Thus, the outcome of the dance revival are the traditions already transcultural in their foundations: made of Indian materials, but modelled on classical ballet, and embedded into the Westernized discourses.

In the increasingly globalized context, the classical Indian dance forms undergo further processes of cultural translation, facilitating new influx of Western ideas and techniques.[3] Some scholars and artists (Schehner 2002, Shay 2006, Jeyasingh 2010) perceive this phenomenon as a metamorphosis of uneven power relations – a shift from political to solely economic colonization, that continues to imprint the cultures of the Third World. In order to find a place on mainstream global stages, South Indian dancers seem to constantly readapt themselves to non-Indian paradigms of art. Their relocation to global auditoria leads to various redefinitions of Indian dance. The public image of a dance tradition can reproduce, or liberate from the stereotypes of Orientalism and nationalism. A Western consumer of Eastern exotica may have the illusion of watching "authentic" culture, uncontaminated by foreign influences. But in fact, to enter the global stage and meet the criteria of a stage art, traditional, "ethnic dances" have been largely uprooted, spectacularized and commoditized.[4]

Before placing them on stage, non-Western dance forms were treated only as ethnographic objects, and could not be recognized as arts.[5] The labels of "folk dance", "world dance" or "ethnic dance" have situated them in a lower position in global dance hierarchy. Even when staged – mainly as representation of supposedly homogenous, "national cultures", such labels have often reinforced the unequal power relations between modern American and European societies and "the other", more traditional nations. Anthony Shay has drawn attention to the fact that both the directors of Anglo-American festivals, and folklorists require the dancers from particular ethnic groups to represent their community in the stereotypical, "authentic" way,

[2] See: P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993.

[3] These Indian dances that gained popularity particularly in the major locations of South Asian diaspora are often refashioned for Euro-American markets. Moreover, Westernized culture constantly flows into the Indian markets.

[4] See: S.L. Foster (ed.), *Worlding Dance*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2009.

[5] M.E. Savigliano, *Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World*, in: S.L. Foster (ed.), *Worlding Dance*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

often in colorful costumes, so that their culture seem to be frozen in time, in some mythical, idyllic villages. Through careful selection of the topics (for example excluding contemporary, social or political issues) such performances are supposed to recreate the distant past of the nation. This designates their subordinate roles, as part of backward world.[6]

Individual social actors have, however, the agency to oppose the false representations and attempts of essentialization.[7] Those performers, who want to be seen as artists rather than "ethnic dancers", tend to distance themselves from the mystified exoticism. The repertoire has instrumental role in inventing or reversing the representation of cultural values (for instance, toward embodying cultural pluralism). In this attempts, cultural hybridity becomes a strategy to avoid classification on the basis of ethnicity.[8] Hybrid aesthetics has, however, multiple sources and functions. I will attempt to describe the complexity of this phenomenon in Indian dance, focusing on the transcultural productions of Kolkata-based Kathak choreographers.

Resisting nationalism and orientalism

Kathak is recognized as one of several classical dances of India. It is associated with Indoislamic culture of north India and is believed to have originated in the courts and Hindu temples. The present-day, "classical" aesthetics of Kathak is largely an outcome of twenty-century reconstruction of various former traditions and imposition of Sanskrit theatrical conventions, since it was relocated to dance academies and national auditoria. As the new Indian middle classes and government took over the dance patronage (between 1930s-1950s), Kathak has become more standardized, sophisticated, religious and devoid of erotic content.[9] The contemporary repertoire is dominated by Hindu mythology and love songs, interpreted in the context of devotionalism (*bhakti*). Specific dance technique (elaborated footwork and rhythmical variations, series of fast pirouettes, graceful postures), conventional expression, costumes and accompanying Hindustani music also makes part and parcel of classical Kathak tradition.[10] However, these norms are sometimes deliberately neglected in the various innovations and experiments, classified as "contemporary Kathak".

The point of departure of experimental, transcultural works of artists, trained in the classical Indian dance tradition, is often a conflict between a dictate of the "tradition" along with the "national identity" imposed on the dance, and a multitude of

6 A. Shay, *Choreographing Identities*: *Folk Dance, Ethnicity and Festival in the United States and Canada*, McFarland & Co., Jefferson, NC 2006, p. 21.

7 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

8 L. Hammergren, *The power of classification*, in: S.L. Foster (ed.), *Worlding Dance*, *op. cit.*

9 See: P. Chakravorty, *Bells of Change: Kathak Dance, Women and Modernity In India*, Seagull Books, Calcutta 2008; M. Walker, *Kathak Dance: A Critical History*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, Toronto 2004.

10 See: S. Kothari, *Kathak: Indian Classical Dance Art*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi 1989.

belongings that constitute their own self. The national identity in India is constantly negotiated in relation to regional, ethnic, class, caste or gender identity that are equally strong point of reference in the process of identification of an individual.[11] Additionally, new lifestyles in big Indian cities foster absorbing and shaping new models of collective identity: cosmopolitan, transcultural, transnational. In reaction, some artists seek to release the dance and the dancer's body from the shackles of classicism, which hinder realistic, emotional expression.[12] Some of the innovators also attempt to renegotiate the Indian national identity, formed on the basis of stereotypes and misconceptions of Indianness, inherited by Indian nationalists from the discourses of colonialism and Orientalism.[13]

To articulate the resistance to 'classicism', artists use various strategies. They may operate on the level of repertoire: through a parody or reinterpretation of traditional themes or introducing new topics (social, political, often controversial). Some choreographers take challenge to adapt Western plays or stories into the language of Kathak. The storyline may be reduced to the exploration of particular abstract ideas. Kathak repertoire is enriched by depiction of contemporary life and experiences (for instance, in Kumudini Lakhia's works), narrations on global issues, such as women rights (presented in the works of Rani Khanam, Aditi Mangaldas and Shovana Narayan) and intercultural encounters (explored, among others, by Akram Khan, Rukmini Chatterjee or Sonia Sabri). Extending the barriers of traditions, cultural translations and crossing the national borders becomes itself a theme of choreography, which I intend to demonstrate referring to the intercultural works of Anurekha Ghosh and Rhythmosaic Dance Company.

Often the change in the content requires formal innovations, since the classical language is sometimes insufficient to talk about the contemporaneity. In response to this need, artists invent new gestures and movements – both mimetic and conventional for other dance techniques. The liberation of body from the limitations of a particular dance technique sometimes triggers modifications of costume, so that it does not hamper the movements. Characterization (or its lack) may also serve the purpose to make the performance more realistic. Furthermore, the idea can be additionally communicated through scenography and props. Artists also draw inspiration from the Western multimedia technologies, making use of prerecorded music, sounds and light effects, or screens as integral element of performance.

A specific feature of recent innovative trends in Kathak seems to be the tendency to express personal experiences, emotions, ideas, and opinions, "a search for one's

[11] See: J. Leslie, M. McGee (eds.), *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion and Politics in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2000.

[12] A. Lopez y Royo, *Classicism, post-classicism and Ranjabati Sircar's work: re-defining the terms of Indian contemporary dance discourses*, "South Asia Research" 2003, no. 23/2, p. 6.

[13] S. Jeyasingh, *Text Context Dance*, in: A. Iyer (ed.), *Choreography and Dance: South Asian Dance*, Harwood Academic Publishing, Amsterdam 1997, p. 31.

own Tongue".[14] The individualized, somatic expression of contemporary performers, exposed to multiple body languages, contributes to the hybridity of aesthetics. Quite often (as in my case study) these artists are familiar to dance techniques other than Kathak, especially ballet, contemporary dance, or Flamenco. This reverses the traditional system of training, based on obedience to only one master (*guru-shishya parampara*). Due to the increasing mobility, this traditional regime also started to collapse.

Along with the growing popularity of Kathak abroad, foreigners are more often seen in dance classes and stages in India. Non-Indian identities of these students may also be the factor of reshaping the traditional training and social significance of the dance. Even if there is no direct interaction or collaboration between Indian and foreign dancers, the Indian artists are exposed to other cultures and dance techniques via the mass media. The new philosophical and aesthetical concepts, the different approach to the body, and strategies of choreography, such as remix, reshape the prevailing practice of Kathak. The creative experiments, founded on the access to such rich database, result in the production of innovative palimpsest of movement and music, grounded in Indian arts and drawing from the variety of cultures, aesthetics, ideas and vocabularies, disseminated globally.

Kathak in dialogue with other dance languages: Kathamenco by Anurekha Ghosh

Anurekha Ghosh started her training in Kathak at the age of four under Meera Majumdar and Mousumi Sen in Calcutta. In 1992 she moved to United Kingdom with her parents, where she continued her training under the tutelage of the renowned Kathak exponents: Pratap Pawar and Naheed Siddiqui. As she memorizes, her *gurus*, although teaching abroad, shared traditional approach to dance education. As it was common in *guru-shishya parampara* system, they prevent their disciples from being distracted by practicing different dance styles.[15] However, the mobility, intrinsic to Ghosh's life, made keeping such order impossible. She perceives her own dislocations as very nourishing for her Kathak, providing her with a possibility to learn various skills from specific teachers and qualities of particular Kathak schools (*gharanas*):

[14] A reference to the title of Daksha Sheth production *Search for My Tongue* (1993), based on the bi-lingual poem of the same name by Sujata Bhatt. The choreography "deals with the dilemma of Asian youth raised in the West, caught between two cultures, their search for identity being mirrored by the search for a mother tongue long atrophied from disuse" (www.dakshasheth.com/repertoire/search-for-my-tongue). Daksha Sheth is considered to be one of the pioneers of the innovation of Kathak, based on hybridity of dance language. She was one of the first choreographers who set Kathak to Western classical music (*Four Seasons* by Vivaldi).

[15] A. Ghosh, pers. conv., Kolkata, March 13, 2015.

> The beauty in my Kathak has come from Naheedji; the clean movements, the clean lines that she always emphasizes. In terms of compositions, I'm obviously influenced by Pt. Birju Maharajji. I'm very open to moving from Lucknow to Jaipur *gharana*. I like to take the best of both *gharana*s, the purity of footwork from Jaipur *gharana*, the subtlety of movements in Lucknow style.[16]

She also confesses, that in U.K., dance training was at that time treated more seriously than in India. Students were devoted to dance practice and set themselves the goal to become professional, not amateur dancers. "If I wouldn't go to U.K. I don't think my dance would expand so much. From the very beginning when I went to U.K. I was put into a very serious mind that I want to take dance as a profession. I wanted to be seen as Kathak dancer who has very innovative approach to it".[17] To enrich her body expression after many years of Kathak training, she also started to learn contemporary dance and South Indian martial arts of Kalaripayattu. All these experiences imprinted her technique of Kathak:

> My Kathak is different in a way (…). I dance with a lot more energy (…). This approach comes from the West, from contemporary dance (…). When we were training in Kalari, it was very difficult for women. As Kathak dancers we are never in so low position (…), so when I started it was a nightmare and so much pain (…). But that training of Kalari has given me a lot of calm and a lot of new ideas of how can I use my body, keep the subtleties of Kathak and make it really calm (…). When I went many times to Spain, I stayed close to Flamenco dancers and have many Spanish students. Then I have also taken some influences from Flamenco.[18]

The mobility of Ghosh was conducive to further enrichment of her dance vocabulary with new content and form. Her staying among exponents of different styles has led to creative collaborations, celebrating interculturalism in dance. During her residency in Spain, she wanted to create something where she could "really put Kathak and Flamenco together". The result was a piece *Humsafar*, in which the body becomes divided into upper part – dancing Flamenco, and a lower part – doing Kathak.[19] "(…) HUMSAFAR is an attempt to show how two different 'Rhythms', 'the Soul', 'the Mind and Body', 'the Gestures and Movements' and the 'Passion and Emotion' have merged together to create a new language".[20] "I don't want to say that I'm fusing the styles, but I'm taking inspiration from both the styles" – explains the choreographer.[21]

The exploration of resemblance between Kathak and Flamenco in this creative collaboration by Ghosh and their Spanish partners was inspired by the alleged com-

16 *Ibidem*.
17 *Ibidem*.
18 *Ibidem*.
19 *Ibidem*.
20 A commentary of the author to a video *Anurekha Ghosh and Company production HUMSAFAR (Kathak and Flamenco Juxtaposition*), accessible on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne0htOKZvy4.
21 A. Ghosh, *op. cit.*

mon roots of the dances. Both techniques reveal certain analogies in the complex and sometimes very fast footwork, harmonized with smooth, graceful hand movements.[22] The choreographers made use of these similarities to develop a syncretic choreography, in which it is difficult to separate Kathak from Flamenco. The songs accompanying this eclectic dance provoke the expression of particular emotions communicated mainly through facial expressions. For most of the performance, two dancers from Spain and an Indian duet perform together the same choreographic patterns to hybrid music. The syncretic costume, combining elements of Flamenco and Kathak dress, also undermines the nationalist discourses, imposed on both the dances, and enables the dancers' bodies to escape ethnic categorizations.

In another choreography of Anurekha Ghosh, titled *Bonded passions*, Flamenco was put in dialogue with Kathak. The video recording of the performance reveals how two dancers of Alma Flamenco Dance Company operate solely through their own Flamenco vocabulary, meanwhile Anurekha Ghosh comes up with more openness, allowing the language of Flamenco to merge into her Kathak. Her costume corresponds to her approach: she dances with a *manton* thrown over her classical Kathak costume. At first, the three characters perform to the music traditional for their dance styles. Gradually, the music becomes eclectic, Anurekha dances to *sevillana*, while Spanish dancers move to *tarana* and Hindustani songs. Finally, they all find a common rhythm and conclude with *jugalbandhi* in a form of harmonious synthesis of the two dance techniques. The process of conversation in the two dance languages can be read as an allegory of the intercultural exchange, in which both the sides seem to absorb elements of the other one, to finally reach the consensus. Transcending the strict frames of traditions foster the intercultural communication and a search for similarities (as a base for the dialogue) rather than differences. The fundamental dynamics of both styles serves here as a common ground to merge into a new quality.[23]

The multiplication of similar projects, combining Kathak with Flamenco, has led to the emergence of the term *kathamenco*,[24] coined in order to describe this type of "remix". As noted by Mohan Khokar, a first of such endeavors was a London performance in 1982 by Mira [Kaushik] and Teresa Moreno.[25] The trend was developed by Uma Sharma, Pratap Pawar, Shovana Narayan, Janaki Patrik, up to many recent productions, such as *Torobaka* (2014) by Akram Khan and Israel Galvan.

[22] The comparison of the two techniques has been explored by Miriam Phillips (1991).

[23] The video of this production is accessible on YouTube. See: *Bonded Passion Kathak and Flamenco Fusion from Anurekha Ghosh and Co.*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLHePr1VplM.

[24] P. Chakravorty, *Dancing into Modernity: Multiple Narratives of India's Kathak Dance*, "Dance Research Journal" 2006, no. 38 (1 & 2) (Summer/Winter), p. 128.

[25] Archival letter by Mohan Khokar dated December 16, 1987, addressee unknown, Mohan Khokar Dance Archive.

PADATIK: toward the body awareness and science of dance movement

An important center of intercultural exchange and innovation in performing arts is Padatik, founded by Shyamanand Jalan in 1972. The institution consist of the drama and dance school (Padatik Dance Centre) and an auditorium (Padatik Little Theatre). The theatre's productions include classics and contemporary plays, both Indian, and Western (Shakespeare, Moliere, Becket). Kathak wing of the centre is headed by Chetna Jalan, assisted by Madhumita Roy, Shauvik Chakraborty, and Sandeep Mallick. The school is associated with Pt. Birju Maharaj, who regularly conducts workshop there. The teachers of Padatik also collaborate with well-known innovator of Kathak – Kumudini Lakhia. The school also runs courses of contemporary dance, and invites artists from abroad to teach various dance techniques and co-produce new dance shows. Besides, Padatik receives a regular grant from the Department of Culture, Govt. of India, and is additionally supported by Sangeet Natak Academy and ICCR.

Such network of interrelations shapes the goals of the institution: "to constantly experiment and bring about changes to adopt to the changing times and popular tastes without transgressing the basic aesthetic sensibilities of the traditional forms of Indian art and culture".[26] Apart from the postulate to enrich and contemporize the tradition, Chetna Jalan promotes personal approach to Kathak. She emphasizes the importance of interpretation of technique, "something that comes from the heart", as a higher dimension of art.[27] "Padatik believes that creativity should be left free of shackles of tradition or other restraints to improvise, explore and create and to be guided by its own impulses to proceed or retract and correct itself".[28] Dance becomes here a medium of self-reflection and self-development.

The Centre runs Kathak repertory wing, staging variety of productions choreographed by Chetna Jalan: from traditional format, and adaptations of Indian lyrics to the hybrid productions, attracting attention by the mode of using the body. In *Scarlet of love* and *Flight of Birds* the technique of Kathak blends with ballet. The latter production was choreographed mainly by German artists, Dietmar Seyffert. Western techniques has been also used by Jalan in her adaptation of the Bengali poem by Shakti Chatthopadhyay *Aboni Bari Aacho* (*Are you there?*, 2002).[29] To translate the poem into the language of dance, Kathak was combined with acro-aerial movements, resembling those used in ballet, contemporary dance and acrobatics: jumps, holding and lifting a partner, balancing, suspension of movement, floorwork. The bodies seem

[26] *Padatik since 1972*, a brochure, n.d.

[27] Ch. Jalan, pers. conv., Kolkata, March 10-12, 2015.

[28] *Padatik since 1972*, a brochure, n.d.

[29] See: the English translation by Arunava Sinha (2014), http://tinyletter.com/translations/letters/32-poems-by-shakti-chattopadhyay.

to alternately play with and subject to gravity. The physical distance between the bodies of performers (typical for classical Kathak performance) has been crossed to the extent that the two dancers roll across the floor in the embrace. The performance is overloaded with emotions, oscillating between ecstatic and meditative mood. Props, lights, eclectic music and innovative costumes further extend the traditional idioms of Kathak. The dancers use sticks with masks, striking them against the floors in synchrony with footwork. It corresponds to the lyrics of the poem, symbolizing striking both to the doors and to the heart, in order to find out "who is behind: is it my soul? my real self?" – explains the choreographer.[30] Operating through such a syncretic language, the production brings the message of the Bengali poem to the level of transculturalism and articulates universalized experience of self-inquiry.

Jalan notices that along with the globalization, there have been emerged two fashions among the youth: to maintain tradition and to favor innovations. She opts for the former trend, but in response to the demands of the public and sponsors, she often choose the latter, creating fusions, contemporary and more abstract or theatrical choreographies. "I did it, but I still say: that is not a real dance, that is not where my heart is (…). But my group needs work (…). The organizers pay money, I have to listen to them (…). If they come and tell me that I'm not relevant, they want something around this, I say – ok, give me any music and I will do it (…)".[31]

Moreover, nowadays Bengali students of Kathak has little knowledge of Sanskrit and Hindi (it is a third language in Bengal), Indian literature, philosophy and mythology, necessary to master and develop the traditional format of Kathak.[32] Jalan claims that this ignorance is the contribution of British rule and education, imposed on Indians. In effect, people are well-versed in English, or French, but not in their own traditional language. Present-day globalization reinforces this legacy of colonialism, and children do not even understand, that they are losing the values (…).[33] Nonetheless, she can also see the positive sides in the access to Western cultural practices, and profits from it.

> I believe, that dance is from the body, so I started to study Western movements. It was studying for five years under a graduate from Hong Kong Dance Academy [Ronnie Shambik Ghose]. I studied deeply – not the dance, but the Western philosophy of movement. I wanted to liberate myself, make myself more free (…). My gurus were uneducated, they could not make me understand the movement, the science of it (…). I never wanted to become a ballet dancer or a jazz dancer, I turned to the Western dance to explore the science behind the dance movement (…).[34]

Thanks to the study of Laban system of movement, pilates, or ballet technique, she has gained body awareness, that was not given to her in the course of Kathak

30 Ch. Jalan, *op. cit.*
31 *Ibidem*.
32 *Ibidem*.
33 *Ibidem*.
34 *Ibidem*.

training. The consciousness about the dimensions, balance, pelvis position, or directions of energy flow enriched her dance technique and teaching methods.[35] She has applied this knowledge into teaching of Kathak. In her studio there are exercise bars, by which she and her disciples can practice basic ballet figures. For those who want to learn it more seriously, there are separate classes of ballet. She believes, that this is the important condition to perform in the transcultural productions.

Crossing the barriers of technique and dance philosophy is not an easy task and requires a lot of attention. For example, Kathak dancers used to dance very straight. When Jalan was creating an adaptation of *Dhola Maru* tale, using Rajasthani folk dance techniques, dancers had problems to tilt their body. Analogously, it was a challenge for her to teach Kathak to ballerinas, who were not used to move their wrists. Similarly, teaching Kathak to hippies in U.S. was not an easy task, as they were not accustomed to discipline, necessary in Kathak training.[36] Serious study of the foreign dance tradition implies immersing oneself in the whole culture, and consequently – expanding beyond one's national and one cultural identity, assigned on the basis of nationality.

Cultural translations: *Swan Lake* by Rhythmosaic Dance Company

In the intercultural productions, traditional Hindu stories are replaced by globally known stage masterpieces.[37] Since a particular ballet libretto is translated into a different dance language, such an initiative can be examined as a cultural translation. The prominent work of this type is an Indo-French dance production *Swan Lake Revisited* (2012), sponsored by ICCR, choreographed by Mitul Sengupta and Ronnie Shambik Ghose in collaboration with jazz dance artist of Offjazz Dance Company, Gianin Loringett. As the title suggests – the ballet has been revised through relocating the story into the context of contemporary Indian city: the scene of ball takes place in a cafeteria, streets and a park replace the lakeside.[38] This treatment aimed at pointing to the universalism of the theme: though the setting is different, the characters, human behavior, dreams and feelings remain the same.

Sengupta confesses that her inspiration to create the play was Freudian psychoanalysis.[39] She regards Odile and Odette as two sides of human nature. Every of us tries to show himself/herself from the best side, hiding the darker aspects of own

[35] *Ibidem*.

[36] *Ibidem*.

[37] This kind of productions has been done for example by Birju Maharaj, who choreographed *Romeo and Juliet* in Kathak – a group production, utilizing characterization, stage design and props to enhance adaptation of the story.

[38] http://www.offjazz.com/swan-lake-revisited.html (access: 15.12.2015).

[39] Sengupta holds her Ph.D. in psychology and additionally works in this profession. She is also a dance therapist, using dance as a medium of empowerment, helping, among other, women who were put into traffic.

psyche. Everyone also experiences some negative emotions, but tries to pretend that everything is fine – she explains.[40] Hence, this ballet aims to express the duality of human nature. The various dance languages helped to emphasize the contrasting emotions. The choreography combines Kathak, jazz, Western contemporary dance, tap dance and flamenco, matched to characters and moods.

The style is definitely a hybrid. My company is fully trained in jazz, ballet and Kathak, so they can well convey hybrid movement (…). For example, watching the coffee bar scene you cannot tell: "Ok, she or he has done a little bit of jazz now, here a little bit of Kathak, and a little bit of ballet here" – that we never do. We do shades: it looks like Kathak, it looks like jazz, this is like ballet, but all are like a picture (…). It's a full research work, because you have to really feel that in your body (…). You have to be trained in all the styles.[41]

The hybrid choreography has been created in a conscious and careful process of elaborating movements from several dance techniques which the dancers had mastered before. Only then, there could be a dialogue between the different movement vocabularies, coexisting in the body of a performer, a form of self-exploration, based on a particular concept, that leads to the emergence of new quality of movement.

According to Mitul Sengupta, since Kathak is an improvisational and naturalistic dance form, it was not much problematic to present the storyline of the *Swan Lake*.

> Telling the story was not difficult for me. What was difficult for me is to bring these cultures together (…). The music of Tchaikovsky has specific notes, specific tonality, specific beats, which you really have to understand. So you cannot manipulate anything when you are doing Kathak, regarding rhythm and the body language. Finding a coordination of this music of Tchaikovsky with my Kathak was a big research for us.[42]

Setting Kathak to classical Western music demanded good communication between dancers and musicians. Carefully planned stagecraft and light design contributed to the presentation. The screen helped to recreate the urban setting of the play. Voodoo puppets were used to signify the curse.

Sengupta and Ghose calls themselves "contemporary classicists", and perceive own works as „a marriage of tradition with modernity", "enriching of language of Kathak".[43] "Tradition is best preserved when it is contemporized (…). Body is an arrow – drag it back to the roots and pull it to expand to contemporaneity" – postulates Ghose.[44] They emphasize that a successful experiment must be preceded by mastering the technique. Sengupta says, that only after completing 20-years of Kathak training (with Chetna Jalan) and 10-years of learning jazz dance, she started to ques-

[40] M. Sengupta, pers. conv., Kolkata, March 9, 2015.
[41] *Ibidem*.
[42] *Ibidem*.
[43] M. Sengupta, R.Sh. Ghose, pers. conv., Kolkata, March 9, 2015.
[44] R.Sh. Ghose, pers. conv., Kolkata, March 9, 2015.

tion the rules of technique and craft her own style. She terms her technique „Kathak with elements of contemporary jazz".

The training in Rhythmosaic Dance Studio, apart from Kathak classes, encompasses lessons of classical jazz, ballet, contemporary dance, tap, and dance theory. Occasionally teachers from abroad are invited to give additional workshop, including special topics, rarely taught in India, for instance movement analysis. Not all the students must practice all the styles, but those who are in dance company have to master all techniques and seek to raise body awareness. Students are taught Kathak marked by elements of other techniques.[45] Especially the influence of ballet can be noticed in her dancing. Sengupta elaborates Kathak movements with more raised chest, which makes the dancer looking more open. Some leg and hand movements (like *tram*) are broader, elastic, and the jumps more expanding the space. Sometimes, the body bends backward and the movement tends more upward than in classical Kathak, in which the body rather sticks to the ground.

The class somehow mirrors the changing pace and globalized lifestyle: it has its exact timing, the sequences of choreographies are presented one by another, with not much time devoted to practice. To memorize them, students record the items by mobile phone. They wear convenient dress (Western style), girls do not necessarily cover themselves with *dupatta*. Among the disciples there are foreigners and Indians from other corners of the country. The teacher speaks Bengali, Hindi and English, mixing it to the form of hybrid language. The accompanying music is also hybrid and modernized, with elements of beat and electronic sounds.[46]

Is a hybrid dancing body the Tower of Babel?

As has been demonstrated, intercultural productions are often the fruit of collaborative work between South Asian and Western artists. They are also created by non-Indian artists who learned some Kathak and other dance styles. Particularly in big cities, such as Kolkata, Indian dancers have also an easier access to non-Indian dance styles. Moreover, they can incorporate their elements into Kathak, even without a proper training – by picking it up from TV, video, several days' workshops.

It is however essential for the artists to keep certain order in such productions and set a goal in the creative process. The new hybrid language of dance is a risky endeavor, often criticized by conservative Kathak *gurus*, exponents and critics as "fusions" leading to confusion. Not coincidentally, the authors of the cross-cultural choreographies oppose to calling their work "fusion", speaking rather of "intercultural dialogue" (Anurekha Ghosh), "expanding of Kathak technique" (Chetna Jalan), or "hybrid dance" (Mitul Sengupa). "I never like to call my work fusion, my work is

[45] Fieldwork notes, Rhythmosaic Dance Studio, Kolkata, March 2015.
[46] *Ibidem*.

always thought on a concept that I carry (…)" – claims Ghosh.[47] According to Mitul Sengupta, fusion is a reckless, random juxtaposition of elements taken from different techniques, one after the other, according to the principle "cut and paste".[48] It is not a creative method of choreography. Meanwhile, deliberate harmonization of two or more techniques can communicate a lot of content.[49]

Hybridity as an artistic value and choreographic strategy seems to be based not only on the concept born in the author's mind, but also on the in-depth knowledge of the different styles and techniques that start to co-exist in the body of the exponent, pervading and affecting each other. Therefore, artists insist on the need to undergo serious training in particular dance techniques before one's involvement in the cross-cultural productions, in which these techniques are used. The hybrid art requires different approach to dance education, that would foster the emergence of hybrid bodies – bodies that have assimilated various cultural codes of communication and dance techniques.

The advocates of inter- and trans-cultural performance have awareness of dangers, resulting from such a great access to the dance world today, and express also critical remarks about the misuse of the existing possibilities. The absorption of various dance techniques in which students have not received a proper training may spoil the arts. Nowadays, Anurekha Ghosh teaches both classical and contemporized forms of dance in her school in Kolkata, but she emphasizes the importance of serious training, aimed at turning the dance from a hobby into passion.

> The young generation of dancers have many options, and that's where the problem is – they are not focused on what they are doing. They also learn many styles: latin, salsa, jazz. In Kolkata and in various places of India, when I see contemporary dance – that's not contemporary dance, and they have this awful name of Western dance (…). What is Western dance? It is a mixture of everything – hip-hop, jazz, ballet, contemporary (…). They are taking little bit pieces from here and there, and even the movements are not properly done, but they go on stage and perform, whereas in Kathak you have to practice at least 5-10 years before even thinking to go on the stage.[50]

More conservative environment do not accept any kind of blending techniques, classifying all of them as fusions. "What is the point of dancing hip-hop to Kathak *bol*s? It is neither Kathak, nor hip-hop. It ridicules both styles" – exemplifies a dance theory teacher.[51] The fusion of Kathak with Western techniques are similarly marginalized for being Westernized, and due to the ethnic identity markers, as not Western enough in the auditoria abroad.[52] The pioneers of hybrid dance are often asked about

47 A. Ghosh, *op. cit.*

48 M. Sengupta, *op. cit.*

49 *Ibidem*.

50 A. Ghosh, *op. cit.*

51 B. Singh, pers. conv., Lucknow, April 10, 2015.

52 K. Katrak, *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011.

the outcome of learning and embodying multiple dance languages: is it really going to enrich Kathak, or rather lead to its deformation?

> There are definitely questions like "what's the point of learning so many things? In India we are learning only one style and we are happy with that. But for me, being happy with only what I know is not the real learning. You have to embrace everything, and then you have to know what you have taken, what you have to deny. In Kathak I would never do a split on the floor, if it is not necessary, because Kathak doesn't have any plie position, first of all (…). You cannot do something which has never been in Kathak. You can do it, if the choreography demands, but still you have to know why you are doing it. There has to be a reason.[53]

Therefore, there are limitations of such experiments. A transcultural performance should not be a careless, random mosaic of movements, unless the dancer wants to express the chaos and collision of the cultures.[54] Dancers based in India rather seek possibility of a consensus in cross-cultural performance. Besides, absorbing other dance languages may help the dancer to expand his/her own individual style.

> If you are really trained with one form, nothing is going to happen to it. Taking from other forms is going to enrich your style, because you are getting exposed to various kinds of body movements, you are analyzing your body, at the same time you really know your limitations and your plus points. Then your style, like for example my style of Kathak, enhances.[55]

Conclusions

The authors of aforementioned innovative productions seem to seek a compromise between their own Indianness and expectations of global audiences on a dance stage. Their international collaborations tend to shape lasting bonds with dancers from abroad. Most of them have been well exposed to the Western paradigms of art and acquainted with other body languages. The specific lifestyle and mobility of these dancers facilitates transgression of culturally-specific corporeality and formation of transcultural bodies and cosmopolitan identities. This provides dancers with a wide range of tools and materials to produce an intercultural or a transcultural performance.

There are various strategies of putting the two, or more, dance vocabularies together in the hybrid choreographic works:

1) each dancer sticks to the technique, representing his/her national or regional identity;
2) each dancer uses one particular technique, not necessarily related to his ethnicity (ascribed instead to a certain character or idea);

[53] M. Sengupta, *op. cit.*

[54] Such approach is shared by Akram Khan, who emphasize the conflict and confusion within his body-mind, resulting from migrant existence between two cultures.

[55] M. Sengupta, *op. cit.*

3) various techniques are consecutively presented by a dancer, one after another;
4) a dancer uses hybrid technique – constantly blending elements of various techniques, in such a way, that it is difficult to distinguish one style from the other.

The first strategy seems to correspond to the risks of multiculturalism, implying cultivation of various cultures close to each other, ready for dialogue and coexistence, yet distinct and separated. The second model of embodying vocabulary from outside of the "native culture" resembles the processes of acculturation. Third strategy of operating various languages is specific for cosmopolitan or chameleon identity, constantly conforming to new contexts, places, communities, fashions, and profiting from own multilingualism.[56] The last strategy seems to denote intermingling of cultures according to the model of transculturalism, enabling their permeate integration. But, as it has been highlighted above – it is not always a choice compatible to the individual preferences of the choreographers. The cosmopolitan, transcultural identities represented in the dance performance shall be understood as discourses, reproduced in accordance to the expectations of global audiences.

The representations of national and ethnic identity through dance can deepen the isolation of cultures or bridge the gap between them. Classical traditions are entangled into the whole networks of national culture. The subjection to their strict rules reproduce the (national) cultures as isolated systems. But as globalization puts the geographically distant practices in close proximity to each other, the various cultures no longer remain separated from each other. As suggested by Welsch, nowadays, the discourse of separated cultures shall be replaced by the narrative on transcultural networks, constantly expanding and reconfigured.[57] Correspondently, artists tend to refuse to represent "Otherness", or deconstruct it, revaluing it as a potential of enrichment.[58] Experimental productions, juxtaposing Kathak with other cultures create space for the renegotiation of "Indianness", redefinition of cultures, and deconstruction of national stereotypes. On the global stage, dance acquires potential to bring liberation from representation and labels, and the hybrid aesthetics can be used as a strategy to question validity of categorizations. The disappearance of boundaries between traditions implies weakening of divisions between ethnic and national identities. Instead of being the ambassadors of their own cultures, performers become advocators of international dialogue, integration and transculturalism.

[56] Similarly, the artists tend to constantly come up with various new productions, addressed to local, national and global audiences. It is accompanied by the efforts to legitimize their new aesthetical ideas into the mainstream. Hence, more and more productions seems to oscillate between the classical canon (iconic for national identity) and the aesthetic hybridity or cultural pluralism.

[57] W. Welsch, *Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today*, in: M. Featherstone, S. Lash (eds.), *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, Sage, London 1999.

[58] M.E. Savigliano, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

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