The Art of Imperial Entanglements

Nautch Girls on the British Canvas and Stage in the Long Nineteenth Century

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I
Introduction

> Culture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience.
>
> — Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

Corresponding with dramatic shifts in global power relations during an age defined by "enlightenment", imperialism, conquest and revolution, the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries yielded increasingly complex entanglements between cultural, national and other categorical entities. These multifarious interactions were to manifest themselves in various manners, not only through political exploits, but also through societal and cultural practices, through which they could proliferate and gain further significance. In this regard, the power of works of art to present, emphasise and often encapsulate the thinkings of cultures and societies should not be undervalued as historical testimony. From the artist's conceptualisation to the audience's reception, as well as all the interlocutors involved in the process of artistic production and negotiation, it is apparent that works of art convey meaning, offering value to historical inquiry.

During this age of imperialism, artists – amongst others – were plunged into a new space within which their works would be constructed, received, reconstituted and appropriated. At the same time, the colonised subjects of works of art were to experience a reconstitution their own respective spaces. These processes of entanglement and renegotiation

contributed to the shaping of new or hybrid socio-cultural spaces.[1] In these hybrid spaces, the historically synthesised borders of nation state and other such locations could be surmounted, giving way to a process of transculturality that reflected interactions across traditionally defined borders and transcended traditional boundaries and binaries.

The invasion of India by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC was to mark only the beginning of an extensively increasing interaction between India and what is conventionally (and problematically) understood as "the West".[2] With the continuous flow of interaction came a multitude of political, economic and social consequences, replete with burdened narratives that corresponded with monumental shifts in power and hegemony. The South Asian subcontinent had been no stranger to foreign presence and imperialism, from the arrival of nomadic clans from Central Asia in the tenth century to the arrival of the French, Dutch and Portuguese involved largely in trade and missionary work to the ruling of the Mughal Empire up until the nineteenth century. Each of these interactions revealed how the vast region of the subcontinent was to be infused with multiple cultural entities spanning across a vast temporal and spatial plane long before the establishment and growth of the British East India Company in the mid-eighteenth century.

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[1] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Psychology Press, 1994).
[2] John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 145.

By the 1780s, Britain had acquired the eastern state of Bengal, and by the turn of the nineteenth century, British dominions in India had grown substantially, particularly in the southern and eastern regions. The eventual establishment of British Crown Rule in 1857 served as a particularly significant turning point in global politics and power relations; India became Britain's crown jewel – a fashionable and lucrative showpiece flaunted at trade fairs, at exhibitions and in the media, as well as in the arts, at great cost to the colony.

As imperialist practices surged across Europe, its manifestations were both profound and multifaceted. John MacKenzie fittingly asserted that "the Empire's diverse character ensured that imperialism meant different things to different people at different times".[3] The very concept of imperialism itself was multidimensional – a complex system of varying notions and opinions that evolved over time and shunned homogeneity. The significance of culture with regard to the complexity of imperialism is vast, warranting extensive investigation, particularly with regard to how it directed perceptions. As Edward Said has argued*:*

> The great cultural archive […] is where the intellectual and aesthetic investments in overseas dominion are made. If you were British or French in the 1860s you saw, and you felt, India and North Africa with a combination of familiarity and distance, but never with a sense of their separate sovereignty. In your narratives, histories, travel tales, and explorations your consciousness was represented as the principal authority, an active point of energy that made sense not just of colonizing activities but of exotic geographies and peoples.[4]

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[3] John M MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 2.

[4] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxi.

Culture was informed by imperialism and interacted with it. For example, Said demonstrated how the nineteenth-century English novel harnessed imperialism as a central component in its various facets and aspects. Unsurprisingly, literature was not the only such product in this culture-and-imperialism relationship.

Art and Imperialism

Art, in its diverse forms and styles, has been intrinsically linked to politics, power and social change,[5] validating its significance in historical study. These works of art were not necessarily intrinsically determined by the ideologies that encircled them, but they were embedded in specific histories within which these ideologies were essential components. Edward Said's work *Culture and Imperialism* was eminently dedicated to understanding artworks not only as "great products of the creative or interpretative imagination" but also as "part of the relationship between culture and empire".[6] In this way, the work of art borne within imperialist interactions cannot be isolated from its ideological environs – "the concept of empire belongs at the centre, rather than in the margins, of the history of British art".[7] Delving deeper, the transcultural flows that ensued during these processes

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[5] Larry Silver, *Art in History* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998); Will Bradley and Charles Esche, *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007).
[6] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxii.
[7] Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham, *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

meant that works of art could also harness power as a vehicle for ideological and cultural discourse. As Julie Codell highlighted:

> Due to art's fundamental nature as spatial, art can illuminate imperial transculturation sites of border cultures and contact zones that go far beyond hybridities of national cultural traditions or conventions. Transcultural works generate new cultural and imperial values.[8]

Through its malleability, art can – in many ways – transcend the rigidities of political and social discourses attached to a particular nation or cultural identity and develop beyond them. The inherent value of culture and the arts in this way was nothing new at this time – cultural preservation appeared even to be an important mission of the British in India.[9] However, it was during the age of imperialism that culture and the arts became increasingly intertwined with political discourse. John MacKenzie emphasises that the "relationship between the cultures of different continents, as mediated by imperialism, is a crucial aspect of modern history", and that this extends beyond the extensively explored world of literature to imperial culture in all its heterogeneity.[10] This became particularly pertinent during a time that witnessed the development of printing, photography, phonography and museums as cultural institutions, as well as the preoccupations with categorisation and classification that came with them.

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[8] Julie F Codell, ed., *Transculturation in British Art, 1770-1930* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
[9] In fact, Hoock shows how the British in India were one of the first governments to attempt to protect antiquities: Holger Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850*, Kindle Edition (Profile Books, 2010), loc. 7897.
[10] John M MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xi.

Homing in specifically on the British in India, artworks offered invaluable insight into varying discourses in politics, society and culture. From the late eighteenth century onward, Britain witnessed revolutionary conflicts across multiple continents, the establishment of humanistic societies to foster visual culture at home and antiquarian study abroad and territorial acquisitions overseas.[11] During this momentous time, the artists who travelled to India to record what they saw, as well as those who produced artworks about India from memory or imagination, did so from what de Almeida refers to as the "coincidence and confluence of Romantic vision and imperial intention."[12] In many ways, these artists were agents or cultural brokers in the visual, aural and narrative construction of discourse in the age of imperialism.

Paintings and sketches by travelling artists were particularly important contributors to the visualisation of India in the imperialist imagination, offering vivid glimpses through colour, style, shape, form, space and narrative. These constructs were expounded by non-travelling artists who contributed to the image of India through hearsay, imagination and borrowings from other works – whether visual, aural or literary. Notably, relatively few musical composers, librettists or theatre producers set foot in India during this time in comparison to painters and sketch artists, and yet musical and theatrical representations of India increased in great abundance. While much of the "representation" of India in musical

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[11] Hermione De Almeida and George H. Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), vii.
[12] De Almeida and Gilpin, vii.

entertainments was part of an imagined construct, they offered reflections on how representations reverberated and reconfigured themselves through different forms of art. For instance, Kathleen Wilson has shown how Thomas Arne's early opera *The Choice of Harlequin, or the Indian Chief* (1781) featured scenery based on drawings by Tilly Kettle, while much of the design in *Rama Droog* (1798) was based on drawings by Thomas Daniell.[13] Moreover, artists occasionally dabbled in different forms of art, such as Charles Smith (1749-1824), who practised composition in both painting and opera and had also been to India. In such cases, it was possible to view the interactions between different art forms within the imperial context. The crossovers between art forms, therefore, are significant in furthering our understanding of art as *agency*. It is also clear that there were distinct processes of exchange between the visual and musical arts that were also linked with literary works. This was particularly significant for Britain in an age where instruments of reproduction, including photography, phonography and rotary printing, were becoming increasingly established. Moreover, in the nineteenth century, following the defeat of Napoleon, the state began to appropriate art to "glorify power" through showcases and performance displays in public spaces, with a reinforced connection between the state and cultural heritage through the development of museums, galleries and other cultural institutions.[14]

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[13] Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2002), 70.
[14] Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination*, loc. 7320.

Works by Mildred Archer, Hermione de Almeida and George H. Gilpin and numerous others have attempted to systematically or thematically categorise and analyse British paintings about India, offering diverse evidence that indicates how imperialism, orientalism and romanticism have helped to shape British art about India during this period. Such artistic practices were characteristically part of a broader wave of orientalist artistic practices that swept through Europe during this time, introducing "foreign" landscapes, subjects and objects to the European audience through vivid and often fantastical visualisations. Although few connections have been drawn until now, there was also a corresponding increase in the number of European musical works with "exotic" settings during this time, from Verdi's *Aïda* (1871) to Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) and Puccini's *Turandot* (1926). The long nineteenth century[15] marked an era in which the "exotic" had become fashionable in music and musical entertainments across Europe, notably in opera, through music, libretti, characters, plot, costumes, sets and props. Ralph Locke notes how the plots many European orientalist operas during this time followed a "paradigmatic plot" involving the "orient" and the "occident" in binary roles:

> Young, tolerant, brave, possibly naïve, white-European tenor-hero intrudes, at risk of disloyalty to his own people and colonialist ethic, into mysterious, dark-skinned, colonised territory represented by alluring dancing girls and deeply affectionate, sensitive lyric soprano, incurring wrath of brutal, intransigent tribal chieftain (bass or bass-baritone) and blindly obedient chorus of male savages.[16]

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[15] A period loosely based on Eric Hobsbawm's definition, which refers specifically to the period between 1789 and 1914.
[16] Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other": Saint-Saëns's "Samson et Dalila"', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 3 (1 November 1991): 262–63."

Like painting, musical works offered artistic and cultural value – but there were also the additional aspects of entertainment and performativity to consider. These further aspects enabled orientalist depictions to manifest in new and differing ways, sometimes resonant of the imagery in the visual arts and other times distant from it.

What often united these types of art was their commercial or financial significance. For example, Ellen T. Harris demonstrated the financial significance of opera, with particular reference to the financial goals of the board of directors of the 1719 Royal Academy of Music and the contribution this made to the artistic management of Handel's orientalist operas that were produced and performed there. Harris found that of the fourteen operas that Handel composed for the Royal Academy of Music, a third of them treated Rome as a "cultural emblem" while the remaining two-thirds embraced "oriental" locales and/or topics.[17] Harris argues that opera in Britain, with its attraction to foreign (usually European) artists to come to work for it, could be seen to stand for the "cultural supremacy" of England within Europe, particularly during a time of increased interests in foreign trade growing throughout Europe. More specifically, she argues, the board directors often had personal associations with the East Indian trade and that that operas with "eastern" settings were valuable as "lobbying or marketing tools" in order to serve their financial and associated political interests.[18] Rather than being "selfless patrons of the arts", Harris argued that the directors were:

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[17] Ellen T. Harris, 'With Eyes on the East and Ears on the West: Handel's Orientalist Operas', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 3 (January 2006): 428–29, https://doi.org/10.1162/002219506774929863.
[18] Harris, 419.

> not only heavily invested and involved in international trade but also risk takers or hoarders dedicated first and foremost to the acquisition of wealth and power. Among other documented activities, they gambled, spent money excessively, and engaged in illicit liaisons […] Whatever their musical backgrounds, it is difficult to believe that such men invested in opera solely for the purpose of supporting good music and not also with their own social and financial goals in mind.[19]

Whether due to financial interest or otherwise, it is certainly noteworthy that the number of "oriental" settings in musical works increased greatly in proportion during this time of increased intervention in the "East". Hoock similarly confirms how eighteenth-century Britain's "Handelmania" had deep-rooted connections with "royal patronage and musical entrepreneurship".[20] It demonstrated the connection between state, power, imperialism and culture and its convergence in the arts.

Notably, opera was a form of art reserved usually for the upper echelons of society during the period and place under study, playing a significant role in social and political display. James Parakilas demonstrated the importance of political representation and motives in his study of nineteenth-century Italian opera in its representation of "bourgeois liberal constructs of political struggle". He noted how opera repertory could be (and was) used for the powerful symbolic representation of political ideas.[21] Correspondingly, Rabb notes

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[19] Harris, 422–23.
[20] Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination*, loc. 7870.
[21] James Parakilas, 'Political Representation and the Chorus in Nineteenth-Century Opera', *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 2 (1992): 181–202.

that opera was "a reflection of, and a commentary on, the society that it entertained."[22] The British reception of opera during this time, however, was not mutually positive. For example, eighteenth-century English writer Dr. Samuel Johnson famously described opera as an "exotick and irrational entertainment",[23] since its Italian origins were received ambivalently by a nation so intent on establishing its own culturally distinct identity. The "foreignness" of opera had therefore been acknowledged as inherent with the art form and could also be doubly explored through the inclusion of a "foreign" subject or setting. Interestingly, during the nineteenth century, Britain was not reputed for "grand" operas, but rather for lighter (some may argue "lowbrow") forms of musical entertainment, such as operettas, masques[24] and comic operas.[25] Corresponding to this, Alain Frogley argues that around the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, British music played an important role in the nationalist movement and its character in the popular imagination, transcending the boundaries of the musical and intellectual elite.[26] These lighter musical entertainments of Britain thus served as products of popular culture as well as art, straying from the "high art" element of opera while embedding themselves firmly within a British cultural identity. It is therefore comprehensible that there was a particular "English craze" for artworks with

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[22] Theodore K. Rabb, 'Opera, Musicology, and History', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 3 (2006): 325, https://doi.org/10.1162/002219506774929782.
[23] Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.: With an Essay on His Life and Genius* (London: Luke Hansard & Sons, 1810), 143.
[24] A masque is a form of theatrical entertainment that encompasses elements of drama, music, song, and dance, popular in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, particularly in royal courts.
[25] Sally Mitchell, ed., *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of Social Science, vol. 438 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 524.
[26] Alain Frogley, 'Rewriting the Renaissance: History, Imperialism, and British Music Since 1840', *Music & Letters* 84, no. 2 (1 May 2003): 241.

an Indian setting or theme,[27] given the proximity and relevance of the Indian subject to British life during British rule in India.

Just as the visual arts evolved to cater to the visualisation of "exotic settings", music was also to adapt and develop according to these new soundscapes, contributing to artistic codes and canons. Anthropologists and, later, ethnomusicologists, arrived in India to record indigenous music. There were also missions to collect and display acquired and loaned musical instruments from India by esteemed institutions such as the British Museum.[28] However, as classical Indian music did not adopt the same staff notation and theory that "Western" music did, it was not possible to accurately record Indian music using "Western" musical notation style. The result was an inaccurate translation, or rather transliteration, of Indian music, which contributed to the shaping of British representations of India on the musical stage. The immediate reception of these translations, however, draws interesting results: many critics had great difficulty in accepting Indian music as anything more than simplistic and chaotic noise, as reviews throughout this thesis will show. This was likely due to various reasons, including the failings in the process of "translation", the inclinations towards assertions of authority and superiority that accompanied imperialist ideologies and a mere refusal or inability to understand that artistic practices could thrive in other forms and in other cultures. For

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[27] Raymond Head, 'Corelli in Calcutta: Colonial Music-Making in India During the 17th and 18th Centuries', *Early Music* 13, no. 4 (1 November 1985): 552, https://doi.org/10.1093/em/13.4.548.

[28] South Kensington Museum, *Catalogue of the Special Exhibition of Ancient Musical Instruments, MDCCCLXXII* (London: J. Strangeways, 1872), https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001466864.

instance, Gerry Farrell notes how in 1911, Western audiences applauded enthusiastically for what they thought was a stunning performance by Inayat Khan and the Royal Musicians of Hindustan but was actually just the sound of the Indian musicians tuning their instruments. Some 60 years later, Ravi Shankar was to face a similar experience.[29] Despite such misunderstandings, these musical "translations" were incorporated into British musical codes, not only to represent "exotic" settings but to enhance musical proficiency:

> The new representational modalities entailed new musical devices, which themselves became aestheticized and were used to enrich the musical vocabulary of all European musics, not just operas or other works with exotic themes.[30]

This was often a conscious or deliberate act, whereby European composers could benefit from borrowing from "Eastern" musical practices, enriching their own musical competencies in the process.[31] Essentially, this was a process through which knowledge was acquired and could be exploited for self-advancement, often to the detriment of the agency of the knowledge source.

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[29] Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1.
[30] Timothy D. Taylor, 'Peopling the Stage: Opera, Otherness, and New Musical Representations in the Eighteenth Century', *Cultural Critique*, no. 36 (Spring 1997): 57.
[31] Ralph P. Locke, 'Exoticism', Grove Music Online, accessed 7 August 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000045644.

It is also important to consider the use of art as a vehicle or catalyst for political or social change, and to then consider this within the context of imperialism. Larry Silver offers an extensive survey of painting as well as sculpture and architecture from the Palaeolithic age to contemporary times, demonstrating how art functions within and for its cultural, social and political contexts. Whether through state-led propaganda or the discourses of revolutionaries, history has long demonstrated how the visual arts could serve cause and sway audiences towards or away from particular notions and ideologies. In further detail, John Barrell has argued that English art theorists of the late eighteenth century championed political ideas that were the "discourse of civic humanism", whereby paintings were the instruments by which to instil civic virtues.[32] Considered in this way, works of art could not be isolated from the social and political contexts that they interacted with. Boris Groys similarly explores the power of contemporary art in global politics according to its ideological function,[33] showing how processes have evolved with the shifting global environment. This becomes particularly pertinent in the age of empire, where the shifts were particularly momentous. Unsurprisingly, musical works of art also held similar value. While, on the one hand, opera has been used as a propaganda vehicle by various ruling bodies, on the other, it has also served as an important platform for promoting protest. Theodore Rabb notes the significant political importance of opera, using the examples of the storming of an opera just three days prior to the storming of the Bastille in July 1789, in the run up to the French Revolution, and an 1830 production of Daniel Auber's *La*

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[32] John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting From Reynolds to Hazlitt: The Body of the Public* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
[33] Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

Muette de Portici in Brussels, which triggered the audience to begin rioting for freedom from Dutch rule, contributing to an uprising that eventually led to Belgian independence within months.[34] Similarly, William Weber and Thomas Grey discuss the relationship between opera and politics, highlighting the importance of a collaboration between the disciplines of history and musicology in order to successfully gauge the impact of musical works historically. Where social and economic changes unfolded, opera had a tendency to reflect these shifts in many ways.[35] These examples illustrate the significance of works of art not only as historical archives, but indeed also as historical contributors and catalysts. Musical entertainments were rather unique and important in this regard because they encompassed the visual, aural, dramatic and narrative elements, offering a multisensory display of representation that might be compared in some ways to film today. It is what Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff introduced as the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the total artwork, a synthesis of various arts.[36] Later, Richard Wagner was to adopt the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* as part of his aesthetic ideals of coalescing the arts on the stage.[37] It is, perhaps, the aesthetic wholeness of musical entertainment, that makes this particular form of art so impactful as a carrier of meaning.

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[34] Rabb, 'Opera, Musicology, and History', 322–24.
[35] Rabb, 326.
[36] Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff, *Aesthetik, oder Lehre von der Weltanschauung und Kunst* (Berlin: Maurer, 1827).
[37] Richard Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2008); Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future, and Other Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

British artworks during the long nineteenth century were self-evidently diverse in style and content. But there were certain themes and subjects that were particularly prevalent and played an important role in historical and socio-cultural terms. One of these was nautch girls, or Indian dancing girls – a group of women in a performative role that simultaneously struck awe and abhorrence amongst Britons. As nautch performances became an increasingly popular form of entertainment for Britons (both within India and outside of it), they were also increasingly frowned upon amidst shifts in political and societal thought, affected by notions of imperialism, feminism, sexuality and other delineators of identity. Accordingly, the nautch girl became a central theme in political and socio-religious debate while also becoming a central subject of works of literature and the arts throughout the long nineteenth century. The enigma of the nautch girl warrants particular attention as a genre that spanned across the visual and musical arts through its associations to imperialism and societal development as well as the different forms of identity associated with them.

Hypothesis and Premise

This dissertation seeks to investigate and compare British representations of nautch girls in visual and music-drama art forms of the long nineteenth century through an interart comparison to derive the correlations between them and to determine the inferences that they allude to within a transcultural context. It assumes a framework in which art that is embedded within an imperialist context exerts a power that transcends the political

asymmetries of power. Within this framework, this dissertation establishes that while at face value many nautch-girl artworks served the imperialist agenda in their representation of a colonised subject as inferior, there was also an innate effect of these works that contributed to challenging societal issues within the metropole through an exploration of the qualities of the nautch girl. As such, these works demonstrated the *power* of the nautch girl as a female figure in the public sphere, contributing to changing attitudes towards women in British society, as well as changing fashions and artistic practices. In this way, the nautch girl represented a symbolic figure that was subject to the dominance of imperialism and yet transcendent in her power to contribute to change amongst the social and cultural entities that sought to colonise her.

In using the nautch-girl subject as a case study, this dissertation is intended to shed light on how the art of empire contributed to the complexities of political, social and cultural thought and practice in the metropole through processes of transculturality across the arts.

Disciplinary Theory & Methods in the Arts: A Brief Overview

This study seeks to analyse works of visual and musical art in terms of content, agency, production and response. Taking approaches from cultural history, it involves tracing the processes that resulted from entanglements between Britain and India, and attempts to determine how these interactions affected, or were affected by, the artworks that were produced.

It focuses on works of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, adhering approximately to what Eric Hobsbawm defined as the long nineteenth century,[38] owing to the significance of the period in terms of Anglo-Indian relations as well as global political and social shifts that accompanied the period of accelerated colonialist activity. The French Revolution marked a significant turning point in history that saw radical developments in society, particularly associated with notions of nationalism and democracy. The mid-eighteenth century also marked the establishment of Company rule in India, causing significant amplification in political, economic and social entanglements between Britain and India. The beginning of the First World War similarly marked extensive change in the local and global political and social climate, with the onset of war as well as changing notions of nationalism, offering an effective cut-off point for this study owing to the vast amount of changes that were to follow thereafter. As the trajectory changed so significantly after 1914, it would warrant a whole new set of tools for analysis. The period of the long nineteenth century allows one to plot the shifts in practices of representation that coincided with the changing relationship between Britain and India during this time. By tracing the trajectories that artistic practice took in this time as a result of the shifting relations and cultural exchange between Britain and India, it is possible to acquire more knowledge about the very relationship and the meaning of cultural productions that were part of and often borne out of this relationship.

[38] E. J Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe, 1789-1848* (London: Abacus, 1997); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, 1997); Eric J Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1999).

As this study encompasses a detailed investigation into works of art, it relies considerably on art historical methods and theory. Scholarship from the likes of Jacob Burckhardt have enabled us to understand the importance of the discipline of art history for *cultural* history, whereby art is considered a valuable facet of history. With much owed to the works of Panofsky and others, iconography – the identification and interpretation of symbols – serves a particularly significant consideration in the analysis of art. It is worthy to note that iconography is also important in the analysis of musical drama as well as visual art – in the exploration of performance techniques, musicians, the role of music in society, aspects of staging and costumes and the incorporation of themes in musical works.[39] Panofsky's three strata of iconography offer a solid foundation upon which artistic representation can be analysed: 1) the primary or natural subject matter (factual and expressional), which encompasses the consideration of artistic motifs; 2) the secondary or conventional subject matter, which considers images, stories and allegories, and, 3) the intrinsic meaning or content, which constitutes an understanding of "symbolic" values.[40] It is within these three strata that *meaning* can be derived and works of art can be suitably contextualised. Indubitably, following the production of a work of art, each subsequent reproduction, reconfiguration and reception can generate new or differing meanings, often based on the praxis of politics.[41] In this way, works of art are shaped by their surrounding spatial and

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[39] Tilman Seebass, 'Iconography | Grove Music', accessed 21 December 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000013698.
[40] *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford History of Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 228.
[41] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968).

temporal presence. In a discussion of Shapiro's "non-mimetic" in art, Harris argues that artwork can only become *meaningful* when it is understood "within a whole society of activities, institutions, and ideologies present in a particular historical moment",[42] demonstrating the importance of contextualising a work within respective setting – whether that is the setting of production, reproduction or reception.

Such contextualisation requires an investigation not only into the historical events surrounding the work of art, but also the connections and multi-directional relations between those events and the work of art. In an exploration of intentions of representation through artistic image, for instance, Michael Camille considers how artistic representation could be used to negatively portray the cultural or religious "Other", arguing that idols in medieval art were created in opposition to Christian images to present other religions negatively and to thus guard and preserve Christianity.[43] Most significantly, Camille establishes that visual art is not simply a reflection of society but an active contributor to constructing meaning through representation and its multifarious impact in religious, social and political practices.

In a similar approach to contextualisation, this dissertation seeks to consider the cultural codes of the time and space within which the artworks were created and initially received. A strong example of such contextualisation can be found in John Clarke's analysis of

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[42] Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2001), 167.
[43] Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

"sexual images" within Hellenistic and Roman art, placing the mosaic images of black men he studies in the broader context of visual art in the specified time and space. Perhaps most significant of Clarke's points considered in this dissertation is how the artist's intention (or indeed the composer's, commissioner's or any other agent's), can only be suitably understood if we discard our own contemporary temporal and spatial assumptions and social values, and instead rigorously explore the "cultural baggage" of the intended recipient of the work of art.[44] This resonates strongly with Arjun Appadurai's argument in *The Social Life of Things* that each artwork's effectiveness (like other commodities) is in its evocation of sensibilities that "are embedded within particular frameworks of knowledge".[45] In this sense, the process of contextualisation relies heavily on acknowledging that works of art are indeed *embedded* within particular constructs that require careful assessment and historical sensitivity.

Musicology also plays a significant role in this study, most discernibly in the analysis of musical works but also in its methodological framework of assessing artistic works more generally. The existence of music as a sonic construction defined uniquely by its temporal progression and containment (amongst other things), offers additional facets as a work of art in comparison to the visual arts. Moreover, further aspects of the musical work of art necessitate consideration, such as selection of instrumentation, the utilisation of specified

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[44] John R. Clarke, 'Hypersexual Black Men in Augustan Baths: Ideal Somatotypes and Apotropaic Magic', in *Sexuality in Ancient Art: Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Italy*, ed. Natalie Boymel Kampen and Bettina Ann Bergmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[45] Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 41–56.

musical devices and methods and modes of performance – all of which require appropriate contextualisation. As with other artistic formats, musical works are multifarious, embedded with a variety of meanings and implications that could prompt particular effects.

Within each temporal and spatial context, the significance of any artwork is altered, and it is therefore that, as Theodore Rabb suggests in the case of operas specifically, the disciplines of history and musicology must collaborate:

> However unlikely this point may seem to some, opera's ability to encapsulate, to represent, and to shape has led to its hold on the Western imagination, and has given historians and musicologists a major issue of common interest.[46]

A multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of the arts has been championed by various scholars, including those in musicology. For instance, Herbert Lindenberger considers theories of literary reception and narrative in exploring how what we consider as art is entangled within the social contexts in which it is produced and consumed.[47] Central to this study of British artwork in a historical setting, is that these works must be examined within their circumstantial social and political environs, with special consideration for the agency through which these works came into existence:

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[46] Rabb, 'Opera, Musicology, and History', 321.

[47] Bennett Zon, 'From "Incomprehensibility" to "Meaning": Transcription and Representation of Non-Western Music in Nineteenth-Century British Musicology and Ethnomusicology', in *Europe, Empire, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 185–99; Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain, 1876-1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Herbert Samuel Lindenberger, *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

> Music is always dependent on the conferring of social meaning – as ethnomusicologists have long recognized, the study of signification in music cannot be undertaken in isolation from the human contexts that create, transmit, and respond to it.[48]

Within this dissertation, this includes a consideration of the impact of imperialism and Orientalism on works of art, as well as social change. Scholarly literature has already provided a comprehensive overview of how musical works were affected by such contexts. For example, in his exploration of orientalist operas, Ralph Locke notes that such works are "essential to view […] in the larger context of the Orientalist world-view that flourished".[49] Such an approach steers clear of isolating a work of art from its circumstances and agency. Similarly, Jeffrey Richards' *Imperialism and Music* offers a particularly valuable analysis of British music and its relationship to imperialist Britain, in which the author addresses the issue of British national identity and music from the perspective of a historian rather than that of a musicologist.[50] In doing so, Richards engages the work beyond its existence as a thing of art, deriving within it its value as a historical source.

Notably, it was within the context of the long nineteenth century that musical devices became increasingly associated with representations of the "exotic" or the "Other". These

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[48] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 21.
[49] Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other"', 263.
[50] Richards, *Imperialism and Music*.

types of musical device have been investigated by various scholars, such as Ralph Locke, Nasser Al-Taee and Derek Scott, demonstrating the significance of the imperialist encounter in the development of musical practices in Britain and, more generally, the "West". For instance, Ellen T. Harris showed how the nineteenth century saw the employment of sinuous chromaticism and richly orchestrated melodies to portray the "exotic" as a rich, vivid and often lustful place, often tarnished by danger and malevolence, as reflected through the seething and droning strings, irregular patterns and unconventional scales.[51] In another example, Ralph Locke notes how the repeated insistence on the augmented second in Saint-Saëns's Bacchanale is used to emphasise the difference between the "Self" and "Other".[52] Derek Scott offers a valuable inventory of Orientalist musical devices that could be applied as "markers of cultural difference" in the twentieth century,[53] enabling us to understand how particular styles and techniques in

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[51] Harris, 'With Eyes on the East and Ears on the West', 441.

[52] Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other"', 267.

[53] Derek Scott lists the following Orientalist devices in music: "Aeolian, dorian, but especially the Phrygian mode; augmented seconds and fourths (especially with Lydian or Phrygian inflections); arabesques and ornamented lines; elaborate "ah!" melismas for voice; sliding or sinuous chromaticism (for example, snaking downward on cor anglais); trills and dissonant grace notes; rapid scale passages (especially of an irregular fit, e.g., eleven notes to be played in the time of two crotchets); a melody that suddenly shifts to notes of shorter value; abrupt juxtapositions of romantic, lyrical tunes and busy, energetic passages; repetitive rhythms (Ravel's *Bolero* is an extreme case of rhythmic insistence) and repetitive, small-compass melodies; ostinati; ad libitum sections (colla parte, senza tempo, etc.); use of triplets in duple time; complex or irregular rhythms; parallel movement in fourths, fifths, and octaves (especially in the woodwinds); bare fifths; drones and pedal points; "magic" or "mystic" chords (possessing uncertainty of duration and/or harmonic direction), harp arpeggios and glissandi (Rimsky-Korsakov changes the harp's connotation of a mythical past to one of Oriental exoticism); double reeds (oboe and especially cor anglais); percussion (especially tambourine, triangle, cymbals and gong); and emphatic rhythmic figures on unpitched percussion (such as tom-toms, tambourine, and triangle). The register of the melody can be important: for example, the cor anglais connotes the East more emphatically than does the oboe. The use of a frame is often important; for example, Rimsksy-Korsakov's "Canto

music were used as symbols of *difference*. However, it is important to note that although such an inventory serves importance as a general marker for understanding, these devices and categories do not apply indiscriminately to all works of the time and cannot be used homogenously for the complexities embedded within individual works of art and their multifarious contexts.

Nonetheless, recent scholarship on the subject of Orientalism and exoticism in music enables us to acknowledge how historical context correlated with trends in artistic practice. They have demonstrated how musical works seeking to represent India, or indeed any other cultural locale, often constructed a soundscape that came to be associated with that locale, regardless of its authenticity. Scott's claim that Orientalist music does not intend to *imitate* but rather to *represent* the cultural "Other"[54] offers an interesting premise here, however it is important to note that the latter does not necessarily negate the possibility of the former.

Locke has pinpointed three common limitations that scholars and critics have been frustrated by when discussing "exotically" set musical works:

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gitano," mentioned earlier, is more than a song arrangement; its full title is "Scena e canto gitano," and the appearances of the song melody are framed by such things as free cadenza passages and *feroce* strings, which enclose its character and meaning within an Orientalist package." Derek B. Scott, 'The Twentieth Century: Orientalism and Musical Style', *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (1 June 1998): 327, https://doi.org/10.1093/mq/82.2.309.

[54] Derek B. Scott, *From the Erotic to the Demonic: On Critical Musicology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 174.

> [G]eneral stylistic aberrations are often applied indiscriminately by composers to vastly different geographical settings; borrowed tunes and the like tend to lose distinctive features by being uprooted and transplanted; and whole stretches of these operas are written in an entirely Western idiom.[55]

Such confines are important to acknowledge, particularly within the context of imperialism but also owing to its impact on artistic practice in the "West".

The exploration and contextualisation of several formats of art is rendered possible through the consideration of an interart framework. This encompasses an understanding of analogy and the numerous interactions that take place between different art forms within a particular time and space. These interrelationships exist upon several strata, from the more corporeal or tangible elements that are visible or audible, for example, to the subliminal analogies and motifs that establish associative meaning within particular contexts.

Mieke Bal argues that in order to practice interdisciplinarity in the humanities, the methodological basis should be sought in *concepts* rather than *methods,* and that these concepts are themselves dynamic in nature.[56] In both the visual and musical arts, codes have been historically established; sets of conventions, techniques and styles that became embedded with particular sentiments and notions based on social context. These codes are explored, analysed and compared to determine the parallels and patterns that emerge

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[55] Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other"', 261.

[56] Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 5.

between the art forms. As discussed by Klein and Parncutt, this requires the integration of the individual disciplines (of which art history and musicology are but two examples) in a systematic intellectualism and institutional dynamism.[57] This encompasses an understanding of symbolism, analogy, technique, reference and allusion, according to social, cultural and political contexts of the time and location within which these works were produced and intended to be received.

Correspondingly, Troy Thomas demonstrates values the importance of analogy and correlation amongst different art forms:

> In the context of interart comparison, analogous relationships may be defined as ones in which comparisons of similar features, characteristics, attributes, or effects are made between otherwise unlike things, that is, different arts.[58]

As such, an interart comparison enables an understanding of works of art and the history within which they are embedded in based on the motifs, symbols and connotations that manifested and developed around the works in question.

While the arts are certainly not limited to the visual and the musical, with the acknowledgement that it is too vast a task to consider all forms of art within this study,

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[57] Julie Thompson Klein and Richard Parncutt, 'Art and Music Research', in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Julie Thompson Klein, and Carl Mitcham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter 9.
[58] Troy Thomas, 'Interart Analogy: Practice and Theory in Comparing the Arts', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25, no. 2 (1 July 1991): 18, https://doi.org/10.2307/3333069.

this dissertation focuses on the visual and musical arts in order to *contain* conceptualisations of interart representation and transculturality within particular boundaries. Particularly apt for the study of visual and musical art, Ralph Locke notes the significant similarity between painting and music, as both composers and painters practise arts that are "widely accepted as being universally true: blessedly unaffected by the barrier of language."[59]

Historical Processes

Such theoretical guidelines are entrenched within and guided by the historical concepts that surround them. A careful reflection of these concepts enables a more detailed exploration of the artworks under study within their respective historical circumstances. While it would be too extensive an endeavour to offer a comprehensive analysis of all of these historical concepts in great depth within the confines of this thesis, a brief introduction to some of the main concepts under consideration can help to offer some clarity and direction. These concepts are explored in further detail throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

In its exploration of artworks deriving from a colonial relationship, this study benefits immeasurably from considerations of cultural exchange and the developments that ensue from this relationship. As such, the concept of transculturality plays a central role in this

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[59] Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other"', 265.

work because it challenges the traditional homogenisation of cultural entities as singular and separate. Instead, it assumes that through processes of interaction, networking and exchange, cultural entities are entangled and cultural hybridities are borne.[60] Nicholas Mirzoeff has defined "transculture" thus:

> [T]ransculture – the violent collision of an extant culture with a new or different culture that reshapes both into a hybrid transculture that is itself then subject to transculturation – highlights those places where the carefully defined borders of identity become confused and overlapping, a task that requires new histories, new ideas and new means of representation.[61]

That it is perceived as a *violent collision* indicates that it is an aggressive, forceful and consequential act. The term "hybrid", frequently coupled with transculturality, conveys how the coming together of two or more cultural elements has initiated the creation of something new, or the reconfiguration of something pre-existing. These transcultures subsequently "collide" with other cultural entities, renewing the concept in an ever-enduring process.

Considered in this way, transculturality is an infinite process – one that we cannot reasonably trace the beginning or the end of. Consequently, when we consider historical events within the framework of transculturality, we are merely acquiring minuscule

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[60] See arguments in: Wolfgang Welsch, 'Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today', in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Scott Lash and Mike Featherstone (SAGE, 1999), 194–213.

[61] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader*, Third Edition (London: Routledge, 2012), 477.

snapshots of something exceedingly and ruthlessly dynamic, presenting a substantial challenge to researchers attempting to understand the various layers of "culture" that have accumulated and collided in time and space. As a result, the acknowledgment of transculturality can only exist through a collaborative effort that enables researchers to combine their microscopic snapshots into a mosaic that provides us insights into how continuing interactions, exchanges and negotiations between cultures has developed temporally and spatially in all its multiplicity.

While temporality can be defined by the construct of time, spatiality can be considered a more fluid concept, referring not only to nations and other geographic locales with defined borders, but also to the undefined contact zones within which the violent collisions take place. According to Mary Louise Pratt, the contact zone refers to the:

> [S]ocial spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the word today"[62]

The consideration of the contact zone as a location of power asymmetries is particularly significant in the analysis of artworks that were produced and received during the age of heightened imperialism; whereby political, social and cultural processes intertwined and informed each other.

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[62] Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession* 91 (1991): 34.

Focusing specifically on the concept of transculturality with regard to art, Julie Codell interprets it as a *function* of colonial encounters. In her edited volume *Transculturation in British Art*, authors explore imperial encounters and cultural exchange, arguing that:

> "[D]ue to art's fundamental nature as spatial, art can illuminate imperial transculturation sites of border cultures and contact zones that go far beyond hybridities of national cultural traditions or conventions.[63]

In doing so, the authors argue, transcultural works can contribute to new cultural and imperial values. The volume alludes to the claim that transculturation is unique in its understanding of temporality and spatiality as "fundamental elements of cultural production, reproduction, and reception".[64] In line with Fernando Ortiz's definition of transculturation,[65] Codell et al. indicate that, in the process, cultures are not only acquired and created, but cultures can also be uprooted and lost. What this volume achieves foremost is to demonstrate the value of art in its engagement with the process of transculturation, with its multiple agents and audiences, codes and associations, and subsequent reiterations of power.

Speaking specifically about musical theatre, Stahrenberg and Grosch explore the transculturality of stage, song and other media, with a focus on "intermedial" interference and its transcultural impact. In discussing the interrelation between dramatic narrative,

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[63] Codell, *Transculturation in British Art.*
[64] Codell, 4.
[65] Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint, Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

dance and song, the authors suggest that such an intermedium strongly exemplifies transcultural communication. For Stahrenberg and Grosch, "transculturation was a product of a number of factors: networked economic and production systems, legal frameworks, promotional cultures, migrating shows and musicians, all bringing cultural material into new forms of music and theatre."[66] But it was also a matter of intermedial exchange. In the context of the turn of the century, the authors show how popular music, song and dance became key vehicles in connecting the performative event on stage with a "broader system of communication and cultural exchange", through the physical migrations of people and the growing dissemination and reproduction of works through technological developments such as the gramophone. As such, transculturality can be seen not only as processes attached to the people that constitute cultural entities, but also the processes attached to the artistic productions that constitute cultural things. In essence, artistic works, performative or otherwise, offer significant value in our understanding of processes of cultural exchange and the corresponding development of cultural entities through varying facets.

Since Edward Said's monumental work was published in 1978, the acknowledgment of Orientalism, as a historical way of seeing, perceiving and representing, has become deeply embedded into academic debates connected with imperialism and cultural power asymmetries. Said defined Orientalism as:

[66] Carolin Stahrenberg and Nils Grosch, 'The Transculturality of Stage, Song and Other Media: Intermediality in Popular Musical Theatre', in *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin, 1890-1939*, ed. David Linton, Tobias Becker, and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

> [A] corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.[67]

In this way, Orientalism could be seen as an assertion of authority or domination over "Other" entities. This assertion could manifest itself in various ways and through various types of discourse and practice including works of art and other cultural products, but also in institutions of thought, knowledge and education – corresponding to Foucault's theories regarding the power-knowledge relationship as well as Gramsci's philosophy of cultural hegemony.[68] Since the emergence of Said's and other scholars' postcolonialist works, scholarly works on Orientalist discourse and colonial histories have engaged in new methodologies and frameworks in order to address the contamination of academia with Orientalist preconceptions themselves. As a result, scholars such as John MacKenzie and Christine Peltre have engaged more deeply with Orientalism in art from the postcolonial perspective, acknowledging the imperial context and its consequences on academic discourse. Notably, MacKenzie – amongst others – has emphasised that Said did not build upon this further to recognise how Orientalist discourses could affect or challenge "western" concepts as a "tool for cultural revolution".[69]

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[67] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 3.
[68] Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Antonio Gramsci and Antonio Callari, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[69] MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts*, 10.

On a superficial level, Orientalism has been recognised to involve the principle of simplistic binary opposition, through which the "Occident" was positioned superior to the "Orient". These binaries could also take on different corresponding forms, such as "West" versus "East", "Self" versus "Other", good versus bad, beautiful versus ugly, masculine versus feminine, Christianity versus Islam and so on. For example, Ralph Locke discusses the binary construction in Saint-Saëns's opera *Samson et Dalila* (1877), where Samson is the "proto-European" male who is favoured by God, compared to Delilah, the "Eastern" female who seeks the ruin of Samson and the "God-chosen West".[70] Whichever way it was articulated, it presented opposing polarities that co-existed to emphasise difference and imbalance between two defined entities, often strongly resonant with imperialist notions. However, it is tempting yet iniquitous to homogenise, misuse or oversimplify our understanding of Orientalism. Orientalist discourses were hardly so facile or uncomplicated that they could be presented in black and white. But it may certainly be acknowledged that although particular patterns and themes emerged within such discourses.

Moreover, it is important not to reduce works of art to being only Orientalist but rather to also consider other notions and symbols that these works embodied or represented. For example, as Ralph Locke notes with regard to opera, the "Oriental" nature of an "Eastern" despotic character might be indicative or symbolic of a commentary on a non-Orientalist

[70] Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other"', 271.

local issue. For example Abimelech and the High Priest in Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* symbolised morally corrupt authority, just as the oppressive Egyptian priesthood in Act IV of *Aïda* could be seen to symbolise Verdi's hatred for politics and religion in his homeland, Italy.[71] The value of such an interpretation, Locke argues, lies in the "possibility of leaving the Orientalist paradigm behind, or at least of enriching it with other, non-Orientalist concerns."[72] In this way, it is possible to consider Orientalist artworks not only in their assertion of authority or superiority to reflect power asymmetries, but also in their purpose as social or political commentaries on local issues, shrouded in an "exotic" cloak to evade controversy.

The cultural products of Orientalism, as obsolete as they might be in telling us about the cultural subject at hand, are significantly valuable as keys to understanding the historical relationship between nations, cultures, societies and powers.

As a historical study, this dissertation relies on understanding (and deconstructing) some of the binary categorisations of location that emerged in the age of imperialism. It acknowledges that the categorisations of the "East", West", "Orient", "Occident", "Other", "Self" and so on are problematic and are only considered as entities within their respective historical contexts. It is also acknowledged that each of these terms is loaded with historical, political and social meaning, and that all are problematic in that their

[71] Locke, 283–85.
[72] Locke, 285.

definitions and borders shifted over time. For this reason, these terms are placed in quotation marks, in order to emphasise that they are acknowledged as problematic historical categorisations and terms.

For instance, European historiography demonstrates how the meaning of "the Orient" changed throughout the centuries, from defining the eastern Mediterranean and then Morocco and the Levant, to encompassing colonial networks in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea during the age of imperialism, and later including North Africa, parts of southeastern Europe and much of East and South East Asia.[73] The "East-West" dichotomy entails further complexities, with even more ambiguous borders. Generally, however, the historical "East" from the European perspective appeared to include Asian and Islamic nations while the "West" tended to include Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

Delving deeper, the term "exotic" referred to an alterity, foreignness or non-nativeness, often conflated in European discourse with the "East" or the "Orient". The concept became particularly prevalent in the nineteenth century, with increasing cultural interactions during the age of imperialism, leading to the cultural movement of "exoticism".[74] Most pertinent about the term "exotic" was its elusiveness and

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[73] Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 53–54.
[74] Sara J. Oshinsky, 'Exoticism in the Decorative Arts | Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art', The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, accessed 22 December 2017, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/exot/hd_exot.htm.

indistinctness, usually implicating no particular geographical boundaries, and its reliance on establishing something that was familiar in order to recognise the "foreign". Importantly, this alterity could be destabilised and reconfigured with every iteration of interpretation and representation, making it difficult to pin down its meaning with any modicum of precision. Connecting the term "exotic" to Orientalism, Philippe Jullian explains that "Orientalism is only a phase in the cult of the Exotic".[75] Such considerations demonstrate the interplay between imperialism, Orientalism and exoticism through processes of transculturation.

Overview

The themes arising from artworks about the nautch girl – a prominent, significant and notorious subject – warrant considerable attention within the context of transculturality and the arts in the age of imperialism. In this way, nautch-girl artworks of imperialist Britain can shed light on the kinds of artistic productions that were to develop within Victorian, industrialist and imperialist Britain – during a time of great debate surrounding definitions of cultural identities and categories at home and beyond.

In order to achieve this, Chapter II begins by seeking to define the nautch girl both as a concept and a category, as well as to explore her relevance in the British political and social

[75] Philippe Jullian, *The Orientalists: European Paintings of Eastern Scenes* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), 19.

climate and the subsequent proliferation of the nautch girl as a subject in artistic discourses. Considering the imperialist categorisation of cultural entities, Chapter III investigates how artworks were made to *locate* the nautch girl through works of art culturally by introducing and exploiting stereotypes to establish binaries and comparisons that promoted the imperialist cause. In Chapter IV, the focus turns to the social context of the nautch girl – exploring how the nautch girl was framed in terms of her gender and sexuality within the context of British imperialism, but also how her representation in British works stood to challenge cultural practices and social attitudes towards women and their role in the public sphere. Chapter V attempts to critically acknowledge that when the nautch girl "craze" that swept through Britain during the long nineteenth century penetrated the artistic sphere, infused with political, religious and societal impressions, it demonstrated how Orientalist or exoticist artworks could be empowered to challenge and affect the so-called "Occident".

II
Framing an Enigma: The Nautch Girl in Victorian Britain

> Nothing can exceed the transcendent beauty, both in form and lineament, of these degraded women, whose lives are as abandoned as their persons are frequently enchanting.
>
> — William Daniell and Hobart Caunter, *The Oriental Annual, Or, Scenes in India*

The saturation of the nautch girl (or Indian dancing girl) as a subject in British art of the long nineteenth century gave rise to the development of an artistic genre of its own. With such fervour did these nautch-girl artworks manifest themselves in visual, aural, linguistic and spatial form, that it appeared as though she were almost a frenzied obsession, artistically and voyeuristically idolised and yet fearfully condemned for her alleged disgraces in British society. The paradox that emerged within the British framing of the nautch girl, which was tenaciously reinforced in the arts, warrants further exploration in order to comprehend the nautch girl's role and impact in British society.

This chapter introduces the concept of the nautch girl, as defined in British discourses, as well the processes of embodiment of this concept in the arts. Through a broad overview, it attempts to identify how the concept of the nautch girl developed within the context of historical events and how this led to a proliferation of nautch-girl artworks during a time when nautch girls were both profoundly celebrated and fiercely censured.

Defining the Nautch Girl

"Nautch girl" was a problematic term that reductively referred to a variety of women in varying occupations or functions from the South Asian subcontinent.[1] The word "nautch" is the anglicised form of the Hindi word *nāc,* meaning dance, originating from the Sanskrit *nṛtya*.[2] Despite the appendage of "girl", the term was used for women of any age. In essence, the term was a category that comprised a variety of Indian dancers, singers, musicians, prostitutes and courtesans within a single expression, including everything from *devadasis* and *tawaifs* to *nautchwalis*, all of whom were very distinctive within their respective cultures, religious organisations and societies.[3] Furthermore, the term "nautch girl" dismissed the complexities of various female Indian performers that involved various social strata and religious associations and, in many cases, was considered to be associated

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[1] It should be noted that the term *nautch girl* is used in this dissertation in its contextualised form – that is, as a problematic term that denoted a false category encompassing a variety of women in performative roles.

[2] 'Nautch | Definition of Nautch in English by Oxford Dictionaries', Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 22 November 2017, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/nautch.

[3] This is not to say that all British accounts about nautch girls (artistic or otherwise) failed to recognise differences between the various types of dancing girl that were grouped within the nautch girl category – some made clear distinctions between, for example, devadasis from South India and the nautch girls of northern India. See Joep Bor, 'Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères: Europe's Portrayal of India's Temple Dancers', in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s to 1940s: Portrayal of the East*, ed. Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 70.

with and even synonymous to courtesanship or prostitution.[4] Sources from as early as the thirteenth century recorded experiences of "Western" interactions with *devadasis* (and possibly other types of female dancers who were to fall under the category of "nautch girl"), with various writings referring to them as "whores", "slaves" and other such appellations.[5] This demonstrated the long-established moral and religious concerns about women in a performative role amongst "Western" (and often Christian) societies, that prevailed well into the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In actuality, those classified under the generalised category of nautch girls were generally part of a dynamically evolving set of social, cultural and religious practices that could not be justifiably expressed by a single simplified term. Many of these women were attached to courts or temples, holding specific socio-religious roles and strongly assimilated into the cultures they performed in. In its reductive nature, the forged category of the nautch girl was problematic because it served as an illusory classification that was conceptualised by imperialist Britain during a period of increasing entanglement of British and Indian societies.

During the colonial encounter, Britons were increasingly exposed to nautch traditions, eliciting a variety of responses. The nautch girl was often classified within the same

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[4] Charn Kamal Kaur Jagpal, '"I Mean to Win": The Nautch Girl and Imperial Feminism at the Fin de Siècle' (University of Alberta, 2011), 19.
[5] Bor, 'Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères', 40–45.

category as the odalisque,[6] in which the exotic female body became a central theme in many Romantic artworks. Pal-Lapinski described the European fascination with the odalisque as an "obsession" that began with the first travel reports of visits to the Ottoman and Mughal empires from as early as the sixteenth century.[7] Of course, nautch girls were only one type of "Oriental" dancing girl that featured in the British arts, as Edward Ziter explores,[8] but they gained significant notoriety. By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the exotic female embellished an entire genre of art, transgressing the boundaries of art form, whether visual, aural, literary or other. In this manner, the exotic body was encapsulated in word, picture, and sound; from her body to her performance and her character. During a period when photography was only still emerging and developing, works of literature, painting, drawing and staged performances formed the main lens through which the general British public could view Indian people and practices, including nautch girls and their performances. Similarly, during a period when sound recording had only begun its technological breakthrough and enjoyed only very limited availability, productions and recitals of musical works came to represent the voice and performance of nautch girls.

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[6] Understood in its nineteenth-century context to represent a multitude of exotic female bodies, although it was initially a term to describe a female slave or concubine in a Turkish harem.

[7] Piya Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture: A Reconsideration*, Becoming Modern (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004), xv.

[8] Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Some of the most frequently observed dances were those that were perceived to be erotic, usually performed to Hindi *thumri* or Persian *ghazals*, and accompanied by repetitive melodic and percussive patterns on the *sarangi* and *tabla*.[9] The perception of these dances as erotic contributed to the association of nautch girls to immoral conduct and prostitution within British discourse. As a result, the nautch girl earned a particularly bad name among the *memsahibs* – the British women who had settled in India – for whom the association of the nautch girl to eroticism meant that the nautch girl stood as a threat to traditional Victorian family values. This is substantiated by the vast amount of fictional literary works of the time (many of which were written by female British authors) in which nautch girl characters pursued sexual relations with married British men and partook in corrupt practices, such as thievery, espionage and other forms of malice,[10] emphasising the alleged "threat" of the nautch girl. In her study of such works, Jagpal argues that the Indian dancing girl "repeatedly prevents the Memsahib from effectively governing *her* empire – the domestic domain – and robs her of her very source of self-empowerment".[11] In this way, the nautch girl served as a disturbance to the British brand of imperial feminism. Indeed, there was more to the reception of nautch girls than only eroticism – in many cases nautch girls appeared to benefit socially and economically from their lifestyle and to enjoy their vocation with little repercussion,[12] making the nautch girl a point of great interest for the Victorians.

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[9] Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*, 30.
[10] For examples, see Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win'.
[11] Jagpal, 53.
[12] Jagpal, 31, 33.

In spite of the controversial nature of the nautch girl in British society, Britons frequently commissioned and attended nautch performances.[13] Since the category "nautch girl" encompassed so many different types of female performer under a single term, the commissioning of these "nautches" led to the interaction, development, and transformation of a variety of Indian dances, causing them to evolve accordingly. These dances also adapted according to the stipulations of their new patrons, allowing the definition of the nautch to be established. Britons of various social standing enjoyed the company of nautch girls (during their stays in India but also in Europe, where nautch troupes occasionally travelled), including members of the royal family. For example, Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) famously attended a nautch performance in 1875.[14] The occasion was highlighted in contemporary media, such as in *The Graphic*, where the nautch performance featured as a prominent illustration in the newspaper, emphasising the element of the spectacle and asserting what Hahn refers to as the "colonial power dynamic".[15] However, as the nineteenth century drew closer towards its end, anti-nautch sentiment grew dramatically. In 1890, Albert Victor (Edward's eldest son, the Duke of Clarence and Avondale) was also reported to have attended a nautch performance – but

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[13] Ian Woodfield, *Music of the Raj: A Social and Economic History of Music in Late Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Indian Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 158.
[14] William L. Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions of The Nautch Girl (1891) and Utopia Limited (1893): Exoticism and Victorian Self-Reflection' (University of North Texas, 2003), 34.
[15] H. Hazel Hahn, 'Indian Princes, Dancing Girls and Tigers: The Prince of Wales's Tour of India and Ceylon, 1875–1876', *Postcolonial Studies* 12, no. 2 (1 June 2009): 173–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790902887163.

this particular occasion caused widespread outrage amongst the British public.[16] In the space of 15 years, British opinion on what had become established as the nautch tradition seemed to have had changed dramatically.

The 1890s marked an important turning point, giving rise to an anti-nautch movement across Britain and India, led by such proponents as the missionary J. Murdoch of the Madras Christian Literature Society.[17] During this period, various committees and societies were established that sought prohibit nautch performances across various regions of the subcontinent.[18] Corresponding with this, numerous publications also emerged or joined forces with the anti-nautch movement, such as *The Lahore Purity Servant*, which sought to enlist men to shun nautch performances.[19] Notably, many of the reformists and abolitionists singled out *devadasis* – women who dedicated themselves to a deity or temple – likening them to prostitutes and claiming that their civil rights were at peril. By this time, the category of the "nautch girl" as defined according to British representation had seeped profoundly into local discourses in India, further blurring the lines between different types of female performer. Notably, the anti-nautch movement appeared to be erratic and varying in its successes in different regions. One of its eventual victories was the passing of the Madras Devadasis Act in 1947 (shortly after India gained independence from British

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[16] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 34.
[17] Hicks, 34.
[18] Claire Mabilat, 'Empire and "Orient" in Opera Libretti Set by Sir Henry Bishop and Edward Solomon', in *Europe, Empire, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 230.
[19] Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood* (New York: Revell, 1900), 137.

rule), prohibiting the practice of dedicating girls or women to idols in South India, as well as permitting *devadasis* to marry.[20] While many anti-nautch campaigners were concerned with social reform and women's role in society, others were fuelled by their beliefs in Christian morals and values or a combination of the both. Jagpal notes that some of the claims arising from the anti-nautch movement resonated with voices from Laura Ormiston Chant's campaign against music halls and theatres, which associated such institutions to "temptations to vice".[21] Mrs. Marcus B. Fuller, the wife of an English missionary in Bombay and a renowned anti-nautch campaigner, claimed that a "well-informed correspondent" of the *Indian Social Reformer* had stated:

> It is saddening to see royal and aristocratic families irretrievably ruined by these women. Many a wealthy man has had to court poverty and disgrace on this account. Even in middle class society, many fritter away their youth and money to quench the insatiable thirst of sanctified immorality.[22]

Notably, such campaigners appeared to be perturbed by the "ruin" of wealthy families of high social standing – highlighting the nautch girl as a direct threat to British society. Such dramatic accounts of the dangers of nautch girls (whether based on fact or fiction) had the effect of promoting fear – threatening the fabric of family values and social practices. This type of discourse made clear that many anti-nautch proponents were concerned with the

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[20] B. S Chandrababu and L Thilagavathi, *Woman, Her History and Her Struggle for Emancipation* (Chennai: Bharathi Puthakalayam, 2009), 264.

[21] Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win', 144; Carol Smart, *Regulating Womanhood* (London: Routledge, 2002), 41–44.

[22] Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, 132–33.

threat of "immorality" that affected the upper and middle classes of British society in particular, and claimed that that nautch girls threatened to destroy family values. This occurred even though the definition of the nautch girl was largely established as a result of erroneous categorisations and associations.

It was perhaps difficult for a "Western" audience to comprehend the nautch girl because there was nothing closely analogous to the Indian dancing girl in "western" tradition. Female dancers in Britain, for example, were perceived very differently. In fact, for many people – particularly those swayed by the anti-nautch movement – the British patronage of nautch girls legitimised prostitution.[23] Moreover, many of the anti-nautch groups took a feminist stance: that the roles and practices of the nautch girls needed to be abolished in order for Indian women to be liberated and empowered, and to be given the opportunity to be educated and contribute to society in a positive way. Many female anti-nautch proponents sought to publicly disapprove of nautch girls and the activities of the *zenana* as well as the allegedly poor treatment of women of the "Orient" more generally. On this topic, Janaki Nair notes:

> By making 'visible' the woman of the colonies, [English women] could successfully make 'invisible' their own colonisation by English men,

[23] Zara Barlas, 'Transcultural Operatics: India on the British Stage in The Nautch Girl, or, The Rajah of Chutneypore', in *Staging the Other in Nineteenth-Century British Drama*, ed. Tiziana Morosetti, vol. 5, Writing and Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), 183, http://www.peterlang.com/index.cfm?event=cmp.ccc.seitenstruktur.detailseiten&seitentyp=produkt&pk=87203&concordeid=431928.

> who had appropriated their capacities for the reproduction of colonial order.[24]

In this way, during the imperial counter Indian women were often represented by British women as powerless victims in their writings, which "consoled the writers for their own disempowerment and struggle against patriarchy."[25] This could be seen as a mode of imperial feminism, as Charn Jagpal discusses, whereby British women could claim cultural superiority over colonised women, who were "constructed as oppressed, passive, and in need of British rescue from the clutches of patriarchy."[26]

It is particularly interesting to note that despite evolving into such a major topic of discussion in political and cultural discourses, nautch girls made up an extremely small minority of the Indian population. William Hicks notes that the 1891 Census of India estimated that among a population of more than 286 million people, five in every 10,000 people were classified as either a singer or dancer – a figure that included both men and women.[27] In a demographic that occupied such a large and significant space in British politics, society and culture, it is extraordinary that nautch girls made up such a small portion yet held such a large presence in British life.

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[24] Janaki Nair, 'Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in Englishwomen's Writings, 1813-1940', *Journal of Women's History* 2, no. 1 (1990): 25, https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0263.
[25] Nandini Bhattacharya, *Reading the Splendid Body: Gender and Consumerism in Eighteenth-Century British Writing on India* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 133.
[26] Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win', 6.
[27] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 35.

Actual "nautch" performances, performed by dancers from India were prevalent not only in India but also across Europe – particularly London and Paris.[28] Troupes of different types of dancers began to travel to Europe during the 1830s to perform and confront claims that they were not common dancing girls or public prostitutes – the first of these was a troupe of *devadasis* and musicians from Pondicherry and its vicinity, signed for by French impresario E.C. Tardivel.[29] But some reviews of their performances in Britain revealed that audiences still felt morally and socially threatened by the women, continuing to spread rumours and claims with little to support them except hearsay:

> At Delhi, a syren, named *Alsine*, reigned paramount for many years; and so great is the influence which a fascinating Nautch girl can obtain over the other sex, that men not infrequently ruin themselves and even commit suicide on account of their attachment to these women.[30]

Many nautch performances received mixed responses in European accounts, with criticisms for being "repetitive, dull, or monotonous, simply because the function of the accompanying music was not understood, and the rhythmic aspects appeared strange and convoluted"[31] and praises for the dances' expressive peculiarities.[32] Often, it appeared, this was a case of misunderstanding or misrepresentation, where the conventions of artistic practices of nautch girls were too distant and unfamiliar from European ones and therefore

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[28] For details, see Bor, 'Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères'.
[29] Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon, eds., *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s to 1940s: Portrayal of the East* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
[30] 'The Bayaderes', *The Era*, 14 October 1838.
[31] Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*, 30–31.
[32] Bor, 'Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères', 63.

incomprehensible to them. Additionally, the criticism and dismissal of nautch performances in Britain (especially in terms of their music) was embedded in a broader system of imperialist hegemony, in which the arts and practices of the colonised were conveyed as inferior to the metropole's own. Such conditions fostered disparaging views about the nautch girls and their performance. Despite the false categorisations that simplified various female performers under the term "nautch girl", British audiences were able to acknowledge some differences between types of "nautch girl" to some extent. For instance, in 1838, an article in *The Morning Chronicle* said of a performance of "bayadères" from South India in London:

> As mere objects of curiosity they are in the highest degree interesting; as a class they are described to be perfectly distinct from the Nautch girls of Northern India or the Almé of Egypt, the equivocal character of whose evolutions has excited so much horror in the mind of virtuous Europe.[33]

In addition to acknowledging that nautch girls have been perceived to present a moral threat in Europe, the comments also recognise that the dancers that performed at the theatre were not involved in the allegedly dishonourable activities that were associated with nautch girls.

But dismissive views about nautch girls more generally continued to spread during the nineteenth century, not only among religious groups and societies but also among the media. Such remarks appeared to focus more on artistic critique than a questioning of

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[33] 'Adelphi Theatre', *The Morning Chronicle*, 2 October 1838.

character, but nevertheless seemed to feed into imperialist discourse. For example, *The Era* reported on the aforementioned performance of "bayadères" in London:

> The performances of the Nautch women are generally exceedingly monotonous, consisting of a sliding, shuffling motion along the floor; the movement of hands, arms, and eyes; and the adjusting and the readjusting of the veil.[34]

Accounts of nautch performances by women also proved largely critical, with accusations against nautch girl's allegedly decadent character:

> [T]he performance consists chiefly in a continual removing of [the] shawl, first over the head, then off again; extending first one hand, then the other; the feet are likewise moved, though a yard of ground would be sufficient for the whole performance. But it is their languishing glances, wanton smiles, and attitudes not quite consistent with decency, which are so much admired; and whoever excels in these is the finest dancer.[35]

It is clear that the anti-nautch movement was largely driven by criticisms of the alleged immorality and indecency of nautch girls, with various female proponents expressing fears of European women losing their husbands to the seductive wiles of the nautch girls. Many accounts of such incidences tended to be fictionalised and extravagant, highlighting the allegedly destructive and malicious nature of the nautch girl in substantial detail. Notably, these accounts emerged at a time when Britain's colonial reins on India were tightening

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[34] 'The Bayaderes'.

[35] Mrs Kindersley in her Letter from the Island of Teneriffe, Brazil and the Cape of Good Hope, and the East Indies, 1777, pp. 231-2; quoted in: Ketaki Kushari Dyson, *A Various Universe: A Study of the Journals and Memoirs of British Men and Women in the Indian Subcontinent 1765-1856* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 336.

and society and religion were being incorporated into everyday life in new and different ways. In such a context, the dismissal of nautch girl practices could be seen as a small but significant component of the broader imperial machine.

Although it is not possible to expand upon this point within the confines of this work, it is at least acknowledged that the imperial encounter also had a significant impact on the female performers of India that were categorised as nautch girls. In addition to leading to the categorisation of the "nautch girl" across India, the establishment of British authority meant that female Indian dancers acquired new and differing kinds of patronage and subsequent practices. This led to the adaptation and development of the "nautch" as a concept, adhering to thee evolving circumstances of patronage and power. As a result, some nautch girls also began to take on the role of concubine for British men,[36] and they subsequently became assimilated into the British colonial society of India. Consequently, the roles and definitions of women categorised as nautch girls were subject to significant transformations according to political, social and economic shifts.

Artists' representations and accounts of nautch girls also offered another useful perspective on nautch girls, from those who visited India and encountered nautch girls first-hand to the artists who consumed and contributed to the imaginary concept of the nautch girl that was established in Britain. Notably, the perceptions of artists could sometimes be freer from political sway and more favourable towards the art of the nautch

[36] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 34.

girl's performance. One British artist of the Pre-Raphaelite school, Valentine Cameron Prinsep, described a nautch performance that he encountered in India thus:

> It is generally supposed that a nautch is an improper sight, and in England such things are talked of with bated breath. There were ladies present during this nautch, and I can assure you, on my honour, that it was eminently respectable. The women, too, were not pretty; but the monotonous chant they kept up and the movements of their hips were curious; and although I should no doubt get heartily tired if I saw more of it, I confess I was amused.[37]

In this account, Prinsep directly addresses the ongoing debates about the alleged immorality surrounding the nautch girl, demonstrating his awareness of the controversy and his approval of the nautch girl's performance. Earlier in the nineteenth century, William Daniell recorded his experience of a nautch performance in India, where he also expressed that the dances were graceful, elegant and respectable, comparing them to European dances which he argued tended to be less "decent".[38] Similarly, it appeared that Daniell was aware of the ongoing comparisons between nautch girls and European female dancers, contributing his own opinion to the debate. Perhaps such views were reflective of an artistic discourse that was relatively less impelled by political affairs. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that artistic opinion could and often was swayed by political, social and economic affiliation, however its frequency and intensity was frequently far

[37] Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *Imperial India: An Artist's Journals* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), 97, http://archive.org/details/imperialindiaart00prin.
[38] William Daniell and Hobart Caunter, *The Oriental Annual, Or, Scenes in India* (London: E. Bull, 1836), 19.

weaker relative to the opinions of colonial governors and administrators, as well as their families.

The general outlook of imperial Britain and its growing presence in colonised India facilitated the realisation of the nautch girl category and its associated insinuations. This led to a mixture of positive and negative responses to nautch girls and their performances that endured within the imperialist infrastructure of Britain. From admiration to disgust, appreciation to fear, sincere acceptance to outright rejection, such an equivocal outlook on the nautch girl served as the backdrop upon which imperative artistic impressions were to unfurl. Such critical perceptions of the nautch girl are important to consider in light of the genre of artworks dedicated to the subject, which appeared, in many respects, to celebrate the nautch girl, despite her controversial characterisation.

The Nautch-Girl Genre

The broad collection of nautch-girl artworks that emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generally reflected a romanticised view of nautch girls. From serving as an embellishment to set the scene to featuring as the central subject of portraiture, the nautch girl featured with increasing frequency in paintings by British artists, many of whom had travelled to India, such as Tilly Kettle, Valentine Cameron Prinsep and William Carpenter. Though varying in style, these works often featured overlapping themes that fed into particular trends, contributing to the development of a genre and a persona for the nautch girl. In this regard, the female body was frequently explored in these works,

with particular attention paid to the power of gaze, whether of the viewer, other subjects in the painting or the nautch girl herself – or, indeed, a combination of these. Performative artworks also embraced the allure of the nautch girl, whether through dramatical works or popular parlour songs. Like many painters, there were also some theatre artists and producers who had travelled to India and witnessed its cultures first-hand, such as W.S. Gilbert in 1890.[39] Their experiences in India would help to stimulate their fascinations and to indulge in them, subsequently contributing to shaping their art.

Many of these nautch-girl artworks often shared common themes, contributing to the establishment of a genre of nautch-girl works that transcended artistic format. On the other hand, many works retained unique features that represented the many faces of representation. Through all their similarities and diversities, artworks featuring nautch girls were phenomenally popular in Britain during the long nineteenth century, spanning across literature, music and the visual arts. Attempting to explain why nautch girls featured so prominently in art about India, Mildred Archer observed that women "of good family or rank" were usually under the constraints of *purdah* (the practice of preventing men from seeing women usually through female seclusion), and therefore rarely appeared as subjects in British painters' works, leaving artists to focus more on women in the public space, including those dwelling in villages, mistresses of British men and nautch girls.[40] While the practice of *purdah* can indeed be considered a contributing factor to the relative lack of

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[39] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 46.
[40] Mildred Archer, R. W Lightbown, and Victoria and Albert Museum, *India Observed: India as Viewed by British Artists, 1760-1860* (New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1984), 13.

Indian women outside of the nautch profession in British art, it is important to note that the practice of *purdah* derived from Islamic practices and were not traditionally linked to Hindu practices. However, this practice was adopted amongst Hindu communities in some of the northern regions of the South Asian subcontinent as a result of acculturation during the Mughal period.[41] Notably, owing to the broad definition of the category within which they belonged, nautch girls did not hold a specific societal rank, but rather were spread across the social spectrum. Furthermore, traditionally the temple dancing girl, or *devadasi*, was to perform unwatched, dedicated only to an ascribed deity or temple – as such, this "nautch girl" would also have escaped the public eye, including artists. Indeed, with changing political and social circumstances, the different types of female performers might have accommodated their practices to their new patrons. Nevertheless, the fascination with the nautch girl appeared to be more than merely a lack of other female Indian subjects to scrutinise and seemed rather to be a conscious effort to dissect a very particular type of female performer. The special focus on the body, performance and sexual character of the nautch girl, which spanned across the arts, appeared to collectively promote the acts of voyeurism and disparagement, where observers could watch, hear and place judgement on representations of female Indian performers through the lens of imperial Britain. For this reason, the astounding popularity of the nautch girl as a subject of nineteenth-century British art solicits detailed investigation.

[41] 'Purdah | Islamic Custom', Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 4 December 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/purdah.

One of the most notable and prolific examples of nautch-girl artworks from nineteenth-century Britain took the form of an operetta. Entitled *The Nautch Girl, or the Rajah of Chutneypore* (1891), the operetta featured music by Edward Solomon, and lyrics by George Dance and Frank Desprez. Other musical works stretching across the long nineteenth century also featured nautch girls within them, from Charles Smith's *A Trip to Bengal* (1802) to Edward Elgar's *The Crown of India* (1912), but *The Nautch Girl* warrants particular attention owing to the centrality of and detail in the concept of the nautch girl to the entire artwork and the operetta's relevance during the anti-nautch movement. For this reason, *The Nautch Girl* forms a central point of analysis in this dissertation. In parallel, an assortment of prominent paintings and drawings featuring nautch girls offer notable points of reference in this interart study.

The Nautch Girl, or the Rajah of Chutneypore (1891)

The Nautch Girl, or the Rajah of Chutneypore was a comic operetta that premiered at the Savoy Theatre in 1891 (six years after the premiere of Gilbert and Sullivan's exotically-set *The Mikado, or the Town of Titipu*). It was the first of the Savoy operas that had not been written by Gilbert and Sullivan.[42] *The Nautch Girl* enjoyed fair successes following its premiere with around 200 performances, however it never became established as "part of the larger Savoy canon."[43] Following its premiere performance, *The Nautch Girl* received an assortment of

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[42] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 11.
[43] Hicks, i.

praises and criticisms, many of which alluded to a generally positive reception. The *Daily News* reported:

> It is described as bearing favourable in comparison with any previous Savoy production. At the fall of the curtain the artists, Mr. Solomon, Mr. Charles Harris, and Mr. D'Oyly Carte were very warmly cheered.[44]

Yet, its charm did not last very long. Even to this date, performances of this opera are extremely scarce, almost non-existent, and usually confined to smaller, amateur theatre companies.[45] It enjoyed a respectable number of productions in Britain, but failed to leave a lasting long-term impression, even within the Gilbert and Sullivan canon. Despite the fervent criticisms present in *The Times'* opening night review, the unsigned reviewer ended on a positive note, that the "opera was received with every sign of favour, many numbers having to be repeated, and the author and composers, as well as Mr Carte, were called before the curtain at close."[46] Various reviews also suggested that several numbers from the work warranted encores owing to the audience's demands, with one number even being called for three times.[47] The immediate response to the work appears to have been a fairly

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[44] 'London, Wednesday, July 1.', *Daily News*, 1 July 1891.

[45] One of the most recent, publicly announced productions of The Nautch Girl appeared to have taken place August 2004, by the Royal English Opera Company of Rockford, Illinois. This was also the North American premiere of the operetta. Rather oddly, Kurt Gänzl noted: 'The Nautch Girl apparently, and rather curiously, was exported only to the eastern circuits, where a touring troupe played it to genuine Indian audiences, and, sadly, Dance and Solomon did not collaborate again.' However, no further details can be found regarding performances of this operetta in India. See Kurt Gänzl, *The Encyclopedia of the Musical Theatre* (Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1994), 1045.

[46] '"Opening Night Review." Review of The Nautch Girl; or, The Rajah of Chutneypore, Savoy Theater.', *The Times*, 1 July 1891.

[47] 'The New Savoy Opera', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 1 July 1891.

positive one, where the onstage caricatures sparked expressions of hilarity, sentiments of national pride and enthralment with the "exotic" to the tune of favourable and familiar-sounding melodies. But these successes appear to have been short-lived, since the operetta did not go on to enjoy the successes of contemporaneous musical entertainments and operas.

While it is difficult to judge whether this work was a failure because of its reception through its various performances, it can be said with some confidence that *The Nautch Girl* was reflective of typical Gilbert and Sullivan works of the preceding decades, and sometimes even copiously borrowed from them.[48] Perhaps it was rather the political and social implications of the work that affected its entry into the Savoy canon. In this regard, one might also compare it to another Gilbert and Sullivan production, *Utopia, Limited, or the Flowers of Progress* (1893 – an "exotically" set opera that has enjoyed relatively little popularity, even amongst fans of Gilbert and Sullivan productions, and has failed to leave any lasting impression.[49] It certainly solicits questioning whether the political and social implications of both *The Nautch Girl* and *Utopia, Limited*, which addressed issues such as gender roles, race and society, affected their reception and success. Interestingly, audiences for some of the first productions of *The Nautch Girl* allegedly had very little to no knowledge of what they were going to see, as it had not been announced in the evening papers, a review by the *Birmingham Daily Post* states.[50] However, the credibility of this source

[48] 'Opening Night Review.' *The Times*.
[49] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions'.
[50] 'The New Comic Opera at the Savoy.', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1 July 1891.

is somewhat compromised owing to the fact that it also erroneously referred to the operetta as "*The Naughty Girl*", in what might have been an innocent typing error or perhaps a Freudian slip.

That *The Nautch Girl* premiered at the Savoy Theatre also bears consideration. This theatre was extremely popular, very well-respected and renowned for its "fashionable, funny, yet sensible entertainments" aimed primarily at the middle and upper classes, often providing pointed social commentaries.[51] There was a tradition at the Savoy of mocking humour and satire that reflected on issues of society in a critical way. To name but a few, as highlighted by Sally Mitchell, the Savoy operas were known to satirise the British legal system in *Trial by Jury* (1875), the navy in *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), the House of Lords in *Iolanthe* (1882) and women's emancipation in *Princess Ida* (1884).[52] Works like *The Mikado* and *Utopia, Limited* (and perhaps even *The Nautch Girl*) enabled British satire at the Savoy Theatre to take on a new form – through the use of an "exotic" setting. By the turn of the century, the atmosphere shifted from a demand for social commentaries to a preference for "lighter fare" on the musical stage, which was to become significantly popular in the twentieth century. This may have contributed to the lack of *The Nautch Girl*'s long-term success, although *Utopia, Limited,* which premiered in 1893, proved still somewhat more successful than *The Nautch Girl.*

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[51] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 7.
[52] Mitchell, *Victorian Britain*, 559.

William Hicks points out that owing to the lack of scrutiny of works such as *The Nautch Girl* and *Utopia, Limited* over the years, the music and social discourse attached to the works can be "resurrected" without having to be concerned about different ideologies being attached to them throughout the decades.[53] As such, these works are relatively free of the build-up of convoluted ideologies that accumulate in works that have been observed and analysed repeatedly over the span of decades and even centuries. Conversely, as a historian, it is also crucial to attempt to avoid ascribing present-day analytical associations to artworks of the past.

Analyses of *The Nautch Girl* are further restricted by the relatively inadequate information available about the lives of Edward Solomon, George Dance and Frank Desprez. This presents somewhat of a hindrance, which can be overcome somewhat through comparisons to other works of contemporaneous art. Moreover, the setting of the Savoy Theatre and the fact that this was a Gilbert and Sullivan production offer some relief in the study of the operetta. As Kurt Gänzl's notes, for instance, the lyrics of *The Nautch Girl* seemed to retain the customary Gilbert and Sullivan tradition:

> Carte's secretary, Frank Desprez, helped out on the lyrics for some songs which were Gilbertian enough without being imitations: a piece about fashionable 'Idols' for Denny, a topical carmagnole for Denny and Miss Bond describing married life ('Vive la liberté), a vast and vastly funny patter song for Thornton about avoiding bad luck, and some much-less-ordinary-than-usual romantic songs for Pounds.[54]

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[53] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 4.
[54] Gänzl, *The Encyclopedia of the Musical Theatre*, 1045.

In describing some of the main numbers of the operetta, this excerpt suggests little in the lyrics to imply a specifically Indian or even "exotic" setting. In fact, such a description of the lyrics could just as easily fit any musical entertainment set in Britain. However, used in combination with oddly "exotic" names and a storyline that makes extensive reference to an interpretation of Hindu customs, the lyrics acquire "exotic" meaning by proxy.

Exoticism appeared to be somewhat of a trend on the nineteenth-century British stage, with Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* having been received very positively in this regard. The creation of *The Nautch Girl* could be seen as an attempt to renew or revive the popularity of *The Mikado*, or even to depend on its success. For the premiere of *The Nautch Girl*, many of the main roles were cast to those actors and singers who had already starred in *The Mikado*, such as Rutland Barrington (1853-1922), who played Punka in *The Nautch Girls*, and Pooh-Bah in *The Mikado*; Jessie Bond (1853-1942), playing Chinna Loofa in *The Nautch Girl* and Pitti Sing in *The Mikado*, and Courtice Pounds, taking on the role of Indru in *The Nautch Girls* and Nanki-Poo in *The Mikado*.[55] Hicks also noted other cast members of *The Nautch Girl* production had other "exotic" roles onstage.[56] Playing "oriental" roles could therefore be seen as a genre taken up by actors repeatedly, regardless of whether the "exotics" they represented were thousands of miles apart. It appeared to be a trend and homogenisation of the "exotic" theme.

[55] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 19–20.
[56] Hicks, 20.

In addition to the lack of biographical information, there appears to be neither an original orchestral score for *The Nautch Girl* nor a production promptbook.[57] However, the libretto and vocal score are widely available and offer an extremely useful insight into British operatic discourse. In addition, reviews of *The Nautch Girl* from the 1891 premiere make various remarks regarding the orchestration of the production, offering small glimpses and insights into the musical soundworld that was created.

Set in a fantastical India, this operetta differs greatly from other European operas set in India during this time, namely the hugely successful French opera by Leo Delibes, *Lakmé* (1883), which was set in the contemporary British Raj, and involved interactions between British and Indian characters. Similarly, literary works about interactions and relationships between Englishmen and Indian women prominently featured nautch girls.[58] Instead *The Nautch Girl* featured Indian characters only in a fictional Indian city at an unspecified time, with no foreign intervention beside passing mentions of London and Paris.

The Lure of the Nautch Girl

[57] In addition, Hicks has pointed out that according to a posting on Savoynet, it is possible that the orchestral score was destroyed in the 1965 fire at Chappell and Company, or that it was lost in the process of shifting storage space. Hicks, 20.
[58] Anindyo Roy, *Civility and Empire: Literature and Culture in British India, 1821-1921* (Routledge, 2004), 114.

Within the British art world, India was often presented as a timeless, mythical or fantastical land, or an "exotic" site, full of fascinating characters and practices.[59] It was a branding of sorts that perpetuated a particular discourse, which appeared to resonate colonial discourses that dispersed via other, non-artistic platforms, including those in the political realm. There were fascinations with certain special aspects of culture and society in India, many of which pertained to the female body,[60] including practices such as *sati*, marriage at a young age, female infanticide and, of course, the dances of the nautch girls. The performances of nautch girls became an event of great social significance, often being called for during important political events and gatherings of the social elite. They also appeared to be taken as important representations of Indian music; indeed the first recordings of Indian musicians made by the British were in fact of two nautch girls.[61] Additionally, when it came to music, the accumulation of knowledge about Indian cultures focused largely on Indian dancing groups that were often invited to perform in Anglo-Indian households.[62]

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[59] This is perhaps most clearly illustrated in Gustav Holst's works *Sita* (1899-1906) and *Savitri* (1916).

[60] For examples, see Fanny Parkes, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim, in Search of the Picturesque, During Four-and-Twenty Years in the East; with Revelations of Life in the Zenana* (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850); Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*; James Atkinson, *A Sati or Widow-Burning*, 1831, Oil on Canvas, 1831, India Office Collection, British Library; Johan Zoffany, *Sacrifice of an Hindoo Widow Upon the Funeral Pile of Her Husband*, ca 1795, Oil on Canvas, ca 1795; George Dance and Frank Desprez, *A New Indian Comic Opera in Two Acts, Entitled The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore. Libretto by George Dance. Music by Edward Solomon. With Lyrics by George Dance and Frank Desprez.* (London: Chappell & Co., 1891).

[61] Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*, 117.

[62] Nicholas Cook, 'Encountering the Other, Redefining the Self: Hindostannie Airs, Haydn's Folkson Settings and the "Common Practice" Style', in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s to 1940s: Portrayal of the East*, ed. Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 13.

The Indian nautch girl was a particularly captivating figure for artists, leading her to appear frequently in British works of the long nineteenth century. While extremely diverse in their practices, generally nautch girls would perform song and dance, as well as recite poetry. As a figure, the nautch girl often had great implications in Indian society, as well as in the religious practices of Hinduism and Islam. Frequently, nautch dancers were politically empowered if associated with a temple or court and were quite often well educated.[63]

Great fervour and intrigue emerged during the nineteenth century for the Indian dancing girl (one might even argue a fanaticism), which continued for some decades, into the turn of the century, and can be seen to be reflected in British artworks, from the fictional novels *On the Face of the Waters: a Tale of Mutiny* (1897) and *Her Own People* (1900) by Flora Annie Steel and B.M. Croker respectively, to the grand paintings of Tilly Kettle, William Carpenter and Thomas Hickey, and the vibrant dramatic musical works *A Trip to Bengal*, *The Nautch Girl, or the Rajah of Chutneypore* and *The Crown of India*. Nautch girls and their performances also appeared in non-dramatic musical works, such as T. Williamson's *Twelve Original Hindoostanee Airs* (c. 1800) and 'The Nautch Girl' in Helen and Granville Bantock's *Songs of India* (1898). Moreover, Charn Kamal Kaur Jagpal notes that various writers, including Flora Annie Steel, Bithia Mary Croker, Fanny Emily Penny, Victoria Cross, Alice Perrin, and Ida Alexa Ross Wylie, were collectively responsible for the publication of sixty

[63] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 33; Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win', 27.

works that involved nautch girls in some form,[64] which illustrates the popularity of the subject.

As De Almedia and Gilpin note:

> Dancing girls portrayed in the Romantic paintings of the later eighteenth century […] endure as figures of elegance and mystery: captured in the motion of the dance or in the charged stillness of its climax, they embody the real appeal of India, and whether they are shown alone or in company, standing or dancing barefoot, they always entice the viewer forward and into the painting and its action with their poses, gestures and eyes.[65]

The "lure" of the nautch girl, it seemed, was widely usurped and appropriated by writers and artists. Although Indian culture attracted artists across Europe and beyond, Britain had an especially vested interest, owing to its distinct political and economic interests in India. The resultant entanglements of imperialism were to be defined not only in the political sphere, but also in the cultural and social ones. There appeared to be an inherent interplay between these works of art, the development of the anti-nautch movement and the changing political and social climate of Victorian Britain and colonised India.

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[64] Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win', 6.
[65] De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 75.

III
Cultural Location: Authenticity and Difference

> I asked one of the nautch girls, who was peering through the window, what she thought of the English ladies' dancing; and the nutbrown disciple of Terpsichore replied, that 'they nautched very well, only they jumped too high'.
>
> — Godfrey Charles Mundy, *Pen and Pencil Sketches, Being the Journal of a Tour in India*

Amidst a multitude of artistic British interpretations, the nautch girl was ascribed an identity that chiefly defined her as vastly distinct from European cultures, whether through visual, musical or symbolic means. Signifiers of the nautch girl, the Indian woman, or, more broadly, the "exotic" were embraced in order to localise and define the nautch girl within a particular context that could subsequently be associated specifically with her. This was achieved through a number of ways, namely through the appropriation of objects, names, cultural practices, styles, and techniques that a contemporary audience or spectator would be able to associate with or relate directly to the nautch girl and her practices, or to the concepts that she ostensibly represented.

Much of process of locating took effect through the channelling of aspects of materiality – of presenting material objects in a particular configuration of music or visual art in order to signify a particular locale – geographic, cultural or otherwise. Considering materiality to

involve the *dialectic* of people and things as Daniel Miller argues,[1] the act of locating the nautch girl through art in this way can contribute appreciably to our understanding of how material things can be employed to evoke particular responses in audiences or viewers of a work of art – whether that work is visual, musical, performative or any other form. This relationship between the material thing and people appears to be reciprocative. On one hand, people, as agents (whether commissioners, artists or performers) can infuse a material thing with particular ideas and sentiments, which can be transmitted to a recipient audience. On the other hand, a material thing can harness the power to "condition human actors" in an act of socialisation.[2] Through such processes, the location of the nautch girl could be achieved through an interaction *between* people and things, in their multiple renderings inside and outside an artwork, in order to define her in cultural terms.

In the context of artistic representations of the nautch girl, materiality appears to be prevalent in various facets. Most significant and apparent in both visual and musical art is the mise-en-scène – in the arrangement of scenery or background, as well as the various props, costumes and objects that are featured and sometimes highlighted[3] to signify a

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[1] Daniel Miller, *Materiality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 38.
[2] Daniel Miller, 'Materiality: An Introduction', accessed 12 July 2016, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/people/academic_staff/d_miller/mil-8.
[3] Other aspects of materiality have been studied, including materiality of the voice, body and music. For examples, see Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Laura Tunbridge, 'Opera and Materiality', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 26, no. 03 (November 2014): 289–299, https://doi.org/10.1017/S095458671400010X.

particular location. Moreover, this chapter explores the apparent material transposition or borrowing of Indian aspects in British works in a process of material transcendence.

It is worthwhile to consider how objects featured in works of art are fundamentally dematerialised and transformed into symbolism or representation. Through this journey, the materiality is transferred from the featured object to the artwork itself – whether this refers to the canvas, the page or the stage. Meanwhile, the objects' own materiality has been transformed discursively. As Karl Marx demonstrated, art's materiality lies in its foundation:

> It is well known that Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art but also its foundation […] Greek art presupposes Greek mythology, i.e. nature and the social forms already reworked in an unconsciously artistic way by the popular imagination. This is its material.[4]

In this way, the artwork is perceived not only in its form as a physical object (or multiple objects), but also with elements of the structure of the "phenomenal world". When an object is transformed through its representation within a work of art, its tangible physicality is dispersed but its associations to the phenomenal world persist. Meanwhile, the materiality of the form of the artwork itself becomes imbued with this context. Indeed, this is further complicated by notions of the commodification of art, particularly in its mass reproduction.[5]

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[4] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, New Edition (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 110.
[5] As discussed in Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.

In essence, the act of locating the nautch girl in British artworks through largely material means fostered an interart discourse that fortified a particular (though complex) depiction of the nautch girl, surrounding her with stereotyped Indian or nautch-related material things that helped to define her place in a broader context. Particular emphasis appeared to be placed on marking out *difference* – on distinguishing between the familiar "Self" and the "exotic Other", often through conspicuous dichotomisation. As Ruth Solie discusses:

> If differences are constructed, are products of nurture and culture, how and where does the process of construction occur? Conversely, how can we locate the sites at which (as we would expect) cultural forces permit or encourage resistance to the construction of difference?[6]

Accordingly, while the nautch girl was categorised and defined in the arts by her location in cultural and geographic terms, the physical location of where the differentiation was constructed remains unspecified. However, it can certainly be determined that this construction appears to take place at the location of cultural collision arising from the colonial relationship between Britain and India. The artistic location of the nautch girl in this way was often rigorously presented and frequently perceived as an "authentic" copy or representation of female Indian dancers, although in actuality it was rather questionable, corresponding to fantasies of the imagination that largely adhered to and fed into the convictions of imperialism. Importantly, "authenticity" is used here to refer to a *claim* of true representation through the use of signs, objects and sources according to the

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[6] Ruth A. Solie, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 9.

representor rather than the represented. This claim is deeply embedded within a particular framework of ideologies, along with its political and social insinuations. As such, "authenticity" often involved an imagined construct, rather than a profound historical actuality according to the subject undergoing representation. Notably, however, even the imagined construct is part of a historical reality through its ontological quality that is of momentous value to the historian. Correspondingly, the imagined constructs of allegedly "authentic" representations should not be dismissed.

Any "Other" Name

Works that were set in "exotic" locales frequently depended on signifiers or indicators that were recognisable by name to locate them within a specific regional or cultural setting, especially where the other elements of the artwork could not solely succeed in doing so with clarity. In musical works, often the music itself was so typical of European tradition, that it alone could not suffice to successfully locate the work in a particular setting. Correspondingly, the specific setting of an "exotically"-set visual artwork was not always so obvious to the viewer without titular signification. In such instances, particular nominal signifiers in these artworks could succeed in helping to formulate a recognisable association to a particular culture and/or region. In this way, naming practices made it possible for artists to inform audiences about a particular cultural or geographical location in an uncomplicated and effective manner.

In visual artworks, for example, the title of a work might include a location, whether it is the name of a city or region within which the particular work is set or has been created, or an otherwise culturally-associable name. For instance, William Carpenter's watercolour works about nautch girls included geographical signifiers such as Kashmir or Udaipur, and Johan Zoffany's nautch girl painting refers to her being "Kashmiree", enabling the viewer to locate the subject within particular geographical boundaries as well as to allow the artist to enjoy the authority of anthropological documentation. Sometimes the names of the works offered other cultural pointers – for example, words like *harem*, *hookah*, and *Hindoo* signified the "exotic", while occasionally offering more specific locations, through mentions of regionally specific objects or social or religious groups. Similarly, musical works about nautch girls could take advantage of being located through naming conventions. For example, Solomon's operetta *The Nautch Girl, or, the Rajah of Chutneypore* offers a distinct location in its title, which – though fictitious – alludes to an Indian setting through the associable word *chutney,* and "pore" (a suffix meaning "city" or "settlement", commonly used throughout South Asia, Afghanistan and Iran). Charles Smith's musical entertainment *A Trip to Bengal*, which features a prominent nautch scene, also specifies a distinct location in its title and is subsequently alluded to throughout the narrative. It appeared to be rather important to locate the nautch girl within a discernibly Indian setting, to facilitate the audience in associating the nautch girl with a particular cultural identity – one that emphasised "Otherness" and, more specifically, "Indianness" – the quality of being *perceived* as Indian as a cultural category within the colonial context. Notably, in colonialist British discourse of the time, Indians of any religion other than Islam and

Christianity were referred to as "Hindus" (or "Hindoos"),[7] serving as a reductive colonial construct that categorised many Indians of different faiths within its fold. In this context, to be "Hindu" did not necessarily refer to a follower of Hinduism but was rather a crude term to identify Indians who were not Muslim or Christian.

The act of locating through naming also took on other forms of practice. In musical works, for example, characters could be bestowed with names that offered culturally significant meanings. In *The Nautch Girl*, most characters feature comical names that bear little to no resemblance to realistic Indian names, but rather to words that would have been recognisable by the British public to be associated with the South Asian subcontinent. In many cases, these names do not reflect those usually ascribed to people but rather to material objects and practices in the Hindi, Bengali and Urdu languages, which were often incorporated into British English vocabulary and continue to be used in the English vernacular today. The main dancers in the protagonist's nautch troupe are named Banyan, Kalee[8] and Tiffin, or fig, flower bud, and a light meal respectively. The protagonist's own name, Hollee, appeared to correspond with the Hindu spring festival of *holi*.[9] Other

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[7] Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 78.

[8] The name Kalee has been understood to mean Kali, or flower bud (□□□ / کلی), but it might rather refer to Kālī (□□□□ / کالی), meaning "the black one" or the Hindu goddess of time, change and destruction.

[9] The name 'Hollee' used in this operetta predates the use of "Holly" as an English female given name, proving that it is unrelated to the English name. 'Holly - Oxford Reference', accessed 28 July 2016, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198610601.001.0001/acref-9780198610601-e-1447.

characters in the operetta receive similar treatment, with names such as Punka, Pyjama, Cheetah and Baboo Currie, demonstrating that this tendency of naming characters after Indian things was not exclusively reserved for the nautch girls or even the women of the operetta. It is clear that within the setting of a comic operetta, such naming is not intended to be realistic but rather a subject of jest. However, the resultant effect of such a system of names is disparaging to the Indian subjects that it refers to – characters are reduced to the names of material objects or concepts that have established links to "Indianness". In this way, the characters of the operetta are objectified and dehumanised, reduced to references to material things that allegedly represent an erroneously homogenised cultural entity.

"Comical" names for characters in "exotically"-set works were not unique to *The Nautch Girl*. This practice is also prevalent in the Gilbert and Sullivan production *The Mikado* (1885), where the characters' names (such as Nanki-Poo, Pish-Tush, Yum-Yum, and Pooh-Bah) are wholly unrepresentative of actual Japanese names. However, contrary to the names of Indian characters in *The Nautch Girl*, the names of characters in *The Mikado* do not have any semblance to the Japanese language at all, and rather appear to be mock English baby-talk – resulting in a form of infantilisation and reductionism of the Japanese cultural presence. The differing treatment of Indian and Japanese characters' names in two very similar works could be the consequence of Britain's closer relation to India and its languages through colonisation, as opposed its more distant relation to Japan and its languages. Since words from Indian languages were being incorporated into Britain's own English vocabulary through the process of colonisation, the choice of names in *The Nautch Girl* reflected this process, in providing names that would be somehow familiar to the

British audience. Since the names were likely to be familiar to the British audience as Indian things or concepts, they would likely have been easier to commit to memory through visual stimulation.

Imperialist connotations are impossible to overlook in the way that the Indian characters were often objectified and degraded for comic effect through a system of naming after material things. But the fact that particular names or material things that were unmistakably associable with "Indianness" were incorporated into artworks indicated that they also served as signifiers of cultural location; as a means to emphasise the subjects as unquestionably Indian, Hindu and *different*.

Objects of Association

Not dissimilar to material naming practices, artists also offered signifiers of location through the incorporation of material objects within their works. Through such methods, artworks could exploit objects of cultural significance or association in different ways in order to locate nautch girls within a particular cultural framework. For instance, in William Carpenter's 1854 watercolour *Two Natch Girls* (Figure 1), the two subjects are shown on a veranda, overlooking a lake and mountains. One of the women is casually smoking a *hookah*, while the other loosely clutches a pink lotus flower. Additionally, there are various colourful fruits scattered on the ground beside the women. The architecture in the scene is built up with scalloped archways and intricately engraved pillars. These small but prominent details of material things collectively enable the viewer to place the scene within

a specific cultural setting. The nautch girls in such images do not exist in an empty space but are rather contextualised within a clear cultural setting through the visual representation of objects with associations to "exotic" and often specifically Indian cultures. This resonates with the inclusion of perceivably Indian objects and concepts in the operetta *The Nautch Girl*, through the naming of the characters after objects associated with "Indianness".

Moreover, illustrations of the costumes of the premiere of *The Nautch Girl* similarly feature material objects that serve as signifiers of the "exotic" (Figure 2) with the characters Chinna Loofa and A Dancer wielding hand-held fans and An Attendant holding a tray of fruit and what appears to be a golden or brass teapot or *samovar*. Although there is no photographic evidence that such props were used onstage in the early productions of the operetta, it is likely that this was the case given that these illustrations were created by John Cleveland Milbourne, who famously attended performances and took careful notes about their visuals.[10] Remarkably, the form and detail of the hand-held fans in the illustrations resemble East Asian fans rather than the Indian kind. The fruit and tea also appear to signify the "exotic", but do not appear to specify a locale beyond that. However, the tray of fruit held by An Attendant resonates with William Carpenter's watercolour image, and signifies the importance of fruit in Orientalist imagery.[11] While the tradition of serving and

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[10] Jane Gallagher, 'Personal Correspondence on UKC-SCRAP-MILB.F203528-P47 with University of Kent Special Collections', 14 November 2014.
[11] See Béatrice Laurent, 'Juicy Fruit in the Harem: Pomological Symbolism in Some Paintings by John Frederick Lewis', *Visual Culture in Britain* 17, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/14714787.2016.1149514.

eating fruits has often been used almost iconically in exoticist imagery, it could also be indicative of sexual connotations, which are explored further in Chapter IV. But in the context of cultural representation, these props and objects contributed to the construction of the nautch girls' cultural identity.

Carpenter's inclusion of a *hookah* in his watercolour was not unique. The *hookah* also appears in Tilly Kettle's depiction of a single dancing girl (Figure 3), though rather unusually it is being held by the nautch girl during a performance. Another example of the *hookah* in use is in Mortimer Menpes' work, 'Kashmiri Nautch Girl with a Hookah' (Figure 4), which focuses on the action of the nautch girl smoking the *hookah* as a central theme. In other works, *hookahs* are shown to be smoked by men as they enjoy nautches being performed, for example in Thomas Daniell's 'The Nautch' (Figure 5) as well as in the work 'Colonel Antoine-Louis Polier enjoying a nautch at his house in Lucknow' (Figure 6), by an unknown artist.[12] In all of these works, the *hookah* appeared to be used to symbolise particular cultural practices associated with the region, and associated also with amusement and spectacle. In *A Trip to Bengal* by Charles Smith, the *zenana* scene (which is the setting for one of the most dramatic revelations for one of the main characters of the work) features a stage instruction that a *hookah* and perfumes are to be presented to the British

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[12] The painting had originally been attributed by Mildred Archer to Tilly Kettle, but this claim was challenged by Christie's, who claimed that the painting appeared to be based on one possibly painted by Johann Zoffany. See: Christie's, 'Lucknow School, circa 1785, Possibly after a Lost Painting by Johann Zoffany | Colonel Antoine-Louis Polier Enjoying a Nautch at His House in Lucknow | Christie's', accessed 29 January 2015, http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?from=salesummary&intObjectID=4572609.

character Captain Fitzpatrick before a nautch is performed.[13] In the same way as the paintings discussed above, the *hookah* is employed in this musical work as an exotic signifier, symbolic of the nautch and of her "Indianness". Similarly, as the art of perfumery was introduced and developed by the ancient Mesopotamians, the Indus Valley Civilization, and early Muslim chemists in the Persian and Arab world,[14] and was often associated with Eastern splendour, it also served as a signifier of the "exotic", while also denoting a thing of indulgence, luxury and enticement. It is also noteworthy that the nautch scene in *A Trip to Bengal* is the only scene in the entire work in which a whole passage is sung in a language other than English (Bengali), rendering it one of the most *Indian* scenes in the work, deeply embedded within a Bengali locale, with a song sung in a language that likely much of the audience would not have been able to understand. This accentuates the "exoticness" of the scene, accentuating the element of difference between "Englishness" and "Indianness".

In addition to placing the nautch girl within a specific cultural or geographic setting, the appropriation of objects such as *hookahs*, fruits and perfumes in this way offered a glimpse into the perceived associations of material things to nautch girls and nautches. And it is likely no coincidence that a substantial amount of the objects that served as signifiers of

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[13] Charles Smith, *A Trip to Bengal: A Musical Entertainment [in Two Acts, in Prose and Verse].* (London: J. Ridgway, 1802), 43.

[14] Martin Levey, *Early Arabic Pharmacology: An Introduction Based on Ancient and Medieval Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 9; A. K. Sharma, Seema Wahab, and Rashmi Srivastava, *Agriculture Diversification: Problems and Perspectives* (New Delhi: I. K. International Pvt Ltd, 2010), 140.

the “exotic” in artworks about nautch girls were ones of consumption; to be imbibed or ingested, usually in a manner of luxury and indulgence rather than through necessity.

As noted earlier, architectural displays could also serve as objects of association or signifiers of the “exotic”, facilitating the location of the nautch girl within a particular physical space, whether that was the *zenana*, a temple or elsewhere. In *A Trip to Bengal*, the famous *zenana* scene is described in the libretto thus:

> – An Apartment in a Zenana – an Arch in the middle, with a semi-transparent Purdo[15] let down – Hindostannee Musicians playing – Singing and dancing Girls arranged on one side of the Stage –[16]

The scene described resembles various paintings of nautch girls, such as the archways in the nautch paintings of Tilly Kettle, Thomas Daniell and William Carpenter. In various works about the nautch girls, scalloped arches, ornate engravings, gracious domes and tall minarets helped to set the scene for nautches, enabling artists to establish a distinct locale within which the nautch girls operated. Comparably, in Edward Elgar’s masque *The Crown of India*, the description of the opening scene highlights that a semi-circular amphitheatre of white marble “is broken by ornate archways”.[17] These archways are referred to on a second occasion when the nautch girl characters are instructed to file onto the stage

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[15] From the Persian *pardah* (پرده).

[16] Smith, *A Trip to Bengal*, 43.

[17] Henry Hamilton, ‘Text of the Masque’, in *The Crown of India*, Elgar Complete Edition; Series III, Dramatic Works, v. 18 (London: Elgar Society Edition Ltd. in association with Novello, 2004), 3.

through the two central archways for their performance, and to later exit through them.[18] The archways come into use in the masque once more when the characters of the Mughal emperors, Akhbar, Jehangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb arrive at the scene with their attendants.[19] Notably different, the Englishmen of the masque, St George and Sir John Company, are instructed to make their entrances from elsewhere on the stage. The archways are therefore reserved in this masque for the nautch girls, their musicians and the Mughal emperors, thereby emphasising the cultural association between the Indian subjects and the archways and the cultural dissociation between the English and Indian characters of the masque.

Notably, the physical framing of nautch girls (and sometimes other Indian subjects) through architecture insinuated an emphasis on internality – of residing within the privacy of a domestic or otherwise enclosed space, whether this was a *zenana*, a temple or a palace. Within artworks, the existence of architectural details such as archways tends to have the functional effect of framing the nautch girl within a particular location, often with her as the focal point. The arch has been described by Amanda Lillie to "mark key thresholds, physically and metaphorically separating inside from outside, open from closed, public from private, secular from sacred, or different degrees of any of these states".[20]

[18] Hamilton, 3.
[19] Hamilton, 10.
[20] Amanda Lillie, 'Building the Picture | Entering the Picture | Apertures and Arches, Porches and Loggias | The National Gallery, London', accessed 29 January 2015, http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/entering-the-picture/apertures-and-arches.

Considering this, the archways in these works serve not only to mark a particular geographical location (since scalloped features were usually associated with the "Orient"), but also to clearly mark out defined spaces – that of the public and of the private – and to locate the nautch girl within these spaces. The nautch activities that ensued in the *zenanas*, temples and palaces were in many ways perceived as taking place within a private sphere – or a domestic sphere, to which a woman conventionally belonged according to Victorian tradition. The appropriation of arches and similar architectural features in works of art in this way could therefore locate the nautch girl within a defined private space, as though to emphasise her location not only geographically or culturally speaking, but also her general spatial location in the social context. Moreover, by depicting the nautch girl in a private sphere and subsequently exhibiting her in a public one through the dissemination of art, the privacy of the nautch is shattered, whether consciously or inadvertently. This act relocates the nautch girl from her initial private sphere to the public one, enabling her to transcend from one to the other. In this fashion, the act of locating the nautch girl in artworks was not necessarily a stagnant, one-off process, and could rather be characterised as mutable according to particular contexts.

Although there is limited evidence pertaining to the details of stage design and architectural elements of *The Nautch Girl*, it appears from reviews of the premiere production that the sets were allegedly representative of Indian or "Oriental" culture and aesthetically satisfying for the contemporary audience. For instance, a critic for *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* stated:

> The Indian costumes, the soft draperies of the Nautch dancers, with their strings of coins, and the Oriental scenery made up a series of stage pictures the fascinating brightness and beauty of which it would be difficult to exaggerate.[21]

The photographs of the first productions of *The Nautch Girl* fail to provide much in the form of evidence regarding stage props and design, but critics' accounts offer some notable details. For instance, the *Glasgow Herald*'s review of the premiere noted that the opening scene featured the "outskirts of Chutneypore, a beautiful scene with overhanging palm trees, while in the distance in the valley lies the city",[22] with the type of foliage serving as an exotic signifier. The critic continued:

> As the curtain falls in the second act we are in the courtyard of the Royal Punka's Palace, a pure Indian scene, lit up by the dull red Indian sunset.[23]

The visual location of the scenes of the operetta appeared to strike critics as specifically representing India. Other reviewers, such as one for the *Northern Echo*, also appeared to dwell upon the "Indianness" of the stage, with its "pictures of Indian native life".[24] From these descriptions, it is apparent that the visible locating of the work in India was significant and contributed to depicting an "authentic" Indian scene. This setting was also prevalent in painting, with an analogous "Indian sunset" and palm trees visible in William Daniell's painting of a nautch girl performance in front of a nobleman (Figure 7) and the dusky skies

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[21] 'The New Savoy Opera'.
[22] '"The Nautch Girl" at the Savoy', *Glasgow Herald*, 1 July 1891.
[23] '"The Nautch Girl" at the Savoy'.
[24] 'Our London Letter', *Northern Echo*, 1 July 1891.

of Hickey's famous image of a group of women that were previously identified as nautch girls (Figure 8), indicating the common visual symbols used to represent the location of India across different formats of art. The apparent visual signature of India in these works demonstrated how the Indian colony was being brought to the imperial audience through the stage and the canvas in a microcosmic artistic representation. It is notable that in some cases of artworks representing India, a direct connection was ascertained between representations of India onstage and on the canvas in terms of scenery and setting.[25] Whether the nautch scenes in works such as *The Nautch Girl*, *The Crown of India* and *A Trip to Bengal* borrowed from painted works is difficult to determine owing to the very limited information that is available regarding the sceneries of these musical entertainments. However, as explored in the following section, there were certainly stark similarities between the costumes used in musical works and those depicted in paintings of nautch girls that are suggestive of an interaction and exchange between the mediums of art.

The common visual depiction of objects such as *hookahs*, fruit, teapots, and distinct architectural details in British works centring on nautch girls served as a generalised "exotic" signifier for a homogenised "Other" culture that was markedly different to the British cultural identity; countless orientalist paintings are testament to this. What was particularly special about the exploitation of these objects in nautch girl paintings appeared to be the association of items of luxury, indulgence and consumption – things that were to be possessed and enjoyed. Indeed, the nautch girl could also be perceived as an object

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[25] Wilson, *The Island Race*, 70.

of desire in the artwork; a luxurious item to be consumed, indulged and enjoyed by the observer or audience. The second significant aspect of the depiction of material things in nautch girl works was that the architectural details seemed to be a common element in scenes depicting nautch girls – emphasising their perceived existence within a private or domestic sphere. This was furthered by the fact that many of the "exotic" signifiers surrounding the nautch girls (hand-held fans, fruits, tea, *hookahs* etc.) were usually indulged in within the confines of private spaces. But in becoming encapsulated within works of art, the nautch girls become the subject of public display – both as performers with public audiences but, more significantly, as subjects in public artworks. The resultant effect is a blurring of the lines between the public and the private, where the nautch girl seemingly belonged to both simultaneously.

Authenticities in Attire

One of the central features in descriptions and representations of nautch girls (artistic or otherwise) was the visual aspects of her clothing and general façade. For any depiction of a performer, fashion and appearance has undoubtedly subsisted as a significant point of scrutiny. The physical appearance of actual female performers in India and artistic representations of nautch girls across Europe prompted substantial examination and discourse, highlighting the importance of the physical manifestation of nautch girls as a conceptual construct. In fact, many artists attempted to copy or to interpret female Indian dancers' dresses in their artworks with varying effect. Regardless of the result, there appeared to be great determination to uphold an element of "authenticity" in the visual

representation of the nautch girl. Often these nautch girls were clearly defined as unique from any other type of performing female artist of the "Orient" through unmistakably "Indian" dresses and jewellery, with similarities across the painted image, the costumed character onstage and even popularly reproduced photographs and illustrations. Notably, with paintings, illustrations and photographs of the people of India, there was often a documentary attribute to the images, largely owing to the fact that the artists had visited India and depicted the subjects first-hand seemingly in an attempt to provide an "authentic" observational representation. Indeed, many of the artists who had painted or drawn nautch girls were also commissioned to paint (or document) important European political figures and some of their proceedings in India, such as Thomas Daniell's *Sir Charles Warre Malet, Concluding a Treaty in 1790 in Durbar with the Peshwa of the Maratha Empire*. Even Elgar's masque *The Crown of India* featured a documentary aspect through the retelling of a version of India's history and England's relationship with it for the significant occasion of celebrating the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary as Emperor and Empress of India.

It is clear from various examples that an element of ostensible "realism" or "authenticity" was intrinsic to portrayals of India, particularly by travelling artists who were affiliated with the East India Company. Musical works were generally somewhat different in that the composers and other producers involved generally had little to no noteworthy interaction with India, leading to works that were conceptualised, produced and performed in Britain focusing largely on an imagined India, or one that was borrowed from other discourses, artistic or otherwise. Through this process, artistic renderings of India could be transferred

across medium and genre, sometimes reiterating already established perspectives and other times conjuring new ones. And whether visual or musical, an expectation or presumption of "authenticity" in representation appeared to be in place.

The profound details and intricacies of nautch girls' costumes and jewellery in artworks and the reception to them revealed great similarities and were largely indicative of the alleged authenticity in the representation of the nautch girl. The operetta *The Nautch Girl* offers a significant example of the lengths that artists would sometimes go to in order to achieve an "accurate" or "authentic" nautch girl representation. The operetta's costume designer, Percy Anderson, claimed to have actively sought inspiration for the nautch girls' costumes for the operetta in actual nautch girl garb from India. In an article in *The Magazine of Art,* Anderson stated:

> When designing the dresses for Mr. Edward Solomon's opera *The Nautch Girl*, for the Savoy Theatre, I was hunting for facts in the Indian Museum. There I came across an Eastern dancing dress, which I copied as accurately as the conditions of comic opera and our stage would allow.[26]

Even for a comical musical entertainment, Anderson made significant effort to achieve "authenticity" in the depiction of the nautch girls' costumes, rather than merely relying on other artists' visual depictions. A small number of photographs from the premiere production of *The Nautch Girl* in 1891 provide some insight into the original costumes and

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[26] Percy Anderson, 'Art in the Theatre: Costume on the Stage', in *The Magazine of Art* (London: Cassell & Co., 1894), 10.

scenery of the operetta, although colourless and largely inadequate in quality. However, comparing these photographs with the coloured illustrations of the costumes from the premiere by John Cleveland Milbourne allow us to evaluate the clothing in more detail (Figure 2).[27] In one of the illustrated costumes, worn by the protagonist Holly Beebee, a long white dress drapes and flows elegantly to the character's ankles, she is heavily adorned in jewellery, and her long black locks of hair are decorated with bright pink flowers while she grasps a similar flower in her hands. Her appearance offers a striking comparison to various nautch girl imagery in visual art of the period. Most notably, the delicate colour balance of whites and pinks resonates with William Carpenter's watercolour featuring two Kashmiri nautch girls (Figure 1). Moreover, the pink flowers (presumably lotus) and abundant jewellery feature prominently in both Carpenter's watercolour and Holly Beebee's dress in Milbourne's illustration. Similarities can also be drawn in the style of the dress in Milbourne's illustration and the long white flowing dresses of the nautch girls featured in the watercolour of Colonel Antoine-Louis Polier enjoying a nautch at his house in Lucknow (Figure 6). It is unclear whether this particular dress in *The Nautch Girl* premiere was based on the actual nautch dress that Anderson had seen in the museum, but the similarities between the illustration and various painted images of the nautch girl

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[27] Jonathan Cleveland Milbourne would attend pantomimes during the late nineteenth century and take careful notes about the costumes, particularly their colours. He would then carefully cut colour and cut out the images from the programme and paste them into this book, alongside brief information about the play and the cast. John Cleveland Milbourne, 'Page 47 of Mr. Milbourne's Scrapbook Showing Costumes from THE NAUTCH GIRL Produced on June 30th, 1891, at the Savoy Theatre, London. It Also Shows Costume Details for LITTLE BO-PEEP at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane on December 26th, 1892, the Rest of the Entry Being Continued on Page 48.' (London, 30 June 1891), Special Collections, University of Kent at Canterbury - UKC/SCRAP/MILB: F203528/P47.

insinuate that there was some interaction between the visual representations. In actuality, the dresses of Indian dancers were to vary immeasurably according to region, type of performer and individual, but under the broad category of nautch girl, these costumes could be homogenised to iconically represent the nautch girl in art. Drawing a further connection, in reference to the nautch scene in Elgar's *The Crown of India,* a *Daily Mail* review notes:

> India and her attendant Cities are discovered seated in a hemi-cycle watching the dances of gorgeously robed nautch girls.[28]

Here the writer diverts the readers' attention to the physical appearance of the robed costumes of the nautch girls, emphasising their importance. Notably, the costumes and scenery for Elgar's masque were designed by the very same Percy Anderson,[29] costume designer of the premiere production of *The Nautch Girl.* Therefore, similarities were naturally bound to be prevalent between the aesthetics of both these musical productions, and Anderson's experience of imitating a real-life nautch girl dress for the operetta are likely to have served as inspiration for his designs for Elgar's masque.

While it might indeed be so that many of the finer details of the nautch girl's appearance were developed through the creative imagination of the artists involved, it is interesting to consider the possible shared sources from which artists (across painting and music) were

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[28] R. C., 'Sir E. Elgar's New Work', *Daily Mail*, 12 March 1912, Daily Mail Historical Archive, 1896-2004.

[29] 'The Crown Of India', *The Times (London, England)*, 7 March 1912, The Times Digital Archive, 1785-2008.

able to locate ideas for costumes. Certainly, in the case of many painters, works were often based on real-life encounters with nautch girls during their travels in India, but to what extent were these paintings a consequence of observation rather than imagination? Early photography enables us to gain some proximity in addressing this question. Comparing Carpenter's work about two nautch girls, which is set in Kashmir, (Figure 1) with a photograph of three nautch girls in Kashmir from the 1870s by Francis Frith (Figure 9), one can immediately identify strikingly conspicuous similarities between the nautch girls' clothing in both images. Carpenter's nautch girls are dressed almost identically to the nautch girl on the left-hand side of the Frith's photograph; from the draping of the white robes, to the fine embroidered details around the collar and the virtually identical earrings, necklace and *matha patti*. Such stark similarities strongly suggest that the nautch girls from Frith's photograph were from the same or a similar nautch troupe to the sitters for Carpenter's watercolour. Remarkably, even the backdrop behind the nautch girls in both images is comparable, with the presence of a *hookah* on the left-hand side of the frame and tea on the right-hand side. All of the subjects are seated on a light-coloured mat, and the nautch girl on the left-hand side in both images rests against a pillow. Such drastic similarities in the minute details of the frame suggest that there was some sort of interaction or borrowing between the photograph and the watercolour image. In turn, this shared imagery might have projected onto Percy Anderson's conceptualisation of Holly Beebee's costume; particularly in terms of the colours and style of her clothing, the way that plaits of dark hair fall on her shoulders, the prevalence of pink lotus flowers and the decorative jewellery pieces.

Similarities can correspondingly be observed in a photograph of a nautch girl from a 1901 production of *The Nautch Girl* at the Royal Theatre and Opera House, Abbey Road (Figure 10) and a photograph of an "actual" nautch girl from Shepherd & Robertson that was taken in the 1880s (Figure 11). In both images, the nautch girl is placed centrally, where she poses holding the hem of her dress on either side of her (possibly performing the skirt dance), causing the dress to cascade and drape dramatically and occupy almost half of the frame. The similarities in the pose might suggest that operatic productions had access to images (whether photographed, painted or sketched) or literary or verbal descriptions of actual nautch performances in India for reference. It appears that the actress in the production photograph mimics a pose that reflected (rather comparably) poses such as the one struck by the nautch girl in the Shepherd & Robertson photograph.[30] Similarly, in the Scottish explorer Robert Brown's 1892 book *Peoples of the World*, an image of a nautch performance reveals its subject in a similar skirt-dance pose (Figure 12), suggesting the popularity of this type of image, and hence the increased likelihood of its imitation in musical performances.

It is remarkable just how far the impact of nautch girl dresses was to reach. As well as receiving local commentaries in Britain, these costumes reverberated even as far away as the United States of America. It is reported that one of the pioneers of modern dance, Loie Fuller (1862-1928) from Chicago, had her costumier design a reproduction of one of

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[30] It is important to note here that the Shepherd & Robertson photograph must have been rather well circulated since it was also made into a postcard. Consequently, it might be that this very image was somehow acquired, and its subject emulated for this particular production of the operetta.

the dresses from the *The Nautch Girl* production at the Savoy Theatre, to be taken back to America for a "specialty dance".[31] Such was the journey of the nautch girl dress, traceable in this particular case from an Indian nautch dress that was transferred to a museum in London, where it was imitated for a British operetta and possibly also for a masque, before it was copied again by a costumier in North America for an oriental dance performance after witnessing the dress during an onstage performance in Britain. In this way, the fashions of the nautch dress enjoyed far reaches and appeared to hold significant implications for Western theatrical practices. For instance, Jagpal notes how pioneers of the skirt dance in the 1870s (such as Letty Lind and Kate Vaughan) wore billowing costumes and performed dances with great resemblances to the *devadasi* and *tawaif* traditions,[32] providing another example of how impactful and popular the nautch dress and performance were. Such practices could be seen to be part of the broader trends across Europe, amongst the tides of turquerie, chinoiserie and even blackfacing, although each of these featured very different (and problematic) aspects, circumstances and contexts.

A comparison of operatic reviews of *The Nautch Girl* with travelling artists' literary accounts of nautch girls offer further useful insight into how artists perceived the nautch girls' attire and subsequently presented them. During his visit to Rajput, Val Prinsep recorded the following description of a nautch girl:

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[31] Rupert Christiansen, *The Victorian Visitors: Culture Shock in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Grove Press, 2002), 222.
[32] Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win', 229–30.

> She is not young, but has a remarkably fine head. Her costume is very handsome, though, of course, rather bizarre. She wears a long flowing robe, and winds her drapery around her with the air of a queen."[33]

In his account, Prinsep pays great admiration for the nautch girl's striking attire and draws a distinct connection between her clothing and her person, whereby her costume contributes to her majestic quality of character. In this way, the nautch girl's costume is perceived to be part of the nautch girl herself – an extension of her body. In numerous paintings, nautch girl costumes are similarly draping and flowing, accentuating the curvatures of the nautch girl's body and thereby forming part of it. Significant examples include Tilly Kettle's single dancing girl (Figure 3) and multiple dancing girls (Figure 13), Lady Lawley's nautch girl (Figure 14) and Shoberl's *devedasis* (Figure 15), all of which feature intricately detailed creasing fabric that drapes tightly around the nautch girls' bodies, displaying her voluptuous figure and emphasising the nautch girls' movement during her performance. The significance of the nautch girls' costume is also explored and described similarly in reviews of the operetta *The Nautch Girl*, spotlighting the very same "draperies" and flourishing clothing that artists have centred on.[34]

In another costume in the Milbourne illustrations, Hollee Beebee wears a khaki-coloured dress with a white headdress featuring a red ribbon, which appears to be the costume that Lenore Snyder wears in the premiere production photograph (Figure 16) and also appears in a coloured sketch by Percy Anderson (Figure 17). The billowing, draping material is very

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[33] Prinsep, *Imperial India: An Artist's Journals*, 94–95.
[34] For example, see: 'The New Savoy Opera'.

apparent in all images of this costume, reflecting the appearance of the dresses in nautch girl paintings. Rather unique to this particular costume is the colour combination, which does not appear to feature similarities with many other visual artistic depictions of nautch girl costumes, which tend to feature more reds and whites and very few earthy colours. The other nautch girl costumes in Milbourne's illustrations are similar to Holly Beebee's, but with their own distinctive combinations of bright colours, from blues to oranges and pinks. Additionally, each nautch girl adorns unique headwear, in an attempt to portray diversity among the nautch girls' costumes. This differs substantially from portrayals of nautch troupes in the visual arts, which tended to feature similar costumes for each of the dancing girls in the ensemble, as though it were a part of their collective identity as a nautch troupe. This reflected photographs of actual nautch girls, in which women of the same troupe tended to wear similarly styled and coloured clothing and jewellery. Within the operetta, the diversity in the colours and details of the nautch girls' dresses achieved the effect of depicting colourfulness and vibrancy, which many critics called attention to. In this way, the operetta steered away from the representation of the nautch troupe as a collective and uniform identity, introducing instead an element of miscellany and haphazardness on the stage in true theatrical manner.

It is clear that costume designer Percy Anderson had made a conscious effort to achieve "authenticity" in the costumes of *The Nautch Girl*. In accordance with this, the *Daily News* review of the premiere production stated that the nautch girls were "clad in their real Indian

gauzes, anklets, and embroideries",[35] while the *Glasgow Herald* noted the operetta's "wealth of real Indian dresses".[36] These examples demonstrate how the attempt to depict a "real" India through the nautch girls' costumes was identified and acknowledged by the reviewers and, quite likely, by the general audience. As such, the "authenticity" or "realness" of the visual representation of the nautch girls in this operetta was of great importance to the Victorian audience, as though it were a great boon to be able to receive a true depiction of the nautch girl onstage. In the visual arts, the element of authenticity was also perhaps significant, but was also somewhat expected, given the documentary nature of travelling artists' work.

Regardless of just how much borrowing occurred in the artistic representations of nautch girls' clothing, it is apparent that these costumes were welcomed as "authentic" depictions, indicating that such works of art contributed to acknowledging and perhaps even shaping people's understandings of Indian fashions and cultural heritage, with particular reference to nautch girls. Consequently, nautch girl attire could be observed, critiqued, admired and but reproduced in multiple versions and contexts.

The "authenticity" of costumes in nautch girl entertainments was by no means restricted to the clothing of nautch girls specifically. For instance, in the 1901 production photographs of *The Nautch Girl*, the male characters are clothed in long tunics and pyjamas

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[35] 'The "Nautch Girl" at the Savoy', *Daily News*, 1 July 1891.
[36] '"The Nautch Girl" at the Savoy', 1 July 1891.

or trousers, adorned in curved-toe *khussas* and turbans, and in some cases wielding a *talwar*, helping to locate these characters as Indians. In closer detail, the Milbourne illustrations and premiere production photographs of the operetta also show that Punka, the Rajah of Chutneypore, is dressed in a gold tunic with an intricate floral pattern, a red cloth *patka* tied around his waist, and various pieces of jewellery – all attempting to resemble the clothing of an Indian *rajah*. More unusually, Punka wears a bicorne hat that could perhaps be intended to mimic a turban or other form of Indian headwear, although it appears to be a poor imitation. In this way, the men of the operetta were treated similarly to the nautch girls. But rather unique to the nautch girl case was the popularity of her dress in the drastic similarities in artistic representations, as well as the dress's adoption into "Western" theatrical practices – part of a growing acceptance and incorporation of aspects from "Eastern" performance into "Western" performances, which is explored further in Chapter VI.

Generally, the nautch girl attire depicted in British paintings and musical entertainments of the long nineteenth century featured flamboyant and colourful dresses, embellished with elaborate headdresses and an abundance of glimmering jewellery. In many cases, these dresses attempted to resemble and/or be perceived as authentic replicas or representations of the clothing of actual nautch dancers in India. As such, these dresses became somewhat of an icon, serving to symbolise the nautch girl and her performance, and were even incorporated into the British and other "Western" arts and fashion. In accordance, the nautch dress was able to transcend far beyond a single artwork or even medium. The significance of "authenticity" is noteworthy, because these artistic representations filtered

and produced very particular representations of these nautch girls, dependent on individual and collective political and personal views. These perceptions, which shared great similarities, were then circulated to mass audiences, gradually developing to serve as a loosely homogenised and allegedly "authentic" representation of the nautch girls of India. As such, artists, commissioners and other agents, together with the corollaries of the contemporary social and political context, could mould perceptions of the authenticity of nautch girl fashion, before it could be incorporated into British and other "Western" cultural practices. Notably, it appeared that these artistic works usually centred on presenting the beauty and marvel of nautch-girl costumes, for these depictions did not appear to be presented nor received as unsightly in any way.

The Art of Performance

Performative aspects were self-evidently central in defining the nautch girl's identity in British works; the art of her dance was key to her role, along with the song and music that accompanied it. In many ways, the performance of the nautch girl was recognised as being thoroughly unique compared to other performances, European or otherwise. Here was another aspect through which *difference* could be accentuated – where artists could determine between the performing arts of the cultural "Self" versus the performing arts of the cultural "Other".

Music

Musical reflections of nautch girls in the British repertoire appear to have contributed to a deceptively homogenised perception of this diverse set of female performers within a specific cultural framework. Rather distinctively from visual or nominal aspects of representation, the musical facet of nautch-girl representation appeared to be largely rooted in conventional British fashion, in some ways favouring familiarity in the expression of sound to the Victorian audience. Furthermore, the music intended to represent nautch performances in British works often adhered to major elements of both "exoticist" and "feminised" music. Indeed, as Linda Phyllis Austern has shown, there are substantial parallels between the "tonal languages" of "exoticist" music and "feminine" music,[37] which warrant further exploration within the context of nautch-girl art. While music is typically non-existent in painting in the unequivocal sense, thereby presenting challenges in an interart comparison, it is possible to consider two other aspects of the presence of music in visual art: firstly, the visual portrayal of objects related to music, such as musical instruments, and secondly, a more abstract understanding of music as expressed in visual art through techniques analogous to those used in music.

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[37] 'And as any modern moviegoer knows, the tonal languages of exoticism and magnetic femininity are strikingly similar, relying on chromatic harmony, pulsating and often syncopated rhythms, irregular metrical accents, a deemphasis of the violin family (the backbone of Classical and Romantic art music), and sometimes scales or melodic patterns blatantly borrowed from specific foreign cultures – in short, on an aesthetically intriguing violation of Western High Art auditory norms.' See Linda Phyllis Austern, '"Forreine Conceites and Wandring Devises": The Exotic, the Erotic, and the Feminine', in *The Exotic In Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 26–27.

The lack of an orchestral score for *The Nautch Girl* poses challenges against attaining a profound analysis of the operetta's musical representation. However, the existing vocal score and various critics' reviews of the operetta aid our understanding of the musical aspects of *The Nautch Girl*. Notably, there seemed to be very little in the music of *The Nautch Girl* that replicated the music of nautch performances in India. On the contrary, the music generally adhered to the typical Gilbert and Sullivan style of British parlour ballads. In fact, the music of the operetta was even criticised for lack of originality and its deep-seated tendency to abide by the trends of similar contemporary works, such as Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*.[38] Similarly, George Bernard Shaw reproached *The Nautch Girl's* numbers for posing as the "characterless equivalents" of songs featured in *The Mikado*.[39] He further attacked the operetta for its apparent lack of loyalty to the conventions of comic opera by allegedly focusing more on making fun than making music,[40] suggesting that it was not even an adequate copy of *The Mikado*. Another critic also picked up on the premiere production's apparently "dull moments", but also praised the existence of some tuneful melodies.[41] According to such accounts, *The Nautch Girl* did not appear to offer anything particularly special in terms of its music and was rather a "cheap copy" of contemporary works such as *The Mikado*. From this it would seem that the charm of the nautch girls did not extend to the musical domain.

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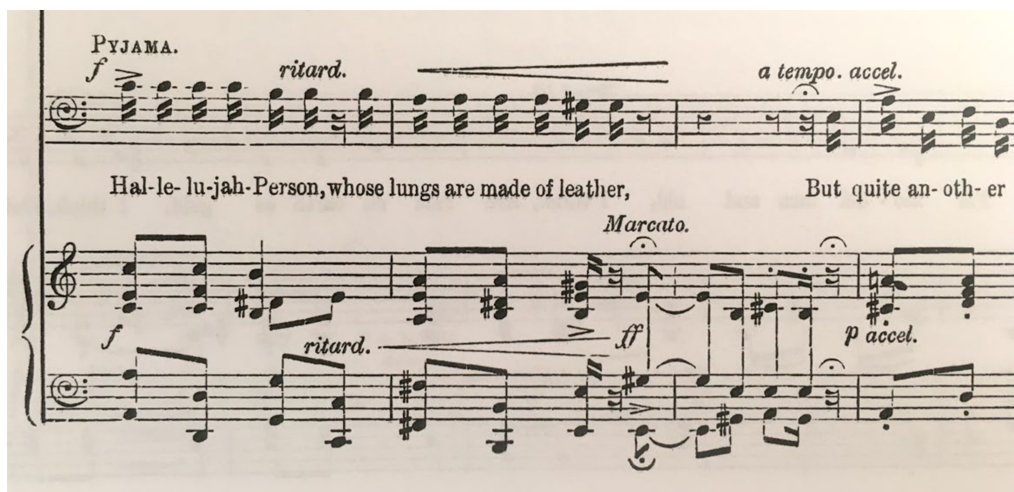
[38] 'The New Savoy Opera'.
[39] George Bernard Shaw, *Music in London 1890-94*, ed. David Trutt, vol. 1 (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1932), 27.
[40] Shaw, 1:27.
[41] 'The "Nautch Girl" at the Savoy', 1 July 1891.

The music of the operetta was explicably embedded in British, European and Western musical traditions, engaging the audience with an air of familiarity. Like many musical entertainments of the time, *The Nautch Girl* quoted or borrowed from other well-known British performative works, promoting further familiarity through aural interaction with the audience's memory. For instance, the operetta's 'Quartette' (No. 8) quotes a strain from the 'Hallelujah' chorus of Handel's *Messiah*, accompanied by a lyrical reference to the work:



Source: Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl Or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 53.

In another example, the Rajah's entrance song (No. 7) adopts the same rhythmic pattern as the popular British nursery rhyme 'The House that Jack Built':

> And this is the patriotic lay
> That's sung by the lords and ladies gay
> That serve the Prince, long may he reign,
> That owns the clear and subtle brain,
> That rules the heart so staunch and true,
> That nerves the eye of hazel hue,
> That steers the arm all cut and scored,
> That wields the sharp and trusty sword,

That guards the big ancestral gem
That decks the royal diadem
Of the Rajah of Chutneypore.[42]

These references or tributes to other well-known British works highlights the Britishness of the operetta, seemingly attempting to deliver a familiar sound to the audience, despite the Indian nautch-girl setting. The reception of these borrowings or quotations relied heavily on the collective memory or knowledge of specifically *British* audience members, with the effect of elevating comedy and self-awareness. In this way, these particular musical examples did not emphasise "Indianness" or *difference*, as so many other aspects of the operetta did.

Considering that the music of *The Nautch Girl* appeared to be received as typically British and barely exceptional for many critics, the art of locating the operetta in a particular cultural setting did not appear to be a strong practice in music. However, selected numbers in the operetta appeared to allude to the "exotic" locale through the use of "Oriental" sounding melodies, rhythms and harmonics, as William Hicks notes the occurrence of in 'The Chorus of the Nautch Girls' (No. 4), 'Punka's Entrance and Song' (No. 7), the Finale of Act I (No. 10), Bumbo's Entrance and Song' as well as the preceding 'Melos' (Nos. 14 a-d and 15), and the 'Indian Lullaby' (No. 22).[43] However, rather than adopting particular musical techniques and styles employed in conventional nautch performances or any Indian musical works, these pieces merely employed generic exoticist musical devices that

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[42] Edward Solomon, George Dance, and Frank Desprez, 'A Comic Opera, in Two Acts, Entitled The Nautch Girl, or, The Rajah of Chutneypore' (London, 1891), 12.
[43] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 21.

represented a homogenous "Other", indicating no real act of location beyond the generic stereotype.

Hicks notes that Solomon's music for *The Nautch Girl* features a "quasi-exotic manner of composition" through the repeated use of "static and unmoving harmony, colored by occasional ambiguous harmonies, which inevitably fall back to the tonic without any extended harmonic progression."[44] Using such devices to furnish melodies with hints of colour, Solomon's work was strongly entrenched in "Western" musical traditions (including exoticist music), loosely alluding to a generic "Other" while maintaining a dominant British manifestation in a significant musical asymmetry.

Remarkably, however, various reviews of the premiere production of *The Nautch Girl* claimed that the music of the operetta featured "authentic" Indian elements. A critic from the *Daily Times* took note of the frequent "Eastern tinge" that supplied "local colour" to the choruses and accompaniments,[45] while *The Graphic* noted that the music was "tinged with an Eastern flavour".[46] Similarly, *The Times*' review stated:

> In several passages, and notably in the last number, local colour is used with happy effect and much intelligence. Actual Hindoo melodies are apparently introduced here and there.[47]

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[44] Hicks, 25.
[45] 'The "Nautch Girl" at the Savoy', 1 July 1891.
[46] 'The Nautch Girl', *The Graphic*, 4 July 1891.
[47] 'Opening Night Review.'

Critics appeared to be fixated on the element of "authentic" borrowing from India that apparently featured in the operetta. British-based composers may indeed have had exposure to actual Indian melodies, perhaps through nautch troupes or other Indian performance groups that had toured in Europe, though no such account exists in the case of Solomon. However, travelling composers and music compilers such as William Hamilton Bird were renowned to have compiled Indian melodies and transcribed them in western musical notation in their works.[48] Such published works, which contributed to the *couleur locale* of musical practices of the time, would have been vastly accessible to British-based composers and musicians. Notably, Ian Woodfield asserts that many of the genres of Indian music that Bird compiled in his *Oriental Miscellany* were associated in particular with nautch dancers, such as the *rekhta*,[49] suggesting that many of these recorded works were interpretations and compilations of music from nautch performances. In addition, various ethnographic works transcribed (or, at least, attempted to transcribe) Indian music to Western musical notation,[50] and an entire array of English-language publications centring on Indian music were published in the nineteenth century.[51] Through such resources, it was indeed possible for a composer such as Edward Solomon to have gained a stronger understanding of music that accompanied nautch performances – however, its specific presence in *The Nautch Girl* is difficult to pinpoint from the vocal and piano score alone. Moreover, while British transcriptions of actual music from India could facilitate

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[48] See William Hamilton Bird's *Oriental Miscellany*
[49] Woodfield, *Music of the Raj*, 158.
[50] Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*; Woodfield, *Music of the Raj*, 8.
[51] Farrell, *Indian Music and the West.*

British education about the music of India, the translation of complex Indian scales to a Europe notation system likely entailed inaccuracies and misrepresentations of the original melodies. In his *Oriental Miscellany*, Bird himself states:

> The Raagnies are so void of meaning, and any degree of regularity, that it is impossible to bring them into a form for performance, by any fingers but those of their country (Hindostan)[.][52]

Moreover, many of these compilations did not offer a note-for-note transcription of the Indian melodies being recorded, but rather offered variations, adaptations and even additions. Bird stated that the "greatest imperfection [...] in the music in every part of India, is the total want of accompanyments [sic]",[53] and so he added his own. Nevertheless, these compilations could offer somewhat of a glimpse for general guidance about music from nautch girls and other Indian performers. Whether Solomon used "real" sources of Indian music for the composition of *The Nautch Girl* remains unclear, but he would certainly have had the means to do so, in view of the British involvement in India and the subsequent dissemination of (largely predisposed) information about Indian cultural practices throughout Europe.

Notably, reviews offered an interesting insight into the reception of Elgar's *The Crown of India* from the musical perspective, with specific reference to the masque's alleged departure from the norms of Orientalist music practices. One review stated:

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[52] William Hamilton Bird, *The Oriental Miscellany: Airs of Hindustan, Compiled and Adapted for the Harpsichord, &c.* (Calcutta: J. Cooper, 1789), 'Introduction'.
[53] Bird, 'Introduction'.

> Sir Edward has, in the most interesting way, avoided the conventional features of Eastern music, obtaining an atmosphere with much skill by rhythmical means, any reference to the customary but entirely imaginary Eastern scale in his melodic line being happily unpursued. The "March of the mogul Emperors" has a fine and stirring rhythm, and the Dances of the Nautch Girls and Warriors are both compositions of decided character and prudent quaintness.[54]

Another critic said:

> In composing the music Sir Edward Elgar has avoided the usual Occidental treatment of Oriental material, though the score contains ideas drawn from Oriental sources.[55]

Both reviews indicated that Elgar did not adopt the perceived "Eastern" or "Oriental" styles of music, although the latter implies that the music was inspired by such styles. In these excerpts, it appeared that Elgar was praised for steering clear of conventions of Orientalist music, thereby claiming the superiority of "Western" styles of music that Elgar apparently favoured in this work.

The music of the nautch was also explored in other British musical works, including those without a dramatic or visual element. For example, the first song of Helen and Granville Bantock's *Songs of India* (1898) was entitled 'The nautch girl', making it a prominent feature in the set. The *Songs of India* were part of the wider *Songs of the East* collection, with which the renowned Orientalist fetishist Granville and his wife Helen attempted to capture the

[54] 'MUSIC: SIR EDWARD ELGAR'S "MASQUE."', *The Observer*, 17 March 1912.
[55] 'The Crown Of India'.

"authentic Eastern" soundscape.[56] But the resultant work was rather deficient, derived largely from the "orientalist imagination"[57] and adhering to typical exoticist musical practices with the use of droning and vocal melismas. In fact, the various sets of songs that made up the *Songs of the East* sounded very similar. Fiona Richards noted that it was "rather a general notion of what makes music 'Eastern', with much use of Western, Germanic harmony."[58] It is no surprise, then, that Bantock and Bantock's *The nautch girl* offered little more than the usual musical Orientalism of its contemporaries. From such examples, it appears that British music linked to nautch girl music generally did not intend to (or perhaps failed to) accurately capture the various musical styles of the nautch, rather creating and locating a generic "Other".

But critics' claims that works such as *The Nautch Girl* made use of "real" Indian melodies are important to explore further within the historical context of cultural definitions and stereotyping. Perhaps one of the reasons why critics presumed that some of the musical numbers featured "authentic" Indian touches was the inclusion of Hindi/Urdu words in the music of the operetta. For example, the 'Indian Lullaby' (No. 22) prominently features the nautch girls singing the word "Cubbadar", referring to the Hindi/Urdu word *khabardar*.[59] Perhaps it was the inclusion of local Indian words that led reviewers to assume

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[56] Fiona Richards, 'Granville Bantock and the Orient in the Midlands', in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s to 1940s: Portrayal of the East*, ed. Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 136.
[57] Nalini Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj: India in the English Musical Imagination, 1897-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 113.
[58] Richards, 'Granville Bantock and the Orient in the Midlands', 138.
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that the piece was based on Indian songs. Similarly, in Charles Smith's musical entertainment *A Trip to Bengal*, the nautch scene is the only part of the work that features an Indian language, while the rest of the work is in the English language. Rather differently to *The Nautch Girl*'s 'Indian Lullaby', however, the lyrics of the nautch song in *A Trip to Bengal* are sung entirely in Bengali, indicating a likely connection to an actual Indian song (or poem). It is certainly thought-provoking that Charles Smith chose an Indian language only for the nautch scene of this work, emphasising the connection between the nautch girl and conspicuously *Indian* identity. Unfortunately, the deficiency of any musical scoring or reviews for *A Trip to Bengal* makes it impossible to analyse the work's musical aspects any further than the lyrics. In the case of *The Nautch Girl*, the accuracy of claims of "authentic" Indian melodies or songs being used cannot be reasonably confirmed, but can nonetheless be explored further through the musical analysis of the vocal and piano score and performance reviews. Beyond the basics of adopting aspects of Indian languages in musical works, claimed musical authenticity might also have been achieved through the adoption of exoticist musical devices within the specific context of the Indian nautch. Indeed, various musical works featuring nautch girls evidently employed particular Western musical devices and styles to locate the music within a particular geographical and cultural setting – one that existed outside of the so-called "West". In particular, there appeared to be great emphasis on vociferous percussive elements, creative rhythmic progressions, and vibrant chromaticism in British nautch-girl artworks.

Percussion was remarkably prominent and appeared to be a particular aspect of the music of nautch performances that caught European interest, although not necessarily in a

positive light. In her writing, Fanny Parkes, who was prominently critical of nautch girls and their performances, noted the rather prominent use of kettle-drums during a particular nautch performance that she had attended in India.[60] Similarly, on the subject of percussion used by temple musicians (who would have accompanied temple dancers), French missionary Abbe J A Dubois commented:

> The sounds produced by these instruments are far from pleasing, and may even appear hideous to European ears.[61]

Furthermore, throughout his book, Dubois referred to the "discordant" music of India, offering great criticisms about the use of percussion but also the alleged monotony, shrillness and piercing nature of Indian music. In contrast, however, are the words of the artist Val Prinsep on his experience of a nautch performance on a badminton court in Jodhpur:

> Torches are lit all round ; a big drum sounds ; the women stand in a circle, and the dance begins. [...] Ever and anon the great drum in the centre gives a boom, when the women all throw up their arms together and behind all, the great moon rises over the dark trees.[62]

In this particular account, the critic and artist is in awe of the entire spectacle of the nautch, placing great emphasis on the centrality of the drum in the performance. However, such

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[60] Parkes, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, 429.
[61] Abbe J. A. Dubois and Henry K. Beauchamp, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies (1905)* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 587.
[62] Prinsep, *Imperial India: An Artist's Journals*, 141.

kind of praise for the percussion of nautch performances was rare, even amongst artists. For even fellow artist William Daniell, who generally praised the performances of nautch girls, found the music of nautches distasteful.[63] The general British outlook tended to manifest great disinclination for the percussive elements of actual nautch performances. It is remarkable, then, that various musical works about nautch girls incorporated the centrality of percussion into their works, perhaps in an effort to emulate what British patrons had heard in India, real or imagined. Reviews highlighted the use of heavy percussion in *The Nautch Girl*, which was an oft-used tool in musical exoticism that could be seen as an attempt to imitate the sounds of the "Orient" but could also be seen in the context of a nautch-girl artwork to mimic the sounds of the nautch. In his exhaustive review of *The Nautch Girl*, George Bernard Shaw stated:

> […] Mr Solomon has been very hard on me. He has given me he worst headache I ever had in a theatre by an instrumental score which is more wearisome than the conversation of an inveterate punster, and more noisy than the *melodrame* which accompanies the knockabout business in a music-hall. Mr Carte had better remove the bassoon, the piccolo, the cymbals, the triangle, and the drums, both *timpani* and *tamburo*, from the theatre; for Mr Solomon is clearly not to be trusted with them.[64]

Bernard Shaw's comments indicate that the operetta featured an unusually prominent use of percussions and percussive rhythms, much to his displeasure. The heavy use of percussion in "exotically"-set works became somewhat of a common practice, particularly

[63] Daniell and Caunter, *The Oriental Annual*, 21.
[64] David Trutt, ed., 'London Music by George Bernard Shaw', 1894 1888, 26.

during the twentieth century;[65] therefore it was unsurprising that percussion was so prominent in *The Nautch Girl*. Usually, such devices were not regionally specific beyond the homogenous "Orient",[66] but within the context of an operetta set in India – and, more specifically, of nautch girls in India – such devices could be employed in a more location-specific setting. Heavy percussion could be seen as an attempt to imitate the sound of the "Orient", particularly where it was understood that percussion played a key role in many Eastern performances and also particularly in dance performances. The fact that the operetta that was strictly about nautch girls provided another context within which percussion could be appropriated. Considering Bernard Shaw's very critical account regarding the percussion of the operetta, it appeared that despite the trending use of prominent percussion in "exotically"-set works, *The Nautch Girl*, rather unusually, featured a yet more prominent percussive element, which could indicate that Solomon might have made a conscious attempt to bring the percussions of the "true" nautch to the British stage.

Similarly, Elgar employs percussive rhythms and a percussion-heavy orchestra in *The Crown of India* to evoke the "Orient" in his masque. Remarkably, for this masque alone, Elgar developed a special gong and incorporated an array of drums, cymbals and a tambourine,[67] emphasising the flagrant use of percussion in this work. Comparably, William Hicks notes that in *The Nautch Girl* the gong is instructed to sound on the final beat of the measure in

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[65] Scott, 'Orientalism and Musical Style'.
[66] The first occurrences of Orientalist music that focused on percussion (drums, cymbals, triangles etc.) appeared to have derived from Turkish music from the Ottoman Empire, resulting in the famous alla turca style. See Taylor, 'Peopling the Stage', 57.
[67] Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, 67.

two places at the end of Act I,[68] proclaiming the impossibility of marriage between Indru and the nautch girl Holly Beebee. In the second occurrence of the gong, in the final bar of the first act's 'Finale', even the words of the libretto refer to the "beat [of] the mystic gong."[69] The gong, which featured in both *The Nautch Girl* and *The Crown of India*, was unlikely to have been used in actual nautch performances in India, since it was an instrument that had its origins in East and South East Asia, but it nevertheless came to be identified as a musical representative of the homogenous "exotic". In the operetta, the use of the term *mystic* in reference to the gong further validates both the nature of the gong and the operetta's setting as somewhere "exotic" and unfamiliar to the audience's own location. In this way, while not an Indian instrument, the gong could be appropriated as a one-fits-all exoticist musical device for the purpose of cultural location, while simultaneously making specific reference to the nautch through the emphasis on percussive elements.

The use of percussion is also particularly prevalent in *The Crown of India* towards the end of the number 'Dance of the Nautch Girls', with the combined use of the timpani, cymbals, bass drum and tom toms, furthering the association of nautch performances to percussive-heavy sounds. Moreover, Helen and Granville Bantock's 'The nautch girl' from *Songs of India* similarly emphasised how "fierce and wild the tom-toms beat",[70] conveying the

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[68] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 24.
[69] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 21.
[70] Quoted in Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj*, 126.

significance of percussion in non-dramatic musical works and corroborating the multitude of literary and musical accounts of nautch girls that existed in Britain.

It is apparent from these various examples that percussion played an important role in the British understanding of the nautch girls, despite cultural inaccuracies in terms of the precise instruments that were used. They appeared to echo accounts of actual performances from India, where Britons often called attention to the sounds of boisterous drums. For the European ear, then, the heavy use of percussion became associated with being "authentically Indian" (and indeed, "authentically Oriental"). In addition, as percussion did not have a definite pitch, it could be incorporated quite easily into "Western" instrumentation. This was in contrast to non-percussive instruments of the so-called "Orient", which often posed challenges in terms of intonation or pitch accuracy to the European ear. This resulted in either forcing Indian and other "Other" instruments into western intonation through a common process of disruption or violation, or the presentation of a contraposition as was prevalent in so many British nautch-girl artworks. While the musical aspect of percussion could not be translated into painting directly in the musical sense, it is interesting to note the strong visual presence of drums in various nautch-girl paintings, such as in Thomas Daniell's 1810 work (Figure 5), in which the dancing girl is accompanied by a woman playing what appears to be a tambourine and another with bells,[71] and 'Colonel Antoine-Louis Polier enjoying a nautch at his house in Lucknow' (Figure 6), in which a woman accompanies the nautch by playing (rather

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[71] Mildred Archer and Ronald Lightbown, *India Observed: India as Viewed by British Artists 1760-1860* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982), 43.

unusually) on the *daya* drum of a *tabla* set.[72] Understandably, in visual artworks about nautch girls, there was a dominant focus on the appearance of the nautch girl and, in many cases, her dance; music played a secondary, accompanying role. Nonetheless, it was very common for musical instruments – usually percussion and wind – to emphasise the musical aspect of the nautch performance in artworks, offering a visual trigger for musicality, and in particular percussiveness. British photographs of nautch girls within this period also contained the musicians, including percussionists,[73] thereby corroborating the significance of music in visual depictions of nautches. When presented with the image of percussion (whether photographic or painted), the sound of percussion is naturally evoked and assimilated into the viewer's reception, reverberating the rhythms of the nautch girls' dances and movements according to the individual interpretation of the viewer.

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[72] For more examples, see Mrs. C. Belnos, *A Nautch during the Puja Festival at the House of a Hindu Raja in Calcutta with European Guests*, c 1820, Hand-coloured engraving, c 1820; Mrs. C. Belnos, *Nautch Girl Sitting at the Feet of Two Memsahibs and Singing*, c 1820, Hand-coloured engraving, c 1820; Christopher Green, *Dancing Girls and Musicians from Madras*, c 1800, Drawing, c 1800, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchearly/nautchearly.html; John Luard, *'A Nautch,' from 'Views in India, Saint Helena and Car Nicobar'*, 1838, 1838, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchearly/nautchearly.html; Unknown Artist, *A Nautch Girl and Musicians*, c 1900, Postcard, c 1900, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchphotos/postcard1900s.jpg; Horace H. Wilson, *A Nautch in the Palace of the Ameer of Sind*, 1841, Lithograph, 1841, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchearly/grindlay1841.jpg.

[73] Examples include: Unknown Photographer, *Nautch Girl with Two Musicians*, c 1900, Photographic Print, c 1900, https://www.loc.gov/item/2001705518/; Samuel Bourne, *Native Nautch at Delhi or Shalimar*, 1864, Photographic Print, 1864, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchphotos/nautchphotos.html.

In musical entertainments, however, the use of percussion could be explored more comprehensively (through the sonic, visual and verbal), and it appeared to resonate with the general reception of actual nautch performances – specifically in terms of the emphatic, sometimes overburdening, percussion. This helped to establish the "exotic" Indian location of the work, but also contributed to emphasising the art of the (perceived) nautch and the importance of percussion in providing rhythm to the dance. In doing so, these works attempted to imitate the trends that Britons construed from actual Indian nautches, incorporating them within their own works through a process of interpretation and assimilation.

Similarly, pronounced changes in dynamics and rhythm could be employed to emulate the perceived aural peculiarities of the nautch performance. For instance, towards the end of Elgar's 'Dance of the Nautch Girls' in *The Crown of India*, the percussion is instructed to shift aggressively between the varied dynamics of *piano*, *fortissimo*, *forte* and *crescendo*, offering great dynamic variation. Additionally, in this piece Ghuman notes the prevalence of cross-rhythms and pointillism in the score,[74] as though the music were emphasising and emulating the movements of the dancing nautch girls. While in music, rhythm and dynamics are oft expressed structurally through the progression of a pattern of sound, in painting, rhythm and dynamism can be expressed structurally in the progression and manifestation of forms; of the general placement of a composition, and the lines and formations within it. This visual rhythm and dynamism is accomplished in the way that the

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[74] Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj*, 66.

viewer's eyes are encouraged to move across forms in a particular way and drawn towards particular forms, offering a kind of movement and progression comparable to the way that music does. For example, visual depictions frequently offer details of the draping and flowing of nautch girls' clothing, emphasising their fluidity and movement, as well as their connection to the nautch girls' bodies. The viewer's eyes are drawn to follow the creases and pleats of the nautch girls' clothing and the posture of her dancing limbs, eliciting the viewer's gaze to move rhythmically in various directions across the bodily form. Moreover, often such works offered contrasting focal points in the form of glittering jewellery and other striking ornaments (such as *hookahs* and other "exotic" signifiers), that would abruptly ensnare the viewer's attention in a play of dynamics. Similarly, the blunt lines of architectural forms in many nautch-girl paintings could help to guide the viewer's gaze towards a particular focal point (nautch girl or otherwise), or even break the viewer's gaze away from the fluidity of the nautch girls' clothing and general figure, offering a type of syncopation, or shift of accent.

Take, for instance, Tilly Kettle's group of dancing girls (Figure 13), where the two nautch girls are placed in the centre of the composition. The surrounding people in the image are painted with rather indistinct facial features, compared to the acute details in the facial features of the two nautch girls, which captures the viewer's attention. The two dancers are poised mid-dance, while the remaining figures on the canvas stand motionless, lacking this performative element of movement or rhythm. Furthermore, the clothing of the surrounding audience is predominantly creased either horizontally or vertically, in a neat manner that adopts a uniform rhythm. By comparison, the folds and wrinkles of the nautch

girls' clothing is far more distinctive and haphazard, flowing diagonally and horizontally across the canvas, casting dramatic shadows and thereby seizing the viewer's attention through syncopated rhythms. The flooring underneath the nautch girls also furthers the centrality and importance of the nautch girls in this image with the planks appearing vertically on the canvas, inviting the viewer's gaze to shift upwards towards the nautch girls. In this way, this painting lures the viewer through a series of rhythmic and dynamic shifts to focus on the cultural location of the subject – the nautch girls. This is reflective of the musical representation of the nautch girls, where intense rhythmic and dynamic changes were employed to reflect the nautch girls' movement and uniqueness. In the case of both musical and visual artworks, the resultant effect is to reveal difference; the nautch girls somehow stand out from their surroundings through unique rhythms and dynamics, drawing the audience's/viewer's attention towards them.

Differences in musical style also helped to distinguish nautch girls from other subjects within works. Such an expression of difference can be seen in the British artworks representing the nautch girls of India. In Edward Elgar's masque *The Crown of India*, the 'Dance of the Nautch Girls' number provides a vivid sound and image of the nautch girls, using musical gestures in a pointillistic manner (which emerged in the early twentieth century) to mimic the movements of the nautch girls' bodies.[75] The resultant effect is one of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, or a sound-colour melody, through a technique that was defined by

[75] Ghuman, 66.

the very composer who coined the term, Arthur Schoenberg, as a "fantasy of the future".[76] Through the use of musical colour and concepts of the perceived future, the music of the 'Dance of the Nautch Girls' expresses *difference*, compared to the other numbers of the masque that representing British characters, which offer more of the conventional and familiar pompous and militaristic sounds by comparison. This number is later followed by a 'Menuetto' which serves as the 'Entrance of John Company', in all its elegance and grandeur. Discussing the transition from the 'Dance of the Nautch Girls' to the succeeding 'Menuetto', an anonymous reviewer explained:

> This movement follows as if to illustrate the statement that 'East is East and West is West' in the dance as in other matters. Nothing could be in more effective contrast to the tempestuous conclusion of the Nautch Dance than this quiet and majestic old-world Minuet.[77]

The minuet evokes feelings of courtliness and aristocracy through traditional trills and grand rhythmic gestures, as Ghuman notes.[78] The transition, then, from the pointillistic "fantasy of the future" to the grand, "old-world" minuet also expresses a difference; one that is clearly highlighted in cultural terms between the Indian dancing girls and the Englishman of the masque, John Company.

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[76] Carl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the New Music: Essays by Carl Dahlhaus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 141.
[77] Unidentified review of The Crown of India suite performed at the Proms on 7 September 1912, EMB Cuttings, 41, as quoted in: Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj*, 69.
[78] Ghuman, 69.

While Elgar's ideological standpoint has been a significant point for debate, various scholars argue that he adopted aspects of imperialism in his musical works.[79] In essence, this would indicate that *The Crown of India* served the imperial cause. The masque was commissioned by Oswald Stoll, famous for expanding the audiences of music-hall entertainment, and written in 1912, with a libretto by Henry Hamilton.[80] The masque was performed in celebration of King George V's Delhi Durbar, which took place in 1911, marking the piece with strong political connections. *The Crown of India* was immensely successful, being performed live long beyond the initial two weeks under Elgar's conductorship, and with various arrangements and live performances following, and further performances through a succession of radio transmissions.[81]

It is certainly notable that Elgar and his colleagues had chosen to include a nautch and a graceful European minuet to contrast each other in this masque, offering polarity between the representatives of India and England in this work. Similarly, as noted earlier, Smith's *A Trip to Bengal*'s only passage to feature a local Indian language is the nautch scene, making it stand out as unique from the rest of the musical entertainment. Through such methods, the nautch girls and their performance were often marked out in artworks as unique and

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[79] For example, Corissa Gould argues that the neglected Crown of India score sheds light on Elgar's imperialistic beliefs: Corissa Gould, '"An Inoffensive Thing": Edward Elgar, The Crown of India and Empire', in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s to 1940s: Portrayal of the East*, ed. Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 147–63.
[80] Gould, 148.
[81] Gould, 151–52.

different. In doing so, these works perpetuated the "Otherness" of nautch girls, emphasising their distant cultural location.

Chromaticism, which involved the interspersing of the diatonic scales with foreign notes, was an oft-used tool in musical exoticism, as Derek Scott has described, and can be recognised in countless Orientalist operas, perhaps most famously in Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1875). Similarly, the operetta *The Nautch Girl* features various occurrences of chromaticism. For example, preceding the second occurrence of the gong, William Hicks notes that there is an eight-bar phrase in D minor, in which the first four measures are sung in a descending diatonic line after which the rhythmic pattern repeats but shifts to a descending chromatic line.[82] Hicks also notes another pertinent use of chromaticism in the fourth measure of the "Melos" of *The Nautch Girl*, when Pyjama is sharing his dramatic warning about the awakening of the idol Bumbo.[83]

Source: Solomon, Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl, Or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 115.

[82] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 24.
[83] Hicks, 25.

Here chromaticism is used as a tool to denote difference and uniqueness, which is unsurprising in a musical entertainment with an "exotic" setting. But in the particular context of a representation of a nautch (which also featured a musical aspect) and of India, such musical devices could be seen to represent – and subsequently be received as – the musical style of the nautches of India. When considering that chromaticism literally means *to colour*, this concept can be translated into painting in a rather uncomplicated, though perhaps somewhat facile, manner. How an artist chooses to paint a subject (in this case the nautch girl) involves the careful selection of a key of colours as well as the forms to express those colours, with intent to evoke particular emotions, sentiments and memorial associations. As explained in an example by Burnett and Nitzberg:

> If the prevailing color scheme is pastel in the manner of Renoir, the painter's "key" in this instance, the insertion of dark opaque colors, indiscriminately applied, would draw one's attention away from the main focus of the painting and, indeed, would interfere with one's understanding of the painter's visual deployment, development, if you will, of the painting's primary color scheme.[84]

The use of colour (or chromaticism) that is employed in musical representations of nautch girls to mark out difference can be extended to painting in this way. In Thomas Hickey's painting of three women (Figure 8), which was originally presumed by art historians to represent temple dancing girls or courtesans,[85] rich and vivid colours are employed to demarcate the three women from the dusky background, which features the natural forms

[84] Henry Burnett and Roy Nitzberg, *Composition, Chromaticism and the Developmental Process: A New Theory of Tonality* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 2.
[85] As suggested by Mildred Archer, *India and British Portraiture, 1770-1825* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet & Co., 1979), 230; De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 233.

of sky and foliage. These intense colours, which stand out from the background, can be compared to the foreign notes interspersing a diatonic scale in musical chromaticism. Moreover, the abundant variety of colouring that represent details on the jewellery and the creases on the saris of the women are particularly striking, distinguishing these aspects even further from the background. The effect of peculiarity and difference can be seen to be promoted further through the artist's employment of an unusually dark tonal palette, which seems to contrast starkly with Hickey's other paintings of female subjects, such as *Indian Lady, perhaps "Jemdanee", bibi of William Hickey*, Calcutta, 1787, which offers a softer, lighter and warmer palette, to evoke a sense of beauty, elegance and femininity. De Almeida and Gilpin argue that Hickey's painting of the three temple dancers or courtesans reflected the imperial view of "distastefulness" towards dancing girls, suggesting that artistic views on nautch girls changed corresponding to the general imperial stance.[86] This might have been reflected in this painting through the dark palette and the piercing gaze of the nautch girls that both combine to generate discomfort for the viewer. In various other paintings, a similar effect of distinct "foreign" colours are used to compel the nautch girls to stand out from the background, and to draw particular attention to the jewellery and other culturally-identifiable features of nautch girls, such as in Carpenter's two nautch girls (Figure 1) and Kettle's nautch-girl works (Figures 3 and 13). As noted earlier, various reviews of the operetta *The Nautch Girl* highlighted the use of "colour", referring in particular to visual aspects of costumes, music and other cultural aspects that were associated with local Indian culture. These examples showed that colour, in whatever form, could indeed serve to be

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[86] De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 232–33.

"foreign" and attention-grabbing. It appears, then, that chromaticism was significant in both painting and musical entertainments in presenting nautch girls as different and unique from other subjects, as well as to divert the audience's attention to them or to particular aspects of them, through the use of bright "foreign" colours, shimmering textures or other eye-catching details.

It is not possible to draw any far-reaching generalisations from European accounts of music accompanying actual dances performed by "nautch girls" because they were so rather diverse in style, form and content. However, there did appear to be great emphasis on the alleged monotony, shrillness and unmusicality of the sounds.[87] One might speculate as to whether this distaste was predetermined by the tenets of imperialist discourse or whether there was a genuine misunderstanding of (or even dislike for) the music of the nautch. Nevertheless, British artists attempted to emulate or interpret nautch music in their own representative works. Though largely European in sound and style, these works adopted various exoticist musical devices that helped to culturally locate the work as an exotic "Other", in terms of both the region and the type of performer under scrutiny. The use of devices such as heavy percussion, rhythmic syncopation, and chromaticism were already becoming embedded within "Western" musical tradition, deriving from attempts to represent the "Orient". The emulation of the music of the nautch was merely a contributor to this continuous process. The alleged "local colour" that various composers and reviewers claimed to have introduced and experienced respectively illustrates that there

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[87] For examples, see Dubois and Beauchamp, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies (1905)*; Daniell and Caunter, *The Oriental Annual*; Parkes, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*.

was particular significance in the genuine (or authentic) representation of India. The case of representations of nautch girls is particularly noteworthy since the dance, which is traditionally accompanied by music, has subsequently been incorporated and reflected in British musical works, within which British interpretations or renditions of nautch music are performed – in essence, it is the adoption of an art within an art. It appears that many of the musical devices adopted to represent nautch music tended to follow the fashions of "Western" music of the time but were also utilised within the specific context of resembling the music of the nautch. The crossovers of these kinds of device with those visible in paintings (in terms of rhythm and colour, for example) imply that there were particular perceptions of the nautch that could be emphasised across different formats of art.

Assertions of "authenticity" in locating the nautch girl musically appeared prominently with regard to various works, and various critics have certainly claimed an aspect of borrowing from actual Indian melodies, but it has been challenging to trace any evidence in support of these claims. Nonetheless, the *claim* of authenticity itself is enough to render the significance of British emulation of perceived Indian nautch-girl art, in an attempt to offer a true representation of the nautch and, quite possibly, a subsequent appreciation of the art. In the artist Prinsep's description of his experience of a nautch girl's song, he states:

> The Indian airs are some of them very wild and pleasant, though of course all sung through the nose. I do not know that they have ever been written down for the English public. Like the Arab airs, they ought

> to be collected, and would, I am sure, give some ideas to our musicians, as the Hungarian music has already done.[88]

Prinsep acknowledging the unique and likable aspects of the music of the nautch girls and India in general reflects that the reception was not all bad. It demonstrated that despite dominant imperialist discourses, there still appeared to be pockets of appreciation for the music of the nautch that were significant enough to warrant recordings (albeit inaccurately in "Western" musical notation) and renderings onstage in different forms. It appeared that the British understanding of the musical aspects of the nautch were part of a broad cultural process, that involved: listening to performances in India; providing literary and visual accounts about them; transcribing and compiling them using their own theoretical frameworks; disseminating them amongst European publics for further interpretation and rendition, and subsequently reincorporating them within the folds of their own works.[89] Through this process, musical works about the nautch furthered and even contributed to the traditions of British exoticist music.

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[88] Prinsep, *Imperial India: An Artist's Journals*, 95.

[89] It is interesting to note that the acts of absorbing, collecting, compiling, transferring, exhibiting and developing described here resonates with the anthropological collection, cataloguing and display of objects in a museum for purposes of satiating and furthering curiosity and politically-conditioned knowledge.

Dance

It comes as no surprise that the aspect of dance was another prominent aspect about nautch-girl artworks. In fact, many of the depictions tended to feature a dance performance, understandably so since it was so central to the perceived concept of the nautch girl. The performance of dance is doubly important in artworks about nautch girls because of the embedding of a performance (the nautch) within a performance (the artwork) – whether musical, visual, or an amalgamation of both. Barbara Bolt's treatise regarding the performative aspect of visual art in *Art Beyond Representation* offers a significant point for consideration*:*

> [A]rt is a performative, rather than merely a representational practice… [T]hrough creative practice, a dynamic material exchange can occur between objects, bodies and images. In the dynamic productivity of material practice, reality can get into images. Imaging, in turn, can produce real material effects in the world. The potential of a mutual reflection between objects, images and bodies, forms the basis of my argument for the deformational and transformative potential of images. This performative potential constitutes the power of imaging.[90]

Within the context of nautch-girl artworks, this element of the performative can be identified in a multitude of facets and can facilitate our understanding of how objects, images and bodies within representations of nautch girls interact with each other and produce a power that can be emitted to its audience. This is particularly significant in the context of artistic representations of dance – arguably the core of the nautch – through an

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[90] Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 8.

understanding of how the performative body is expressed in a performance on the canvas or on the stage. An artwork about nautch girls, regardless of its format, contains within it the potential to evoke certain reactions amongst its audience through its representation of a subject, but it can also promote transformation in the way that the performative process of a dance is incorporated into the secondary performative process of the artwork. Through this process, the dance of the nautch girl transgresses and transmutes, permeating "Western" performative and artistic practices. Intrinsically, this relies on a formidable interaction between the artist, the subject, the artwork and its audience, as well as the social setting within which this exchange takes place.

The most discernible representations of the dance of nautch girls in both music and the visual arts manifested themselves in the form of visual or physical representations of the nautch. Whether dynamically progressing through a rehearsed sequence of steps and moves onstage or captured stagnant in the middle of a striking pose, the nautch girl was frequently represented in her role as a dancer. Indeed, her profession made her a common feature of British artworks simply because of the entertaining and alluring element of her dance. In this way, the unique moves of the nautches were encapsulated in artworks, uniquely identifiable as the dances of the nautch girls of India. The musical works *The Nautch Girl*, *The Crown of India* and *A Trip to Bengal* all featured the visual presentation of at least one nautch. In the case of the former two, these were carefully directed, choreographed and rehearsed. In the case of the latter, the nautch served as a significant turning point in the plot of the musical entertainment, though no evidence has been found regarding its choreographic specificities. In musical dramas such as operas and masques,

artists enjoyed the opportunity to interpret and emulate the dance of the nautch girl. Whether these emulations were based on actual nautch performances, interpreted from accounts of actual nautch performances or conjured from artists' imaginations is unascertainable, but given the importance of retaining "authenticity" in other aspects of nautch-girl representations, it is likely that attempts were made to adhere to accounts of actual performances from female dancers in India. Interestingly, in a review of *The Nautch Girl*'s premiere production, a critic claimed that "it was not the true Nautch dance that was given",[91] expressing disappointment at the lack of authenticity of the dance. One can only speculate whether it was the limitations of censorship at the Savoy Theatre that shed the dance of its authentic aspects.[92]

In a review of Elgar's *The Crown of India*, *The Observer* wrote:

> [I]t is in the marches, the incidental music accompanying the spoken word, and the Oriental dances that the best and most taking music is to be found."[93]

That the dances were considered "Oriental" emphasised that the performances appeared to align with conventional perceptions of the so-called "Orient", although there was no further regional specificity made.

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[91] 'The New Comic Opera at the Savoy.'
[92] 'Opening Night Review.'
[93] 'MUSIC: SIR EDWARD ELGAR'S "MASQUE."'

Beyond the visual representation of the nautch in musical entertainments, it is also possible to consider the musical representation of dance. With regard to *The Crown of India*, Ghuman notes how in the 'Dance of the Nautch Girls' Elgar conjures the perceived *kathak* dance through musical pointillism.[94] This enabled the music of the work to feature a secondary performative quality as expressed through dance, coordinating with and underscoring the movements of the nautch girls as they danced. In this way, the music itself could articulate the act and art of dancing. Later in the work, Ghuman continues, the 'Allegro Molto' offers the "relentless pulsating of Elgar's 'Indian' drum ('tomtoms'), along with fortissimo parallel fifths and a swirling sixteenth-note figure in the flutes and piccolo, [which] evoke the perceived primitive or barbarous nature of the nautch".[95] In this way, the music of the masque accentuated the effects of the dance performance, emphasising its unique identity and its significance.

It is challenging to further evaluate the dance performances of musical works about nautch girls, since little evidence can be traced in terms of stage direction. However, it can be fairly assumed that the dances were choreographed with a particular idea of the nautch in mind (whether "authentic" or imperialistically informed). At the very least, it is clear that musical entertainments featuring nautch girls featured at least one dance, exhibiting the main conduct of the nautch profession. Regardless of the growing anti-nautch movement, nautch performances continued to be emulated in British musical works throughout the

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[94] Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj*, 66.
[95] Ghuman, 66.

long nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. This demonstrated just how enamoured Britons were by the nautch, despite its controversies, to the point that they would recreate it onstage as well as on the canvas.

In many a painting and illustration, nautch girls were also captured mid-dance. Some appeared to be rather suggestive and inviting, such as Wilson's 1841 lithograph featuring a nautch in the palace of the Ameer of Sind (Figure 18), which focused on the male gaze upon the performing woman and her forthcoming reciprocation. More observational works were concerned with particular dance moves, such as Lady Lawley's nautch girl (Figure 14), which focused on the movements of the nautch girl's hands and arms, and Menpes' 'Nautch Girls, India' (Figure 19), which emphasised the synchronicity of the dance amongst a group of identical nautch girls. Tilly Kettle's 'Dancers' (Figure 13) placed particular emphasis on the movements of the nautch girls' arms and legs, as well as their facial expressions. Regardless of these differences, the artists' attempts to capture the nature of the nautch contributed to a generalised British understanding about nautch girls and their profession. In turn, such imagery would help to shape British knowledge and memory about the nautch, contributing to her perceived identity. The nautch girl was primarily a dancer and was represented in various artworks fulfilling this role, unknowingly evoking responses from her audience. And yet numerous nautch-girl paintings and illustrations focused on the nautch girl in a state of idleness rather than in a state of dance, which is explored further in Chapter IV.

The general diversity in the way that paintings and illustrations depicted the dances of the nautch girls highlights how artists picked up on a variety of differing aspects. In the visual arts, the act of *copying* artistic styles from India for works about nautch girls was less frequent – or at least less visible. While music tended to be flexible in occasionally attempting to create a stylistic atmosphere akin to (or somehow representative of) a nautch performance or Indian or even "Oriental" music more generally, paintings in the nautch girl genre did not generally attempt to copy Indian styles of painting and were rather painted using European techniques – those that the artists were trained in and accustomed to. The contrast of the rigidity in painting style versus the flexibility of musical style is not confined to the nautch genre and highlights a significant difference between the two art forms during the long nineteenth century. But within the context of the nautch girl genre of artworks, music was specifically significant owing to its presence in actual dance performances. This nested effect did not occur in paintings, although the performative aspects of the nautch girl could nonetheless bear strong presence in painting. What was common amongst all these artistic representations of nautch girls, however, was the demonstration of performative aspects ascribed to the nautch girl as a subject through unique dance stances and poses that a British audience could subsequently associate with India, and to nautch girls specifically. Quite often, it was the combination of their elaborate costumes, exotic signifiers and their unique dance poses that contributed to image of the nautch girl as a cultural entity that was unique and different to her supposed equivalents in Britain. Quite palpably, the nautch girls' dances in these works were clearly incongruent to representations of British, European or "Western" dances.

Narrative aspects of nautch-girl artworks also revealed various trends regarding the cultural location of the nautch girl and the establishment of her alleged authenticity. Various British discourses about the nautch girl revealed an emphasis on the need for her to be saved or rescued, or her desperation for escape from ill fate. Alluding to the imperialist rhetoric of the civilising mission, nautch girls were often victimised in works with the effect of justifying colonial intervention. In many works (fictional and non-fictional alike), India was juxtaposed with a superior "West", whether the latter was represented by Britain, Europe, Christianity or another categorical "Self" or "Occident". Through the anti-nautch movement, this trend was exploited substantially, where the nautch girls were often doubly victimised as both Indians and as women who needed salvaging from the alleged constraints of their religion, their profession and their general social circumstances.

In the case of Solomon's operetta, while *The Nautch Girl* contains only Indian characters, there are various references to Holly Beebee wishing to escape with Indru to a foreign land (and in some cases specifically to Paris or London):

> And fly unto a foreign land,
> And say farewell for evermore
> To cross and cruel Chutneypore.[96]

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[96] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 22.

According to the narrative of the operetta, the alleged tragedies inflicted upon persons in the land of Chutneypore could be resolved through escape to "foreign" domains. It insinuated that the ill fate of the characters of the operetta was a direct consequence of the characters' location, whereas foreign lands could provide sanctuary and relieve a person of his/her misfortunes. The continuous repetition of this message within the narrative of the operetta is significant to note because it does very little to drive the plot forward, and rather serves as a tangential but politically and socially significant remark about location. To put it briefly, according to the narrative of the operetta, Europe would provide refuge from the alleged troubles of the Hindu caste system that disallow the nautch girl Holly Beebee from marrying Indru:

> Away, away
>   Across the main,
> Beyond the sway
>   Of Brahma's reign,
> Unto a spot
>   Far o'er the sea,
> Where caste is not
>   And men are free.[97]

In another section of the operetta, it is made clear that Europe offers economic fruitfulness, where the nautch troupe is shown to achieve such great successes during their tour of Paris and London that they have been publicised in the newspapers.[98]

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[97] Dance and Desprez, 23.
[98] Dance and Desprez, 25.

The Nautch Girl is not unique in this assertion of Indian women requiring aid from the West. For instance, in Elgar's *The Crown of India*, following the opening of the masque with a nautch performance, the Indian cities (all personified as females) quarrel over who should be the capital, and it only thanks to English intervention (personified by males) that the situation is successfully resolved. This gender binary is of profound significance, where men are placed in a dominant position of authority in order to help to govern and quash the petty squabbling between the seemingly helpless "female" Indians in the masque. Imperialism resonates brazenly here in the form of sexist and racial stereotyping, alluding to the alleged need for "Western" intervention in India.

Returning to *The Nautch Girl*, it is significant that it is the protagonist, a nautch girl, who requires sanctuary, reflecting the numerous literary works that claimed that the nautch girl of India, with her corrupting profession, required guidance from the "West". Once again, the significance of geographical and cultural location comes into play, with clear polarities between the Indian nautch girl and the "Western" saviours. And yet various British literary works and other discourses from the anti-nautch movement claimed that men were the victims of the bewitching and empowered nautch girls,[99] which offered a glaring contradiction or challenge to the notion of the nautch girls as the helpless maidens awaiting rescue.

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[99] For example, see Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, 145.

Differences were also highlighted in the narratives of staged works through the inclusion of unusual or "exotic" aspects to the plot, from the rather incongruous capital punishment of "death by crocodile" to absurdly unrealistic ritual practices and bizarrely behaving religious idols that come to life. It appeared that one of the underlying effects of such narrative stances in both the operetta and the masque was to crudely accentuate the difference between life in India and life in Britain; whereby one featured inherent dangers, misfortune and quarrelling, while the other offered freedom of marriage, economic successes and political resolution.

Society and Religion

Whether *devadasi*, *tawaif*, *kanchani*, or *kalavantin*, the performing women collectively categorised by the British under the label "nautch girls" were often attached to temples, courts or private organisations.[100] These affiliations demonstrated how the nautch girl was intrinsically embedded within religious and societal practices through various facets and with varying effects. One of the earliest records of the codification of female dance performance in India is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Science of Drama) – a Hindu text on the performing arts that dates from between 200 BCE and 200 CE that is commonly attributed

[100] Alison Arnold and Bruno Nettl, *South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent*, vol. 5, The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music (London: South Asia: The Indian Subcontinent, 2000), 409.

to the sage Bharata Muni.[101] Such works detailed the intricacies of the theatrical arts, including hand gestures, feet positioning, stage properties, costume, make-up and the specifics of female theatre and performance, embedding them within post-Vedic culture. For instance, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* described the *ganikā* as possessing her own establishment as well as slaves and servants.[102] Such was the *ganikā*'s societal standing that to be sighted with her was considered to be a symbol of status.[103] As Islam spread through northern India through Mughal rule, the region saw the entrenchment of new styles of dancing that married the Central Asian, Persian and Indian arts. The result was the metamorphosis of the *kathak* form of dance into a sophisticated form of aristocratic entertainment that centred on eroticism and sexuality. Notably, *kathak* became popularised amongst Muslim audiences whilst upholding the symbolism of Radha Krishna from Vaishnavism – one of Hinduism's major traditions.[104] Tracing the history of the so-called "nautch girls", it is clear that these women were embedded in religious and societal frameworks from the very beginning of their existence, developing new modes and styles according to new interactions and exchange. This continued with the arrival of the British in India, and the subsequent interpretation of the nautch girl and her practices in British artistic renditions. While artworks about nautch girls were generally identifiable by their rigid setting in Indian

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[101] 'Natyashastra - Hinduism - Oxford Bibliographies', accessed 8 October 2017, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399318/obo-9780195399318-0071.xml;jsessionid=67F14DC1E7F40742E827E007B5F60931.

[102] Som Prakash Verma, *Art and Culture: Painting and Perspective* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2002), 154.

[103] Pran Nevile, *Nautch Girls of the Raj* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009), 2.

[104] Drid Williams, 'In the Shadow of Hollywood Orientalism: Authentic East Indian Dancing', *Visual Anthropology* 17, no. 1 (January 2004): 69–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/08949460490274013.

locales and their distinct focus on Indian subjects, these works were not solely representations of Indian dancing girls – they also offered reflections on women more generally, as well as the societal and religious observations surrounding them. This was especially the case since nautch girls were so strongly associated with particular customs, which were reinterpreted and reconfigured in new and differing circumstances in Britain through the processes of artistic production and reception.

The extensive missionary work that occurred during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries inevitably elicited consequences on societal and religious practices across the different parts of the subcontinent. This was driven particularly by Evangelicalism and its movement to promote good manners and morals within a conservative Christian framework. From the seventeenth century onwards, writings appeared across Christian European discourses that expressed revolt against the fusion of eroticism and devotional worship among Indian temple dancers for its marrying of something perceived to be sacrilegious with something perceived to be sacrosanct.[105] Notably, evangelicals had proven extremely powerful during the anti-slavery movement, and so their subsequent focus on inculcating Christian morality on "Other" societies and religions was correspondingly impactful. This, of course, included the recontextualisation of the nautch girls during the anti-nautch movement. One of the most prominent examples of literary observations and criticisms of Indian women written by a British woman is Mrs Marcus B Fuller's *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*. She described *devadasis* as practising "a

[105] Bor, 'Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères', 47.

most debasing custom”,[106] claiming that nautch girls were treated as “the common property of the priests”,[107] bringing to light various issues related to social class and religion.

Interestingly, one of the most apparent examples of recontextualising nautch girls for British society occurs in the operetta *The Nautch Girl*. Despite clear references to the Indian setting throughout the work, there are various jibes and references in the lyrics that firmly locate the work in British society.[108] For instance, in ‘A Different Kind of Person Altogether (No. 8)’, the Indian vizier Pyjama sings: “Nor the House of Commons person who wants feminine M.P’s [sic]”,[109] making explicit reference to the women’s suffrage movement in Britain and the growing desire for female representation in Parliament. By bringing current political affairs into the operetta, the work succeeded in moving beyond the Indian setting and grounding it in British societal affairs – staying true to the traditions of Gilbert and Sullivan works. In another scene of the operetta, when the Rajah speaks to the protagonist Holly Beebee, he jokes about his blue-bloodedness:

> Punka. Look at that! (*gives paper*). It is a chemical analysis of our family blood, which, you will observe, yields one hundred and twenty grains of indigo to the square inch.
>
> Beebee. How very blue it must be!

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[106] Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, 119.
[107] Fuller, 119–20.
[108] This is unsurprising since localised political satire and parodies of contemporary culture were rather typical of Gilbert and Sullivan works.
[109] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 17.

Punka. It is – unusually blue.[110]

While relatable in meaning for the contemporary British audience, this reference strays from the "Indianness" of the work and its characters. Instead, it sheds light on a significant issue in European society, satirising the perceived mark of nobility. Interestingly, the concept of blue-bloodedness originates from medieval Europe, whereby the aristocracy of Spain traditionally distinguished themselves from the Moors and the Jews by emphasising the appearance of blue superficial veins visible under lighter-coloured skin.[111] With physical, cultural and social dynamics at play, the concept of blue-bloodedness was infused with the assertion of racial superiority, echoing some of the convictions of nineteenth-century imperialism. In this particular context, it is an Indian *rajah* who asserts his nobility through his alleged blue-bloodedness, presenting a perceivably comical situation. In yet another example, in the love duet of the first act, there are various quotations taken from the English marriage service, as *The Times* review indicates.[112] Such examples demonstrate just how European, and in some cases specifically English, the operetta was, despite its Indian setting, through the use of references to regionally, culturally or societally specific matters.

Returning to 'A Different Kind of Person Altogether (No. 8)', it is noteworthy that a male character sings lengthily and comically about the requirements of a model wife, strongly

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[110] Dance and Desprez, 13.
[111] John H. Kautsky, *The Politics of Aristocratic Empires* (London: Routledge, 1997), 206.
[112] 'Opening Night Review.'

reflecting the socio-political narrative that is woven through this operetta. The issue of women's role in the political (and therefore public) sphere is explicitly raised through the discussion of women's suffrage in a satirical manner. Comparably, Hicks argues that in the operetta Punka is obsessed with the shape of his skull, connecting it to the establishment and expansion of the British Phrenological Society during this time.[113] Such connections ensure that the British audience is able to relate to the entertainment, particularly when it is set in a spatially and culturally distant space. The music of the operetta, too, is largely set in British musical style, with minor inflections and references to "Indian" music, catering largely for a European audience. In addition, there are well-known references to British cultural works, including the British nursery rhyme 'The House That Jack Built' and the renowned strain from the 'Hallelujah' chorus of Handel's *Messiah*, offering further localisation in the British setting as well as a celebration of cultural products associated with British culture.

Issues of society and religion were also explored in diverse ways in nautch-girl artworks. For instance, the libretto of Charles Smith's musical entertainment *A Trip to Bengal* is filled with references to religious and social differences between the British and Indian characters. For example, the Kitmutgar (a male servant) has a distinctly different manner of speaking than his English master, Fitzpatrick:

> KIT. Saheb Salaam! (bowing in the Indian manner.)
> FITZP. Absolom! – why, that's a Jewish name. – Pray, Mr. Absolom, what religion are you of?

[113] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 36–37.

KIT.	Me Massa religion.
FITZP.	My religion! I shall be obliged to you to tell me what that is.
KIT.	Me eat every ting, drink every ting –
FITZP.	A very convenient religion, truly. – But now you talk of drinking, how must I ask, in your lingo, for something to drink?
KIT.	Impose Massa want water for drinkee – him say – Peeneka paunee.
FITZP.	Water! – psha! – (making faces)
KIT.	Or shrab –
FITZP.	Rather too hot for shrub – (wiping his forehead.)
KIT.	Or, impose Massa love claret –
FITZP.	Love claret! – Does an Irishman love claret? – Och! to be sure, and I do.
KIT.	Then Massa must say – Loll shrab
FITZP.	Loll shrab?
KIT.	Yes, Massa.
FITZP.	Loll shrab! (aloud.)
KIT.	Very well.
FITZP.	Loll shrab! (louder.)
KIT.	That right.
FITZP.	Then why the devil don't you bring it, honey?
KIT.	Oh! Massa want for drinkee?
FITZP.	Aye, to be sure – What shou'd I do but drink it?
Kit.	Me tink Massa only want for talkee. – Me bring directly. [Exit Kitmutgar.]
Fitzp.	What civil creatures these poor black negers are! – Oh! What a sad thing it is they shou'd be so cruelly opress'd! – as if they were not Christians like ourselves. Well!- if I were Governor, they shou'd have stockings and brogues – aye, and wigs too.[114]

In addition to the grossly problematic racism presented through the servant's manner of speaking, this excerpt also weaves in an important discussion about religious and social issues, marking out differences between the Muslim Indian and Christian English character

[114] Smith, *A Trip to Bengal*, 12–13.

in various ways. Similarly, in the *zenana* scene, the Governor's Lady disguises herself as a nautch girl and mimics a comparable "Indian" speaking manner:

> FITZP. (*to the* Governor's Lady) I say, my dear creature! can you speak English?
> LADY. Me speak a littlea, Behadre.
> FITZP. Then tell me what is the meaning of this song.
> LADY. Song mean that Begum love Behadre very much.[115]

In this rather unique setting, an Englishwoman of high social standing claims to be a nautch girl, using not only her appearance but also her manner of speaking to convince an Englishman (Fitzpatrick) that she is a dancing girl. Since the mock-accent and speaking mannerisms of the "nautch girl" resemble those of the Kitmutgar, it appears that no class distinction is made between the two Indian personalities, placing them within the same category, which is distinguished considerably from the English characters of the work. In a similar act of disguising oneself as a nautch girl, in a group portrait by Zoffany (Figure 20) the Impey family, their household attendants and a group of Indian musicians are gathered around a young child (Marian Impey), who is dancing in Indian costume, imitating a nautch girl.[116] As the adults spectate, it is a British child that takes on the mock role of a nautch girl, with a gaze fixed on the viewer and one arm flung upwards while the other rests on her hip. Although this piece is rather tranquil and forthcoming, with smiling and welcoming expressions all around, the scene is problematic within the context of how nautch girls were perceived during this time – on the one hand, revered and admired and,

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[115] Smith, 43–44.
[116] De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 137–38.

on the other hand, sexualised and disparaged. This was particularly interesting in the context of the subjects of the portrait – Sir Elijah Impey was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal,[117] and his wife was Lady Mary Impey, a natural historian and patron of the arts in Bengal. While it might be perceived that the nautch was being likened to child's play and therefore infantilised and belittled in its own right, it is certainly clear that an English family of high social standing felt no disparagement towards the nautch girl within the context of this portrait.

Notably, within the narrative of *The Nautch Girl*, there is a confusion – whether intentional or accidental – of social and religious structures and principles strongly associated with Indian and British cultures respectively. This confusion takes place in the form of both a mixing up between Britain and Indian constructs, but also a melding of societal and religious constructs as intertwining elements within an imagined Indian setting. Indeed, it was not uncommon for European artworks of the era to explores the practices of "other" religions, particularly delving into differences in beliefs, rituals and societal interplay. There exists an array of British paintings in the long nineteenth century that highlighted various perceived aspects and practices of Hinduism and Islam that appeared both unusual and fascinating to the British audience. Practices such as *sati* and *charak puja* became a frequent spectacle in British painting during the age of imperialism. Interestingly, in the operetta *The Nautch Girl*, one of the dancers is named *Suttee*, although there are no further references

[117] Thomas M. Curley and Samuel Johnson, *Sir Robert Chambers: Law, Literature, and Empire in the Age of Johnson* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 196.

to this practice throughout the operetta. Nevertheless, the ritual was considered iconic enough to earn notable (and perhaps satirical) reference in the work.

More broadly, the operetta features various references to religion and its associated practices, playing a crucial role in the work's plot through an exploration of the Hindu caste system. This is particularly noteworthy in the historical context given that the caste system had been a subject of great discussion in British politics and society, with its complex definitions and facets extensively simplified and organised into a rigidified class system under British rule. As various scholars have shown, the codification of the Hindu caste system that was established during British rule used the British class system as a template, thereby forging what was essentially a novel form of social and religious classification that completely transformed the caste system.[118] The British attempts to simplify and regulate the immensely complex caste system is exemplary of the wide-scale hijacking of local religious and social practices that took place under the yoke of imperialism. In the operetta *The Nautch Girl*, this codified caste system was conveniently appropriated and adapted to accommodate the plot. It is because of the Hindu caste system that the son of the Rajah, Indru, is unable to marry the nautch girl Holly Beebee; because he is a *brahmin* (the highest ranking of class) he is forbidden from marrying the nautch girl, who is of a lower caste. As the plot unfolds, it transpires that Holly Beebee also originally

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[118] See David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Frank de Zwart, 'The Logic of Affirmative Action: Caste, Class and Quotas in India', *Acta Sociologica* 43, no. 3 (July 2000): 235–49, https://doi.org/10.1177/000169930004300304.

held *brahmin* status, but owing to an incident involving her father being rescued from a river (and thereby touched) by a Pariah, her father lost his *brahmin* status. Holly Beebee's father is subsequently involved in court proceedings that stretch over years, with her father fighting for the reclamation of his *brahmin* status, which would also then be passed down to his daughter. Unaware of the concurrent legal proceedings, Indru denounces his own *brahmin* status by eating potted cow so that he may be permitted to marry Holly Beebee. At the same time, Holly Beebee's father's court proceedings conclude in his favour, enabling himself and his daughter to regain their Brahmin status. Consequently, the hindrance to the romance is reversed but the caste-related conundrum remains. The entire plot thereby relies heavily on a simplified and formulaic interpretation of the Hindu caste system that was somewhat reflective of the one that was codified in British India. *The Nautch Girl* was by no means unique as a British artwork in its appropriation of an interpretation of the caste system, but rather served as an important example of the multiple works of art that contributed to debates and deliberations about the caste system.[119] Generally, *The Nautch Girl* appears to take a critical view of Hindu practices – it is because of Hindu custom that the romance is hindered, even though it is eventually resolved. The operetta places the caste system in a significantly negative light, with Indru referring to it as "shackles" that must be undone,[120] and the punishment for renouncing

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[119] For literary examples, see various novels of Rudyard Kipling, as well as Maud Diver's Lilamani (1910) and F.E. Penny's Caste and Creed (1890). There was also a multitude of visual depictions of Hindu castes that were often decontextualised and distributed in Britain and India, as described in Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 100.
[120] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 10.

his caste is to be thrown to the sacred crocodiles[121] – furthering the emphasis on religion and the sacrosanct. In the *Daily News* review, the unsigned reviewer says that this operetta "satirises the *absurdities* of Indian caste",[122] revealing negative attitudes towards the caste system among the audience. The interpretation, or rather misinterpretation, of the Hindu caste system both within this operetta and more generally in the art world (and also in the political sphere) illustrates how the misconceived construction of other cultures, societies and belief systems could become manifested in imperialist discourses.

The libretto of *The Nautch Girl* indicates the existence of three Hindu castes, the *brahmins*, the *sudras* and the *dalits* (Untouchables). However, the *sudras* are only indicated in the written libretto, playing a very minor role where they are seen to be sometimes prostrating and mainly forming an extension of the stage props, and would probably not be recognisable by audience members who were not familiar with the libretto nor with the Hindu caste system. This leaves the audience in the presence of two starkly contrasting castes the main narrative of the operetta, the *brahmins* and the *dalits*, which would be perceived – in simplistic and linear terms – as the highest and lowest ends of the class spectrum respectively. Hicks points out that the caste system is essentialised here in order to make the topic of caste more accessible to the Victorian audience, using comical characters "who lampooned iconic representations of colonized Indians."[123] Remarkably, however, the protagonist of *The Nautch Girl* is identified as originally being a *brahmin* –

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[121] Dance and Desprez, 11.
[122] Author's emphasis. 'The "Nautch Girl" at the Savoy', 1 July 1891.
[123] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 29.

emphasising her status of power of being in the highest and most respectable class while still succumbing to the ridiculed bureaucracy that caused her to descend in the ranks. With this in mind, it might be considered that this aspect of the operetta offers a critical commentary of the British administration's meagre attempt to rigidify the Hindu caste system, highlighting its obscuring bureaucracy and peculiarities. It is also worthwhile to note that that various popular literary works of the Victorian era that focused on interracial relationships between European men and Indian women revolved around women of *brahmin* status, such as Maud Diver's *Lilimani* (1911) and Penny's *Caste and Creed* (1906). Perhaps the allure of the "exotic" woman was amplified through the representation of a more "respected" woman of higher ranking or power. Prinsep's study 'Kashmiree Nautch Girl' (Figure 21) similarly drew critics and observers to behold the nautch girls as a "class" of women who beheld power and wealth, as this Royal Academy Exhibition commentary illustrates:

> VAL. C. PRINSEP'S study of a 'Kashmiree Nautch Girl' (44), dressed in white, and seated on what looks something very like a bolster, but for which Mr. Prinsep has, no doubt, a more euphonious name, gives a very capital idea of a most important class of our Indian fellow-subjects. Her white dress simple enough; but we see that the great toes of the little feet which peep from underneath it are ringed as well as her fingers, and that costly jewels and gold pieces enter largely into the composition of her head-gear. Her large eyes, too, with their lustre and their Eastern shape, are a gloss on her character and an explanation of her influence. See also another Nautch Girl by Mr Prinseps [sic], 'Martaba' (167), in the next gallery, with her richly bejewelled head. E.J. POYNTER, R.A., has tried his hand on an Eastern subject; but whether his sitter was as true a daughter of the Orient as M. Prinsep's we cannot say.[124]

[124] 'The Royal Academy Exhibition.', *Art Journal, 1839-1912*, July 1878, 145–48.

Notably, this description implies a connection between class, wealth and influence, drawing on British perceptions of social hierarchical structures and applying them to nautch girls.

Such crossovers also took place in other forms. In *The Nautch Girl*, Indru, who openly expresses his disapproval of the Hindu the caste system for hindering his relationship with Holly Beebee, declares himself a "democrat Hindu"[125] – one who does not see the difference between a *brahmin* and a *sudra*, for example. Since observations about democracy were conventionally rooted in "Western" traditions that dated back to the ancient Greeks, the term "democrat Hindu" offers a noteworthy deviation from the norm. Polarising himself against the so-called shackles of caste, Indru aligns himself with the "Occidental" concept of democracy, thereby emphasising an apparent political schism between democracy and conventional Hindu practices. This could perhaps be seen as an attempt for the character to gain sympathy or favour amongst the operetta's audiences. But underlying this tool for character development hides a deeper possible political meaning that Hinduism and democracy are, in fact, incongruous.

Exploring further aspects of class and society in *The Nautch Girl*, the women of the court, the poorer relations of the Rajah whose social status was advanced by the Rajah himself, are described as "common fry":

> Governesses, teachers, nurses,

[125] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 3.

> Lady-helps with slender purses,
> Toiling, broiling, day by day
> In a common, humdrum way –[126]

This description aligns far more closely to the Victorian image of the British working-class woman than the Indian one, particularly when considering the typical signifiers of location and culture. In this way, the work offered similarities to Charles D'Oyly's works about nautch girls (Figures 22 and 23), which made strong references to British social issues. William Hicks notes that the characters of high social rank in *The Nautch Girl* are the most compassionate and loving characters, sympathetic towards family and friends and leaning towards democratic tendencies; they "are above all legitimate and necessary to the equilibrium of the social order."[127] These characters include Punka, Indru and Holly Beebee. Meanwhile, the characters of a lower social status are either deceptive with malicious intent, or quick to become enamoured with a member of the opposite sex or sexually exploitative.[128] Such characters include Pyjama, the Grand Vizier, Chinna Loofa and the remaining nautch girls. These affiliations between class and credibility shed light on wider social concerns in Britain, which contribute to locating the operetta in Britain.

Moreover, William Hicks notes:

> Through comic jabs and twists on the British understanding of Indian society's multi-layered gradations, the intersection and conflict of British and Indian feminisms, and the use of seemingly benign musical topoi,

[126] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 24.
[127] Hicks, 31.
[128] Hicks, 32.

> *The Nautch Girl* overtly engaged and exploited many of the rhetorical and figurative images about the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent that members of the London theatergoing public would have carried over from their daily work, political, religious, and personal lives.[129]

Misrepresentations of religious and societal practices are also prevalent in *The Nautch Girl*. For example, the *sudras* (the lowest of the *varnas* in the traditional four-section division in the Hindu caste system) are directed in the libretto to be "*salaaming*" – a form of greeting that is practised by Muslims and not Hindus. Similarly, the punishment of death by crocodile for caste renunciation was less associable with Hindu practices than it was the ancient Roman practice of *damnatio ad bestias*, which became particularly prominent in the execution of Christians during the first century AD.

Certainly, those in the audience who were well acquainted with Indian religions and society might have been able to identify some of the more obvious the discrepancies in the representation of Indian societies and religions in the operetta. But there were various aspects of misrepresentation that would have gone unnoticed and would thereby contribute to the recontextualisation of Indian societies and religions through the arts. For example, *The Times*' opening night review of *The Nautch Girl* raises the issue of the operetta possibly hurting Buddhists' sentiments,[130] despite no reference to Buddhism throughout the work. In the *Birmingham Daily Post's* review, the unsigned reviewer stated:

> Even Anglo-Indian experts to-night, however they might chuckle over the impossibility of the story, or hint a doubt as to the wisdom of

[129] Hicks, 12.
[130] 'Opening Night Review.'

> holding up to ridicule the religious observances of our Brahmin fellow-subjects, could pick no holes in the mounting, or at the most only such small ones that they could scarcely be seen.[131]

In postcolonial retrospect, it is far easier to pick the so-called holes in the mounting, enabling us to identify the intrinsic problems of representation. It seems clear that within the historical context of the operetta's production, such holes were largely overlooked. However, it might also be considered that the intermeshing of differing cultural, social and religious elements were intended rather than incidental – that such works were meant to shed light on key issues by highlighting differences between different societies, cultures and religions, particularly when this was a Gilbert and Sullivan production that typically would invite such reflection. Indeed, to make such a substantial claim would require further exploration that lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

References to diverse sets of cultural, societal and religious practices in works about nautch girls enabled a deep exploration of the differences between various groups of people, whether these divisions were outlined in terms of class, religion, gender, culture or any other categorisation. On the one hand, these works were garnished with "exotic" references, and on the other they were deeply embedded in "local" practices that audiences were familiar with or could relate to. By intertwining societal and religious references, these works offered significant insight into perceptions of society, culture and religion and their intermingling, as well as how the nautch girl fit in. From the outset, the representation of caste and class in works like *The Nautch Girl* appeared vague and misconceived, pandering

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[131] 'The New Comic Opera at the Savoy.'

to the "Western" audience and its (mis)understanding of complex social systems connected with Hinduism. But on another level, these works drew focus towards these problems, highlighting disparities while diluting their starkness by offering cross-references across different cultural, societal and religious systems, embracing aspects from diverse groups and categories. In the reception of such works, these representations could be adopted by both pro-imperialists intending to justify their hegemonic cause and reformers wishing to elicit social or religious transformation at home.

Locating the Nautch Girl

The nautch girl was often reduced superficially in artistic depictions to an "exotic" sounding name, an amassment of spectacular dressing and stereotypically "Indian" (and often indulgent) objects. In this way, the art of cultural location can be seen to manifest itself in a multitude of facets and forms: from culturally-specific and reductive naming practices to complex emulations of the appearance and art of the nautch. Collectively, these aspects could contribute significantly to locating the nautch girl within a distinctive regional and cultural setting, enabling her to ostensibly represent India and its cultural practices more broadly. This was particularly pertinent within the imperialist context, whereby representations were frequently embedded with politically- and socially-charged predispositions (whether in the process of production or reception, or indeed both). But the direct and indirect similarities and differences across music and visual art reveal how the act and art of culturally locating the nautch girl was commonly inherent but also diverse in style, form and expression.

One of the key prevailing common factors was how, through the numerous processes of locating, these works endeavoured to instil *authenticity* in the representations of nautch girls – to claim that theirs was a true representation of the Indian nautch girl and her profession. This could be achieved in particular through the quest to portray realistic nautch girl attire, as well as through the supposed emulations of actual nautch performances. This "authentication" of the nautch girl could also be furthered through visual, aural and narratological references to "Indianness"; in other words, things that signalled India to Britons. This enabled nautch-girl artworks to serve in a representational function to the British, or the more general "Western", audience.

Interconnected to this, these works appeared to establish *disparity* and *difference* – to demonstrate that these subjects were unlike British (or sometimes Christian) people, women and performers, and hence unique in their ways (whether in a positive or negative light). This fostered the pre-existing polarities of the "Self" versus the "Other", which could be exploited not only for the pro-imperialist intentions of asserting the superiority of the British, but indeed also to promote the development of the arts in Britain in incorporating the art of "Others" – in this case, the art of the nautch girl. This act might be interpreted as a plundering and appropriation of the nautch that furthered the imperialist mission, but also, simultaneously, as an emulation and interpretation that illustrated the process of British artistic acculturation during this age of imperialism.

Regardless of whether the nautch girl of India was liked or disliked, Britons were nonetheless riveted by her existence and thoroughly curious about the ways in which she differed from themselves. This could be expressed across the visual and musical art forms, whether through identical or analogous approaches that demonstrated that the phenomenon was not unique to a single kind of art and shed light on a broader trend. The act and art of cultural location through the arts enabled the agents of artworks to incorporate aspects of the nautch girl and her art (as far as they perceived it) into their own, in a process that offered not only a political significance but also a cultural-artistic one.

IV
Gendering the Nautch Girl

> European ladies not unfrequently attend these spectacles; and, when the dancers are warned beforehand, they only witness a graceful and sufficiently stupid display; but, if thrown off their guard by applause, there is some danger of their carrying the suppleness of the body and limbs quite beyond the disgraceful, and ever bordering on the disgusting. The situation of a gentleman in this case is irksome and uncomfortable; and he sits in constant and not unfounded dread lest these fair libérales in morality should commit some, perhaps unintentional, solecism against decency.

— Godfrey Charles Mundy, *Pen and Pencil Sketches, Being the Journal of a Tour in India*

The term "nautch girl" comprised a very significant and encumbered expression of a particular sexual identity. Not only was this identity female by definition, but it was also young; rather than a nautch woman or a nautch lady, she was a nautch girl. This emphasis on a youthful female, one may argue, contributes to conjuring a distinct sexual identity of the nautch girl as a young maiden, with its multi-layered insinuations, including those of a sexual nature. As Said points out:

> The Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe.[1]

In addition, it simultaneously infantilises the nautch girl, emphasising her alleged puerility and her apparent need to be "parented" by the coloniser, thereby depriving her (as well as

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[1] Said, *Orientalism*, 190.

all that she stood for culturally) of agency. This sort of infantilisation of the colonised is also connected with the feminisation of the colonised, whereby both encompass a method of subordination of the subject, through the establishment of predisposed binaries. The nautch girl could thus be appropriated in artworks using a gender-specific and sexualised identity that appeared to justify and promote the imperialist mission. However, another interpretation is simultaneously conceivable; one in which Britons celebrated the femininity, sexuality and freedom of the nautch girl.

With this in mind, it is important to consider Catherine Hall's argument that we "only establish the differences between men and women by discursively constructing 'the other'",[2] which becomes doubly valid in works about nautch girls, raising issues surrounding women specifically as well as the "other".[3] As Linda Phyllis Austern noted:

> Long before Western art music dichotomized Selves and Others by ethnicity, it did so through gender.[4]

The centrality of the themes of gender and sexuality in British politics, as demonstrated by Catherine Hall, could lead one to question whether it is possible to see works of art about

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[2] Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013), 41.

[3] Simon Gikandi similarly focuses on the links between eighteenth-century cultures of taste and the development of slavery, demonstrating how slavery played a fundamental role in defining contemporary notions and constructs of beauty and the self through the establishment of difference. See Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[4] Austern, "'Forreine Conceites and Wandring Devises'", 27.

nautch girls as commentaries not merely on India but on an "imagined community",[5] in an attempt to categorise and shed light on British society and the "social organization of power".[6] In essence, nautch-girl artworks could be exploited to offer reflections on the "Self" (British culture and society) through the depiction of the "Other". Delving even further, the representation of Indian women and their role in the public space could be exploited to offer reflections on the British woman's role (or lack thereof) in the public space, highlighting the discrepancies between these two groups of women.

In the consideration of representation in terms of gender and sexuality, various scholars have explored the significance of images of women in literature and the arts. In many instances, scholarly literature has focused on the use of the female body, or the feminine, in "Western" fantasies about the "Orient". For one, Alain Grosrichard discusses the *topos obligé* of the images of portrayals of female figures as objects of desire.[7] It is interesting to note what Ralph Locke calls the "exotic mask" – while artwork that presented the female form in an erotic nature would normally be repressed from the art gallery and opera house in nineteenth-century Europe, this could be circumvented if the work was sufficiently "exotic", or culturally displaced.[8] Located in a distant region and time, the deeply sexualised female subject could be deemed acceptable in forms of even "highbrow" European art.

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[5] A reference to Benedict Anderson's concept, discussed by Catherine Hall: "For the imagined community is built on a series of assumptions about 'others' which define the nature of Englishness itself." Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, 71.
[6] Hall, 45.
[7] Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du Sérail: La Fiction du Despotisme Asiatique dans l'Occident Classique* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 155.
[8] Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other"', 271.

The present chapter explores the concurrent notions of imperialism through the topics of gender and sexuality that were woven into nautch-girl artworks, offering significant insight into how the nautch girl served as an important female figure in British discourses.

Establishing Gender, Making Meaning

It was an inevitability that the nautch girl was to be distinctly defined through the British lens by her female identity, particularly during a time in which gender roles were a central topic of political and social deliberation. Through the arts, this ascription of gender could be achieved through a number of ways, though most lucidly through visual and musical aesthetics. Fundamentally, this was not so much a biological determination of gender as it was a social and cultural classification, laden with contextually-significant connotations of the colonised and "Other". Ascertaining sexual differences has been considered significant in the establishment of gender in the visual arts,[9] and has also been investigated in musical works.[10] By underscoring differentiations, gender could be established and defined according to contemporary ideals and notions of socially- and culturally-accepted values. Importantly, as Judith Butler notes:

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[9] As discussed in Whitney Davis's chapter on gender in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History*, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
[10] As debated by various authors in: Solie, *Musicology and Difference*.

> [G]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*.[11]

As such, the establishment of gender in the arts involved a dynamic process that was both affected by its distinctive environment and contributed towards it. In the nautch-girl context, it appeared to be particularly significant in explicitly establishing gender ascriptions to the subject, which subsequently contributed to fostering gender-specific notions about nautch girls and perhaps even women more generally.

The role of the female body in nineteenth-century art, as well as its intermingling with its surrounding social constructs, has been explored substantially. In *Musicology and Difference*, edited by Ruth Solie, authors explore gender and sexuality in music scholarship within a particular social and cultural framework, in terms of constructs of identity and categories of power.[12] Similarly, Sander L Gilman considers the linking iconographies of the black body and the prostitute in art through a study of social perceptions of the genitalia of the Hottenot and the perceived diseased genitalia of prostitutes.[13] In exploring these social perceptions, Sanders argues that it is owing to the broader fears of miscegenation in the late-nineteenth century, along with "the inherent fear of the difference in the anatomy of

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[11] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi, Oxford History of Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 356.
[12] Solie, *Musicology and Difference*.
[13] Sander L. Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature', *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1, "Race," Writing, and Difference (Autumn 1985): 204–42.

the Other which lies behind the synthesis of images", that these representations took form.[14] These examples demonstrate how societal circumstances are key to our understanding of how and why representations of particular genders (and other categories of identity) evolved as they did. In this way, artworks containing references to gender and sexuality did not emerge in a vacuum, but rather within the space of collision between specific cultural entities and their respective societal settings. Additionally, assertions of power were to manifest themselves in various forms, in which gender relations and categorisations played an eminent role. The interplay of these circumstances of culture, society and power relations require significant exploration in order to determine the inherent value of artworks in the broader historical context. Reinforcing this argument, McClary notes that:

> [C]odes marking gender difference in music are informed by the prevalent attitudes of their time. But that they also participate in social formation, inasmuch as individuals learn how to be gendered beings through their interactions with cultural discourses such as music.[15]

One of the values, therefore, of artworks in a historical context remains not only in their power to reflect social thought, but also to contribute to its formation and development. This is not to say that such codes and ideologies remain stagnant; on the contrary they are subject to great change and development, dependent on the dynamic processes driven by societies and cultures.

[14] Gilman, 237.
[15] McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 7–8.

The exoticisation of the female body in British (as well as French) art has been explored comprehensively by Pal-Lapinski, who describes six commonly used tropes that can be applied to artworks, including those discussed within this chapter. These tropes are:

> (1) an infectious, erotic atmosphere in which "languor" or "lassitude" predominated; (2) a rhetoric of ornamentation and excess with emphasis on the textures of material objects; (3) a display of racially ambiguous, intertwining female bodies marked by a diversity in skin tones; (4) women (either individually or collectively) lounging, reclining, or performing in public and/or private spaces; (5) an interlocking series of gazes, ranging from the absent/unfocused to the ironic and openly defiant; and (6) women either exhibiting themselves or bring exhibited.[16]

In line with these tropes, gender-related definitions of the nautch girl could be expressed very candidly through the physical depiction of the female body, with physical attributes that were usually ascribed to the female body. For example, various works featured nautch girl figures with voluptuous body shapes, with round breasts and wide hips clearly defined, visible even through loosely draped clothing. This is exemplified clearly in nautch girl paintings by Tilly Kettle and Thomas Hickey. This was also achievable on the musical stage, with nautch-girl characters dressed in costumes that accentuated their figure, particularly visible during dance performances. This physical definition of the nautch girls' gender drew attention to the nautch girls' sexual identity – which was already highlighted as a grave concern for proponents of the anti-nautch movement and similar groups promoting religious and moral values. Nonetheless, nautches remained popular amongst the multitude of admirers of the art throughout the period of the British Raj and beyond.

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[16] Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, 17.

Gender distinction and definition could also be established more delicately through artistic style, for example through choice of colour palette, musical key or ornamentation. Particular forms, styles and methods of artistic production could evoke an aura of femininity or masculinity (as they were historically perceived), or indeed a convolution involving both. These stylistic choices contributed to the broader representations and meanings of the artworks as well as shedding light on the cognitive processes of the artists and the recipients of the works, through the connections and associations established between genders and other considerations, such as race, religion, morality, and power. For instance, Hicks notes how most of the topical songs of *The Nautch Girl* (barring the first few songs, which focus on Indru's proclamation of love), adopt minor modality, giving the particular example of No. 22, 'Indian Lullaby'.[17] While this might indicate, as Hicks infers, attempts to exoticise or Orientalise the music,[18] it simultaneously feminised the music. According to the conventions of eighteenth-century Western music, the minor keys signalled sombreness, melancholy and suffering and were affiliated with femininity, with ascriptions of weakness and instability.[19] In this way, minor modality was evocative of particular "feminine" leanings and called to mind specific characteristics stereotypically attributed to women. The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* determines between male and female

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[17] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 27.
[18] Derek Scott discusses how the minor key was to become 'a marker of ethnic difference': Scott, 'Orientalism and Musical Style'.
[19] Gretchen A. Wheelock, 'Schwarze Gredel and the Engendered Minor Mode in Mozart's Opera', in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 202.

cadences in music, whereby:

> A cadence or ending is called "masculine" if the final chord of a phrase or section occurs on the strong beat and "feminine" if it is postponed to fall on a weak beat. The masculine ending must be considered the normal one, while the feminine is preferred in more romantic styles.[20]

Indeed, there were exceptions, such as Mozart, who – as Wheelock notes – employed the minor mode to "invoke powerful associations with the supernatural, the furies of Nature, human passions out of control, delirium and fainting, and death."[21] But even in this case, many of these associations – though fierce, powerful and far from tender – could nevertheless be associated with femininity, particularly in a time and place that defined and treated the allegedly passionately emotive and hysterical "maladies" and "madness" of women differently than the alleged afflictions that affected men.[22]

The prevalence of minor modality in many of the topic songs in *The Nautch Girl* is therefore indicative of the emphasis on the feminine, consistent with contemporary musical practices. This is particularly pertinent in an operetta about nautch girls, whereby femaleness is highlighted not only through the characters but also the music that is employed to accompany them. The contextual emotional and characteristic traits attached to femaleness (in music, but also otherwise) offer significant insight into the kinds of

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[20] Willi Apel, Harvard Dictionary of Music, Second Edition, rev. and enlarged (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 506. Quoted in McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 9.
[21] Wheelock, 'Schwarze Gredel and the Engendered Minor Mode in Mozart's Opera', 205.
[22] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

meanings that were to be produced from the gendered representations of the nautch girl. Similarly, Elgar's orchestral work 'Dance of Nautch Girls' in *The Crown of India* is in A minor, emanating an aura of "femininity" that was reflective of the nautch girls themselves. Within the masque, the minor mode is also adopted in 'March of the Mogul Emperors', offering great contrast to the "masculine" major mode of the 'Entrance of John Company',[23] indicating crossovers and connections between representations of gender and the binaries of the "Self" versus the "Other". Another method of ascribing gender to music occurred through the melody itself. For example, the 'Dance of the Nautch Girls', with its 3/8 time, features elaborate triplets and sextuplets on the flute and as well as intricate trills and tempo changes that simulate delicacy, elegance and ornateness, as though the music itself represented the movement of the nautch girls during their performance. This act of ornamentation with trills and other similar rhythmic, harmonic or melodic inflections could was also associated with femininity, according to standard musical conventions of the time.

The gendering of the arts was not unique to music. In the visual arts, gender could comparably be rendered through "modes". For instance, Gillian Perry explores how styles and methods of painting and drawing could historically be perceived to be ascribed a gender (with reference to the French Academy in the nineteenth century), whether through the femininity of emphasising modes of colour or the masculinity of a thick impasto

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[23] Gould, "'An Inoffensive Thing'", 157.

technique.[24] Indeed, Perry discusses this gendering of the visual arts referring more to the way in which a style was expressed i.e. "he painted in a feminine manner". However, the enduring effect would lead to the representation of a particular gender through the way that the work was painted or drawn. Colour – through its perceived qualities of being decorative and ornate – appeared especially significant in artworks of the nautch-girl genre, with strong hues of reds, greens, whites and gold in the costumes of the nautch girls that highlighted her presence and accentuated her feminine figure and adornments.

The incorporation of narratives and intertextual elements constituted another method of establishing gender and subsequently contributing to meanings in nautch-girl artworks. The alleged nature and characteristics of the nautch girl were widely debated by Britons during the long nineteenth century and, amongst these discussions, issues of gender and sexual immortality featured abundantly. Unsurprisingly, many of these notions were also integrated into artworks about nautch girls, through displays of the character and acts of the nautch girl, and were often reflective of other (usually literary) accounts of nautch girls. Such artistic works responded to and contributed to other established accounts about how the nautch girl's gender identity and associated sexuality shaped her character and being.

With the combination of physical depictions, artistic styles and the use of narratives and intertextuality, the gender and associated sexuality of the nautch girl could be explored substantially in artworks. The three elements combined to build a picture of the nautch girl

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[24] Gillian Perry, *Gender and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 220.

which, in many ways, conformed to the already established discourse about nautch girls and thereby promoted and endorsed it through the arts. The formidable inclusion of gender and sexuality in nautch-girl artworks fostered particular meanings and demonstrated its importance as an indicator of character and a representation of an identity. The implications of establishing gender in nautch-girl artworks, which are explored further in the remainder of this chapter, are essentially expressed through various characteristics, including beauty, eroticism, seduction, deviousness, domesticity, and ownability. Through these various traits that were directly associated with females in these works, the nautch girl acquired a distinct identity that conveyed significant connotations in the imperial context, deeming her – in some ways – a singled out representative of colonised India that appeared to promote or justify British imperialist action while simultaneously challenging gender roles.

Beauty

British literary accounts frequently broached the topic of the beauty (or lack thereof) of the nautch girls. It denoted once more the significance of the aesthetic in representations of the nautch girl. This fixation with the physical beauty of the nautch girl could be explored in great abundance and with profound complexity in the arts, owing to their multidimensional manifestations and expressions. It is generally regarded that the beholder enjoys what he/she perceives to be beautiful and is repulsed (though perhaps still engrossed) by that which he/she holds to be ugly, thus empowering the degree of beauty to evoke an emotional response from the beholder. Within nautch-girl artworks, the

exploration of beauty contributed to the beholder's construal of the nautch girl as an aesthetic object.

It is fascinating that so many British literary accounts about nautch girls focused on emphasising the alleged ugliness of the nautch girls, while visual representations such as paintings and drawings tended to offer a more aesthetically pleasing portrayal. For instance, Captain Thomas Williamson wrote of Kaunum (sometimes spelt Kannum), a particularly famous nautch girl, that she was:

> [A] haughty, ugly, filthy black woman [who] could, solely by the grace of her motions, and the novelty of some Cashmerian airs, hold in complete subjection, and render absolutely tributary, many scores of fine young British officers![25]

In this particular case, the term *ugly* is connected with *filthy* and *black*, offering insight into perceived connections between beauty, cleanliness and whiteness on the one hand, and ugliness, filthiness and blackness on the other. That Williamson chose these terms is particularly significant given the vast undertakings for public health development in imperialist Britain during this time, for example with the establishment of and amendments to the Contagious Diseases Act and Imperial Vaccinations Act. The fixation with hygiene and its association with whiteness versus blackness in Britain during this time offered very significant connections to imperialism.[26] In Williamson's comment, he connected these

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[25] Quoted in Woodfield, *Music of the Raj*, 157–58.
[26] This topic has been explored in detail by various scholars. For example, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York:

imperialistically-loaded notions with ugliness in his description of a nautch girl, drawing associations between the aesthetics of the female body of the nautch girl and her alleged lack of hygiene. Coincidentally, Williamson was also a music publisher who produced two sets of 'Hindostannee Airs', from which the songs 'A Song of Kannum's' and 'A Dancing Tune of Kannum's' "enjoyed an exceptionally high reputation among army officers".[27] It appears that despite the alleged unsightliness of Kaunum, Williamson found himself drawn to her performance enough to appropriate it for a British audience.

Williamson was by no means alone in his expression of the perceived ugliness of nautch girls. Samuel Bourne, who had a particular interest in aesthetics owing to his profession as a photographer, expressed that many in a group of nautch girls that he witnessed were "miserably ugly".[28] Emily Eden, an English poet and novelist and sister of Governor-General of India George Eden 1st Earl of Auckland, recalled a "very ugly set" of nautch girls in Ludhiana.[29] However, Eden also remarked regarding another encounter with a group of nautch girls that:

> [M]ost of them [were] ugly, but one was […] the prettiest creature I ever saw and the most graceful"[30]

Routledge, 1995); Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health* (Basingstoke, 2004).

[27] Owain Edwards and Ian Woodfield, 'Williamson, T.G.', Grove Music Online, 18 June 2014, http://id.loc.gov/authorities/names/nb2006005108.html.

[28] Samuel Bourne, 'Narrative of a Photographic Trip to Kashmir (Cashmere) and Adjacent Districts', *The British Journal of Photography* XIII, no. 351 (25 January 1867).

[29] Emily Eden, *Up the Country: Letters Written to Her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1866), 297.

[30] Eden, 40.

These kinds of views about nautch girls were widespread during the long nineteenth century, as literary evidence demonstrates. The emphasis on the ugliness, or lack of beauty of the nautch girls, might have been the result of the dissimilarity of the nautch girls from British ideals of beauty, or rather embedded in imperialist notions – or indeed a combination of both.

On the other hand, there were also many British accounts of nautch girls that reflected more positively on the beauty of nautch girls. Anna Harriette Leonowens (an Anglo-Indian travel writer, educator and social activist) marvelled upon the "rare beauty of the performers" with regard to a nautch that she experienced in India,[31] as well as frequently describing nautch girls as beautiful. Renowned anti-nautch advocate Mrs Marcus B Fuller even remarks that nautch girls were frequently "very attractive",[32] although this is to be understood in the context that Fuller believed that nautch girls maliciously seduced and ruined young British men. Naturally, performers such as nautch girls were constantly under aesthetic scrutiny, but amongst the diverse opinions about the beauty of the nautch girls, there appeared to be a significantly strong wave of negativity, which might have been swayed by political or ideological leanings. Unsurprisingly, many of the authors of such comments had close connections or interests at stake in the British imperial state that might have impacted their views.

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[31] Anna Harriette Leonowens, *Life and Travel in India* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1884), 178.
[32] Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, 130.

Artists, who were often somewhat freer of or more distant from such official obligations, tended to portray nautch girls in a more positive light in terms of physical beauty. Artistic portrayals tended to treat the nautch girl kindlier and in a more pleasant light than many of the more critical literary works – understandably so, given the central significance of aesthetics in the visual arts. The combination of delicate features and bright and attractive colours in the works of William Carpenter, Tilly Kettle, and Mortimer Menpes emphasised the beauty of the nautch girl, offering an arrangement of visuals that were conventionally pleasing to the eye. This was bolstered by a cultivated beauty in the tranquil backgrounds, decorated with aesthetically pleasing objects and consumable items that doubled as locational signifiers. Ideals of beauty in nineteenth-century art commonly relied upon depictions of the so-called "Orient", a setting within which nautch girls neatly conformed.

However, even in painting, works could highlight the perceived "uglier" side of the nautch girl. The subjects in Thomas Hickey's painting of three women (Figure 8) stand out inconsistently from the artist's usual painted subjects, with starkly dark skin, piercing stares and masculine physiques. The subject on the left side is depicted with discernible blemishes on the skin of the face (and possibly the arm), highlighting her imperfections or perhaps allowing the viewer to see beyond them. The woman on the right-hand side lifts the border of her white sari to reveal her upper arm, covered by the sleeve of her pink bodice. The three women stand with confident stances, in an almost coquettish manner, as they affix their eyes in direct contact with the viewer; the white of their eyes contrasting starkly with the dark tones of their skin.

These women are not necessarily depicted in an ugly way, but they are certainly distinctive from other contemporary works, including those by the same artist. For example, in Hickey's 'An Indian Lady' (Figure 24) from 1787, the subject – who is believed to be the *bibi* of the British lawyer William Hickey – is depicted with fair skin, soft palette and overall radiance through the interplay of light and colour on the canvas. Her frame is small and her features delicate, and she glances to the right of the frame, avoiding direct confrontation with the viewer. Hickey's three dancing girls in Madras lie in great contrast to the *bibi*, with the dark tonal palette, sharp features, stocky frames, broad faces and piercing gazes, that reflect many elements that would not appear out of place in a conventional depiction of a male figure.

There has been much deliberation on the context of this work. The figures are identified by Mildred Archer as temple dancing girls or experienced courtesans. Archer and Lightbown show that Thomas Hickey was one of the few artists who "succumbed to the attractiveness of British India and virtually adopted it as his country",[33] with nautch girls presumably being part of the fascination. In this context, Archer describes the "good humour" of the three women in the painting. More recently, however, scholars have challenged the theory that these are indeed dancing girls, as well as the general responses that these women affect upon their viewers. For instance, de Almeida and Gilpin suggest that the three women are "unsmiling and sullen, and their facial features suggest a mixture

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[33] Archer and Lightbown, *India Observed*, 46; Archer, *India and British Portraiture*, 205.

of fear, insolence and hostility".[34] This would suggest a depiction lacking conventional beauty. The authors further argue that there is an overall darkness of palette, providing an ambience of gloom, and "unspecified sources of flame-colored light seem to highlight the exceeding darkness of their skin and the excessive whites of their eyes".[35] This excessive contrast could rather be seen to disturb or disrupt the viewer's gaze. According to de Almedia and Gilpin, then, these women were intentionally depicted in an unattractive and unfavourable manner. Moreover, the authors assert that these figures do not merely appear masculine, but might actually be cross-dressed males or transvestites.[36] Certainly, *hijras* would have crossed the visual path of many an artist in India, but whether these are depicted in this painting cannot be confirmed on this claim alone. The authors point out that there is nothing in this painting that suggests that these are dancing girls, except for the title given to the painting itself. De Almeida and Gilpin rather interpret these women as something more along the lines of prostitutes. It is certainly notable that nautch girls and prostitutes were often categorised similarly in the reception of such artworks, coinciding with the common (though usually fallacious) connection between nautch girls and prostitution.

Contrarily, however, Nigel Chancellor argues that these are not temple dancing girls nor prostitutes, nor does he claim these figures to depict *hijras*. Instead, he notes that there is no sign of a temple in this work, thereby dismissing the temple dancing girls theory. He

[34] De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 232–33.
[35] De Almeida and Gilpin, 233.
[36] De Almeida and Gilpin, 233.

also identifies that the bangles that the women wear represent the emblems of the women of the Arasu royal clan and that the triangular *pátta* on the forehead of one of the women shows that these are *pattaránis*, the wives or betrothed wives of a *rajah*.[37] He further explores other details in the women's headdresses to support this theory, concluding that two women on either side are Mysorean queens Rani Devajammani, the *rajah's* senior wife, and Devajammani of Lakshmivilas Sannidhana, the junior queen, and that the woman in the middle is probably one of the *raja's* royal sisters. It is certainly a rarity, if this work is indeed a portrait of female royalty in the Mysorean kingdom. Chancellor notes that the first vaccines against smallpox arrived in India at the beginning of the century, and that members of the court of Mysore were keen to promote the vaccine, and that the subject on the right (believed to be Devajammani of Lakshmivilas Sannidhana) reveals her upper arm to demonstrate where the vaccine would be administered.[38] If this accurately captures the context of this work, it offers a fascinating insight into the incorporation of Edward Jenner's smallpox vaccine from within the court of Mysore, but yields little value as a representation of dancing girls. And while it does not offer much value as a representation of nautch girls, it does enable us to understand how artists could challenge the stereotypes and tropes associated with unmarried women in public spaces – even if they were to be misconstrued as dancing girls.

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[37] Nigel Chancellor, 'A Picture of Health: The Dilemma of Gender and Status in the Iconography of Empire, India c. 1805', *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 4 (October 2001): 772–73, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X01004012.
[38] Chancellor, 'A Picture of Health'.

The almost eerie use of a dark tonal palette and the piercing gazes with partial smiles now gain a new context, where the representation of these figures propels far from the "fair female" archetype towards a more powerful image that emphasises the importance of the smallpox vaccine. In doing so, the women in this painting do not abide by the conventions of feminine beauty in nineteenth-century Britain (and might therefore be perceived to be unattractive), but instead they offer a rare insight into women in a public space with a public message. That many others were to conclude that these were temple dancing girls or courtesans is intriguing in itself, as a reminder of the nautch trope and just how central it was in British artworks of the long nineteenth century. The unusual appearances of the three women in the painting offer a unique perspective on how the ideals of beauty could be stretched, explored and repeatedly reinterpreted, and categorised (perhaps inaccurately) in the nautch-girl genre. So atypical it was for a painting of this time to reflect Indian women (who did not fall under the nautch-girl category) in a public space that it is unsurprising that many might draw the conclusion that these were dancing girls or courtesans.

The extent of beauty of these three women is challenging to ascertain, particularly owing to the uniqueness of the depictions compared to Hickey's other paintings. If one argues that these women appear to lack beauty (or the conventional characteristics of beauty as perceived by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British audience), it resonates with various contemporary literary works about nautch girls. Notably, the scrutiny of beauty amongst nautch girls was relevant to women as well as to men. Women could (and did)

objectify "Oriental" women, with a particular fixation on the details of their appearance.[39] For example, upon witnessing various nautch performances, Lady Maria Nugent, wife of Commander-in-Chief in India George Nugent, remarked:

> In general, these women are pretty, or would have been pretty, had they not been disfigured by having the eyelids parted, and their lips and teeth discoloured, by something they chew – their dress also was unbecoming, and they were loaded with gold and silver trimmings, etc.[40]

Such remarks implied that nautch girls were perceived to have possessed a natural beauty that had been altered to undesirable effect and taste. Valentine Cameron Prinsep wrote of one of his nautch experiences that "[t]he women […] were not pretty".[41] In fact, in his painting 'Martaba, a Kashmiree Nautch Girl' (Figure 25), the subject possesses unique facial features that stand out distinctly from the women in Prinsep's other works. In this work, the nautch girl's skin colour appears uneven and blemished, her dark hair braided and her watchful eyes set wide apart. Her face is distinctively round – a feature upon which one critic in *The Observer* critically remarks:

> There are besides one or two pictures by Prinsep, with the usual fruits and merits of all his European work, and an Indian portrait (132), the title of which "Martaba" (Cashmere for Moonface) makes criticism superfluous[…][42]

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[39] Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 147.
[40] Quoted in De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 233.
[41] Prinsep, *Imperial India: An Artist's Journals*, 97.
[42] 'The Hanover Gallery', *The Observer*, 14 November 1880.

Despite the incorrect translation of *martaba* – the Urdu and Kashmiri word for rank or dignity – this writer is openly critical of her "moon-like" face, implying a lack of beauty. Moreover, the critic explicitly categorises Prinsep's works separately into European ones (with the "usual fruits and merits") and the "Indian portrait", revealing an emphasis on dissimilarity and the tendency to categorise the artist's works through regional polarisations with respective positive and negative connotations.

With a solemn unsmiling face, Martaba gazes at the viewer in a confident confrontation as she holds a cup of tea in one hand and rests her other hand on a *samovar* – a specialty of the Kashmiri region. The image is striking, with a strong presence of dark colours and tones, drawing various parallels with Hickey's painting of the three women that were initially believed to be dancing girls or courtesans, offering a similar level of aesthetic ambiguity. Martaba's broad and unrefined facial features and her general posture do not appear particularly attractive in the conventional sense. Comparable to Hickey's painting, the nautch girl in Prinsep's painting has an unsmiling expression and is painted in dark tones. Her gaze pierces through the canvas at the viewer, confronting him/her with an unwavering glare, which may be perceived as somewhat threatening. The empowerment of nautch girls in artwork took on various forms – one of which involved the returning gaze of the nautch girls. The eyes of the nautch girls in various paintings meet those of the viewer in a confrontational gaze (e.g. Christopher Green's 'Dancing Girls and Musicians from Madras', c. 1800; William Carpenter's 'Two natch girls, Kashmir; and William Daniell's 'The Favourite of the Harem'), as though in an attempt to lure the viewer. In a time when the nautch girl was commonly labelled as licentious and a threat to the British

family (in fictional and non-fictional literature alike), her piercing eyes would undoubtedly have garnered some immoral sexual connotation.

On the topic of beauty, Fanny Parkes also took a critical view of nautch girls she had witnessed:

> Some of the girls, who were horrors by daylight, looked pretty by the artificial light, at a distance.[43]

Such claims of nautch girls being physically unattractive and even being perceived as "horrific" allow us to view paintings by the likes of Hickey and Prinsep in a special context. Generally, such opinions about the unattractive nature or ugliness of nautch girls contributed to the stark disapproval of them during the anti-nautch movement and could be connected to the moral and political mission to supress nautch practices and even prohibit British interactions with nautch girls.

On the other hand, typical of the Pre-Raphaelite approach, Prinsep's depiction of Martaba could be seen rather to offer a unique interpretation of beauty through the individual observation of nature and the rejection of the conventional ideals of beauty in Victorian art. As Susan Casteras noted, Pre-Raphaelite works challenged Victorian canons of beauty and contributed to the transformation of the concepts of beauty and non-beauty.[44] In

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[43] Parkes, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, 431.
[44] Susan P. Casteras, 'Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (1992): 13–35, https://doi.org/10.2307/3817653.

Prinsep's painting, the artist could be seen to have chosen a nautch girl to present this challenge – contributing significantly to ongoing dialogues regarding the aesthetics and personalities of nautch girls in general. It raised questions about whether the nautch girl was beautiful or not, conventionally or otherwise. Indeed, Prinsep's other works also adhered to the principles of Pre-Raphaelitism, particularly apparent in his portraits of different women. But in the depiction of Martaba, Prinsep adopts offers a far less refined aesthetic compared to other works, such as 'The Gamekeeper's Daughter' (1875) and 'At the Golden Gate' (1882), which feature a lighter colour palette and predominant use of light to amplify the subjects' multidimensionality and realism. Notably, the portrait of Martaba bears great similarities to Prinsep's 'The Green Dress' (Figure 26); from colours and tonal palette, to the piercing gaze and the general composure of the subject, the women in these two portraits present substantial parallels, despite representing very different cultures (identifiable by "exotic" signifiers in the painting of Martaba). And yet, Martaba appears more two-dimensional and far less illuminated than Prinsep's woman in the green dress, with relatively little expression of light and shadow throughout the work. Moreover, while Prinsep's portraits of women usually offer beautifying details in the background (from photorealistic foliage to intricate interiors), the portrait of Martaba features a plain and monotonous background of pine green. As a result, Martaba appears flatter and less photorealistic compared to the woman in the green dress.

Prinsep's other work about a nautch girl is a painting simply entitled 'A Nautch Girl' (Figure 27). It is clear that this painting is based on a sketch from Prinsep's journal *Imperial*

India, which is an illustration of 'Begoo, a Kashmiree Nautch Girl'.[45] In contrast to Martaba, Begoo's gaze is not fixated on the viewer, but rather her unsmiling face is tilted to the side, while her body faces the viewer. Her intricately detailed headdress is extremely similar to Martaba's – unsurprising, since both nautch girls are identified as Kashmiri, and could even have been part of the same or a comparable troupe. Unlike the portrait of Martaba, the portrait of Begoo features an elaborate background, with a colourful carpet, some cushions and Begoo's shoes. The subject's fingers and toes are beautified with jewellery. The use of light and shadow in this portrait also appears more elaborate than that found in Martaba's portrait, particularly on her face, which appears attractive. Rather unusually, her thick defined eyebrows appear to meet very closely in a perceivably masculine and unconventional way. Despite this peculiarity, this work was well received, and was purchased in 1879 by the Prince of Wales, who possessed an admiration for paintings of Indian women.[46] Moreover, the painting continues to remain within the Royal Collection today, testament to its lasting legacy.

Both of Prinsep's nautch paintings appear to have been exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1878, according to a review of the exhibition in the *Illustrated London News*, which remarked:

> Mr. Val Prinsep's two small pictures, "Study of a Kashmiree Nautch Girl" (44), and "Martaba," another effigy of a young lady of the Kashmirian *corps de ballet* … [show] that Indian dancing girls (in despite

[45] Prinsep, *Imperial India: An Artist's Journals*, 228.
[46] Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 208.

> of the popular delusions on the subject) may be neither pretty nor graceful[.][47]

Such scathing comments about the appearances of nautch girls (real and artistically portrayed) appeared frequently – though it is debatable whether works like Prinsep's nautch girls were intended to portray non-beauty or were only perceived in this way by certain viewers. It is quite likely, given Prinsep's involvement in the Pre-Raphaelite style, that the artist was attempting to offer a non-conformist and alternative vision of beauty rather than to represent non-beauty. In turn, this could be seen as Prinsep's exploration of the limitations of beauty, by challenging the conventions of aesthetics through the controversial figure of the nautch girl.

Similarly, musical entertainments centred on offering pleasing visuals through the combined aspects of storytelling, entertainment and status as works of work. It was extremely rare for entire musical works to be intentionally "ugly" (perhaps owing to the unavoidable audible displeasures associated with cacophonous or unmusical sounds during a performance), though elements of dissonance and discord were often used sporadically to express the absence of beauty within particular contexts. Such practices could also have been seen to represent the perceived dissonance of actual nautch performances by British patrons:

> The most unpleasant part of the nautch is the dissonant music with which it is accompanied, and in which the dancers themselves every now and then join with voices as shrill and unmusical as the note of the peacock.[48]

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[47] 'Royal Academy Exhibition', *Illustrated London News*, 25 May 1878, Gale NewsVault.
[48] Daniell and Caunter, *The Oriental Annual*, 21.

Beauty – or the lack of it – could be expressed more widely within the visual aspects of musical entertainments in a similar way to painting, through the physical attributes of the subjects and the backdrops upon which they are presented, which could be judged and critiqued. Owing to the lack of visual accounts of musical entertainments featuring nautch girls during the long nineteenth century, it is difficult to ascertain whether and how beauty played a role in depictions of nautch girls. However, most published reviews of *The Nautch Girl* appeared to agree on the pleasing visuals of the sets and the costumes. Reviews of the first performance of *The Crown of India* similarly referred to the impressive visual spectacle of the masque, though commentary rarely pursued this matter in greater detail. Certainly, nautch girls offered a "beautifying" effect in the scenes of musical entertainments, often serving as the backdrop for important events in musical entertainments. For example, in James Cobb's 1798 comic opera *Ramah Droog*, there is a zenana scene featuring dancing girls and musicians, comparable to that highlighted in Smith's *A Trip to Bengal*. In addition, *The Crown of India* features a troupe of nautch girls who also offer no major contribution to the narrative of the work, but rather assume a role in setting and embellishing the scenes that they appear in. In such works, the nautch performers could serve as both cultural signifiers and beautifiers – decorating and colouring the scene for aesthetic purposes through their visual appearance and performance through a process of objectification.

It is notable that in many of these musical works, the nautch girls were presented as a troupe rather than as individuals, with relatively minor roles. In paintings and sketches, nautch girls were more likely to be portrayed as individuals or in smaller groups, often with

a central role in the work. In the musical works of *Ramah Droog*, *A Trip to Bengal* and *The Crown of India*, nautch girls are depicted to perform in a group, never enabling a single nautch girl character to appear in isolation as a point of focus. In doing so, the beauty (or non-beauty) of these nautch girls as individuals can never be explored or scrutinised profoundly – the nautch girls are treated only as a collective entity with scarce individual identities.

Another important consideration with regard to beauty was the topic of femininity versus masculinity. As discussed earlier, Hickey's painting of the three women of debatable qualification appear rather masculine, expressed through the broadness and lack of refinedness of their figures and their faces and a general lack of conventional femininity. According to the traditional tropes of men and women in Victorian society, femininity was associated with delicate features, fair skin, a slender figure and a generally soft composure. Such characteristics of "feminine" beauty seem to be lacking in Hickey's and Prinsep's works about nautch girls. However, in many other works about nautch girls, such as those by William Carpenter, Tilly Kettle and John Zoffany, the subjects do conform to Victorian conventions of feminine beauty, offering diversity in nautch-girl representation in this regard.

The representation of beauty in nautch girls is further complicated through the works of Charles D'Oyly, who marked out regional differences in his representations of nautch girls in his illustrated lithographs. For instance, there is a stark contrast between his depiction of a dancing woman of Bengal (Figure 22) and a dancing woman of Lucknow (Figure 23)

respectively. Notably, much like the operetta *The Nautch Girl*, D'Oyly's works offered cross-overs in art and satire, often embedding political or social nuances in his work. In the two lithographs, the Bengali woman has a broader physique than her Lucknawi counterpart, with a wide neck and a masculine and seemingly unattractive face with mouth open, barefoot with her pyjama on display, and poised in a clumsy and inelegant manner. Her audience (two English officers and an Englishwoman) stand with neutral faces, rather indifferent and unresponsive to the performance. The dancing girl from Lucknow appears far more graceful, elegantly poised with a long, slender neck and delicate features upon her face, that appear to resonate more with Victorian ideals of feminine beauty. Unlike her Bengali counterpart, the Lucknawi nautch girl wears shoes, and her flowing dress reaches her ankles. Moreover, her audience is far more positively engaged in the performance. In this case, ugliness and beauty in nautch girls is explored through features typically ascribe to masculinity and femininity, as well as a deconstruction of regional differences within India. According to de Almeida and Gilpin, the contrast appears to "illustrate the once prevailing imperial preferences for northern Indians (believed to be more delicate and lighter skinned and therefore closer to the European model than the people of the south) [or east]."[49] Perhaps it is an element of the satire that the audience members within the two works are clearly not a family, despite the illustrations' descriptions, further emphasising the tongue-in-cheek aspect of the works.

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[49] De Almeida and Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance*, 259.

In this satirical work, D'Oyly addresses the issue of how nautch girls were perceived and branded as ugly (particularly in the depiction of the Bengali nautch girl), although they remained a popular form of entertainment for Britons, subsequently portraying the hypocrisies of British discourse. The "ugly" masculine Bengali nautch girl contrasted with the more "beautiful" feminine Lucknawi nautch girl further allowed D'Oyly to explore issues of regional racism and the preferences for women of certain regions of the subcontinent over others, which might also have had political insinuations. In this way, artists could also offer critiques of society and general attitudes towards nautch girls and, by extension, ideals of beauty.

While diversities were indeed apparent in representations of nautch girls, it is clear that artists were able to offer commentary and an exploration of the perception of nautch girls and of beauty more generally. While some artists chose to depict nautch girls according to the conventions of feminine beauty, others chose to defy them, whether in an attempt to contribute to the existing anti-nautch discourse that nautch girls lacked beauty or to insinuate that the limitations of beauty extended far beyond the existing tropes of Victorian society. The mixed reception to these artworks further reveals the complexity of the issue, whereby subjectivity and its ensuing complications prevail to present an assortment of varying ideas and opinions on the subject of the nautch girl.

Sexualisation and Eroticisation

The forging together of the themes of gender and "otherness" was significantly inherent in imperialist discourses of the long nineteenth century. The development and interplay of the inseparable categories of gender, race and sexuality within the imperial context is explored comprehensively by Anne McClintock.[50] Natalie Boymel Kampen has emphasised in her edited collection of essays on ancient art that a distinction should be made between the "erotic" on the one hand, and "sexuality" on the other. The distinction lies in the fact that the former refers to "the presentation of sexual behaviour and of images designed to arouse the viewer", while the latter refers to a wider platform of considerations, including "the study of the representation of the body, of the way social categories and individuals are defined by sexual identity as well as sexual conduct, and the way that imagery allows human beings to find and measure themselves as sexual."[51] In the last few decades, she argued, feminist and post-structuralist readings had emerged, which have further opened up questions of what we mean by terms like gender and sexuality and how they interrelate or, indeed, might not. Meyda Yeğenoğlu examines the deep connections between expressions of cultural and sexual difference respectively, through an in-depth analysis of the Western fixation with the veiled woman of the "Orient".[52] A noteworthy

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[50] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.
[51] Natalie Boymel Kampen and Bettina Ann Bergmann, eds., *Sexuality in Ancient Art: Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.
[52] Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

trend within the amalgamation of gender and otherness was the exploration – or exploitation – of sexuality and eroticism, which was particularly prevalent within reflections about the nautch girl. Since the nautch girl was associated with decadence and prostitution (in the eyes of imperialist Britain) as well as being regarded as a performer, she was widely sexualised, with extensive focus on her body. As Reina Lewis notes, "the sexualised display of the Oriental female body was a central strand of Western Orientalism, fully developed and well known by the second half of the nineteenth century".[53] This was also true for artistic representations, with aspects of eroticism present in a plethora of works about subjects across the so-called "Orient". In a similar way, the nautch girl was ascribed multiple identities simultaneously; such as a representor of a region (Oriental, Indian, Kashmiri/Bengali etc.), as a woman, and as a performer. The combination of these three identities contributed to the forging of a historically significant figure in the context of British imperialism and Victorian society. Though not quite so simple, the nautch girl did appear to correspond largely to the "negative" or non-conventional poles of particular constructed oppositional binaries. In this way, the nautch girl was a significant cause for provocation and excitement in nineteenth-century Britain. Moreover, the combination of these various identities lent itself to associations of sexuality, whether subtly implicit or unequivocally overt. In this way, sexuality could be explored in the context of the "erotic exotic" woman, who was often expressed as being both enchanting and dangerous, thereby augmenting the thrill of the nautch girl.

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[53] Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, 143.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were visual depictions of nautch girls that emphasised the shapely and voluptuous (though largely clothed) bodies of women, offering a strong indication that these were grown and fully-developed women as opposed to "girls". On the other hand, there was also a great multitude of works that drew little attention towards the female body, but rather towards other aspects that exuded femininity, such as delicate facial features and elaborate attire and jewellery. In either case, there was a prevalent emphasis on defining the nautch girl by her gender using visual signifiers. These visual signifiers could also be expressed in musical entertainments, complemented with aural signifiers.

The artistic definition of the female body or form in depictions of nautch girls did not exist in a vacuum. Indeed, artworks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain offered a variety of ways of expressing femaleness and femininity, regardless of the subject at hand. The act of expressing gender in art was particularly pertinent in the nineteenth century, as the outlook towards women's roles began to develop and the traditional boundaries between the public and private spheres was increasingly challenged. This development could also be seen to be reflected in British paintings about nautch girls, where nautch girls were increasingly depicted individually and uniquely rather than in generic groups. These nineteenth-century nautch girls were bolder and more independent, reflecting changing social views in Victorian Britain. At the same time, however, women continued to be restricted, categorised and framed, as well as condemned for allegedly debauched behaviour, thought or affect.

As the yoke of colonialism expanded from within Britain, as well as various other countries, so too did the lure towards the "East", which often comprised a sexual element that drew on escapism and fantasy. This grew increasingly common over time. As Rana Kabbani notes, the nineteenth century was a "conspicuously consuming era" that "thirsted for variety in its sexual depictions as it craved a variety of products in its markets".[54] Depictions of the nautch girl played a strong role in satiating such desires, through emphases on her body and her sexuality. For example, while Tilly Kettle's singular dancing girl (Figure 3) is clothed, the roundness of her breast, accentuated by the folds of her golden blouse, is difficult to overlook, particularly when the mouthpiece of the glimmering *hookah* she holds draws the viewer's eyes towards it. She glances towards the frame of the work, her right arm poised in an inviting manner as she allows the viewer to gaze at her dancing body in an eroticised manner.

Kabbani argues that women in Orientalist paintings are made more erotic by being surrounded by material objects and textiles (often signifiers of the exotic) that also entice the viewers and thereby prolong the gaze: "the woman's revealed body becomes startling and arousing in contrast with a well-dressed room."[55] This resonates strongly in countless nautch girl depictions on the canvas as well as on the stage, with the appropriation of *hookahs*, fruits, perfumes, and "oriental" interiors that furnished the background and foreground in the vast majority of nautch-girl artworks.

[54] Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), 70.
[55] Kabbani, 70.

The pose and positioning of nautch girls in various works also contributed to the eroticisation of the subject, with the female body either assertively poised mid-dance, which accentuated her feminine figure, or reclining idly in an indolent and inviting manner. For example, in Horace H Wilson's 1841 lithograph 'A Nautch in the Palace of the Ameer of Sind' (Figure 18), the nautch girl is poised in an alluring manner, as she lifts her veil to entice her audience to gaze at her beauty as she dances. This is furthered by the palpable shapeliness of her breasts visible through her clothing, offering a distinct point of focus that is centred under the scalloped archway. She gazes lovingly at her all-male audience members, who return the exchange with expressions that convey attentiveness and desire. The process of sexual objectification is furthered by the visual presence of objects that are associated with indulgence and luxury (as previously discussed), such as *hookahs*, fruits and "exotic" instruments, which supplement the aura of pleasure that exists in this work. Frederic Shoberl's coloured engraving from 1820 entitled 'Devedassis or Bayaderes' (Figure 15) takes a different approach, but with similar effect. There is no audience but the viewer of the work, nor any substantial background or setting, save for a small carpet upon which a female musician is seated and plants towering behind the subjects. The musician sits attentively as she plays her stringed instrument, exposing her unusually long bare midriff to the viewer. The two dancing girls are shown light on their feet as they dance together with joyful expressions. Rather unusually, the two women face each other as they dance tremendously closely together and gaze amorously at each other. They almost mirror each other in their poses, revealing the statuesque front of the dancing girl on the left, and the curvaceous back side of the dancing girl on the right. With blushing cheeks,

outstretched arms that encircle each other's bodies, and hips that appear to be almost touching, the representation of nautch girls in this work appears to insinuate an exploration of sexuality. The two women's dancing bodies are central to the image, allowing the viewer to consume them both. Shoberl's engraving appears in R. Ackerman's *The World in Miniature – Hindoostan* amongst numerous other illustrations that offer a more documentary-esque recording of the people of "Hindoostan". Significantly, Shoberl's depiction of Indian women appears to differ somewhat from his depiction of men. In various works that contain women, the female subjects are clearly sexualised and eroticised, for example, through the depiction of the bare breasts seemingly bursting out of the women's clothes in 'Potter's Wife' and 'Cotton Spinning', and full nudity of the torso while adorned in a full set of jewellery in 'Dress and Ornaments, Hindoo Ladies'. It appears, therefore, that the depiction of dancing girls in this book was part of a wider conceptualisation of the nude female body that existed throughout Ackerman's work. But it is only in the image of the dancing girls that the women appear to be interacting with each other, implying an exploration of sexual freedom.

Decades later, British intrigue with the nautch girl's sexualised body endured in illustrated book form. In a unique example, Indian-born British artist Byam Shaw was responsible for the illustrations of Laurence Hope's (Adela Florence Nicolson's) *The Garden of Kama, and Other Love Lyrics from India* in 1914.[56] As Nalini Ghuman notes, Shaw's frontispiece for this work (Figure 28) features "a night of bliss in the Garden: lovers kiss among peacocks

[56] The book was first published in 1901 and republished with Byam Shaw's illustrations in 1914.

and falling rose petals; semi-naked *nautch* girls dance and sing, adorned from head to foot with ornaments, their pale skin and 'handsome' Kashmiri features drawn from travellers' descriptions."[57] As a later depiction of nautch girls during the period under study, the image draws great interest – many of the most renowned nautch girl images had been painted in the earlier period of the long nineteenth century. Bare-breasted and supple, these women are portrayed as confident and content, blissfully unaware of any sort of audience within or outside of the image, visually devoted to their art. In this way, these women – and their bodies – are sexualised and eroticised. As an illustration for a book, the style and intentions differ considerably from the paintings of William Carpenter, Tilly Kettle and others, hence the image's bold uniqueness in its semi-nude portrayal of the nautch girls. Like other images of nautch girls, the nature of performativity of the dancing girls remains highly prevalent and central to the image. With gazes averted, these dancing women are unaware of their observers, eyes closed or averted, surrounded by the beauty of nature and the night, and poised mid-dance. One of the most prominent aspects of the image remains the semi-nudity of the nautch girls, which is marked clearly with the use of light and shadow so that the viewer's gaze is guided towards the dancers' symmetrical and round breasts. Even the jewellery that is adorned by the nautch girls serves to frame the women's breasts. With its unique depiction of semi-nude women dancing gallantly with softened facial expressions and bold usage of colour throughout, the work appears to have drawn inspiration from pre-Raphaelitism, through the vibrant portrayal of these women's bodies engaged in an almost ritualistic nautch performance amongst nature. This departure from

[57] Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj*, 188.

the conventional nautch visuals we have seen so far is likely due to the later time of production (1914) compared to other nautch-girls artworks. Attitudes to women in the public sphere and, more specifically, the female body underwent substantial exploration and change during this time, coinciding also with shifting attitudes with regard to imperialism and colonialism. Within this context, works such as Byam Shaw's illustration offered a glimpse into just how differing views were manifested in the arts and how they transformed over time as interactions between cultures increased and artistic genres evolved.

Depictions of nautch girls were not always sexually charged, as so many examples show. Works by the likes of the Daniell brothers appeared to focus on the elegance, grace and the splendorous spectacle of the nautch girls and their performance more atmospherically, with little attention heeded towards explicit nudity or sexuality. In these kinds of works, nautch girls often served in a scene-setting role, as a geographic and cultural locator. This was also reflected in musical works, such as Elgar's *The Crown of India*, in which nautch girls served to provide "local colour" through an otherwise relatively passive role. This is not to say that in such works nautch girls were desexualised. Indeed, by depicting nautch girls in front of male (and female) audiences, a distinction of gender was made clear. However, this was not explicitly linked to sexual desire (although it was often suggested). The other type of nautch-girl artwork constituted a more central role for the nautch girl, such as in Prinsep's two nautch-girls portraits as well as works by Thomas Hickey, in which the female body and individual characteristics were far more prominent. In these works, the

nautch girl's sexuality could be explored more unambiguously, through facial expression, physical stance and clothing (or lack thereof).

While nudity (partial or complete) was certainly not uncommon in European painting throughout the ages, it was usually reserved for images of classical and religious figures rather than contemporary figures – in particular, those figures that provoked such controversy as the nautch girls. In its classist and neo-classicist traditions, nudity was often displaced from the contemporary and the "real" through its location in mythology and religion, thereby circumventing controversy of a sexual-morality nature. This strongly adhered to the concept of "heroic" or "ideal" nudity of classical sculpture.[58] In contrast, musical entertainments steered clear of nudity onstage largely until the 1960s and 1970s. This is likely owing to the challenges of using "real" nude actors onstage, as opposed to the "unreal" bodies depicted on the canvas that were, rather bluntly, an assemblage of brushstrokes. Subsequently, there was a marked difference between paintings and musical entertainment with regards to the visual treatment of the nude body which emphasised the disconnection between acceptable nudity and perceived notions of reality. Indeed, the sexuality of the nautch girls could be expressed in music in differing ways, but visual nudity did not appear to be one of them during the long nineteenth century.

Notably, however, with regard to Solomon's operetta *The Nautch Girl*, *The Times*' opening review stated that the dances of work "passed through the crucible of the theatre's

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[58] Nigel Jonathan Spivey, *Understanding Greek Sculpture: Ancient Meanings, Modern Readings* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997).

censorship, [coming] out as immaculate as the 'blameless dances' of Ruddygore."[59] From this one may reasonably deduce that some controversies had arisen regarding perceptions of the dance performances developed in this production, which needed to be toned down in order to meet the censorship requirements of the theatre. The terms "immaculate" and "blameless" insinuate that these dances might once have been too erotic or sexualised for the British stage. Furthermore, the review of the same production by the *Birmingham Daily Post* suggests that "it was not the true Nautch dance that was given",[60] which, in addition to implying a lack of "authenticity" compared to "actual" nautch performances, might also insinuate that the dances were morally policed for the British audience. Notably, the types of dances that were performed in this operetta and other works featuring nautch girls could quite likely have varied significantly between productions, and indeed perhaps even between individual showings, depending on the individuals that comprised the audiences.

The score for the nautch dance in Elgar's *The Crown of India* provides little instruction regarding the performance, thereby limiting the assessment of how sexualised the performance might or might not have been. However, since the masque was first performed to commemorate the coronation of the Emperor and Empress of India, it is unlikely that a risqué performance was involved. However, the fact that the anti-nautch movement was in full swing during the early twentieth century meant that the sexuality and eroticism that had been associated with nautch girls was deeply impregnated in the minds

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[59] 'Opening Night Review.'
[60] 'The New Comic Opera at the Savoy.'

of many, and might therefore have resonated during the performance regardless of whether there was any explicit nods towards the sexuality of the nautch girl. It was simply a process of association. The fact that a nautch dance was included in a masque about making Delhi the capital of India is notable in itself, since it did little to advance the plot of the masque and rather served as an exotic signifier and visual ornamentation – something to engage the audience.

The sexualisation and eroticisation of contemporary nautch girls prevalent in some nautch-girl artworks of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries could be seen to have been somewhat daring, particularly since contemporary European women were rarely depicted in a similar manner. Indeed, nautch girls were perceived very differently to European women in comparable social categories and comparable circumstances, making differences in representation inevitable. In the high arts, the nude female body (though commonly associated with sexuality and the erotic) avoided controversy and moral indecency through the portrayal of symbolic, spiritual or mythical figures, in which case the body was displaced from "reality". Of course, from the latter half of the nineteenth century, Impressionists began to challenge the classical nudes by portraying women in contemporary settings, such as Eduard Manet in 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe' (1863) and 'Olympia' (1865). Interestingly, this piece borrowed significantly from Titian's 'Venus of Urbino' (1538), which took form respectively from Giorgione's 'Sleeping Venus' (1510).[61]

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[61] Jean Sorabella, 'The Nude in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance | Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art', The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, accessed 14 January 2018, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/numr/hd_numr.htm; 'Degas and the Nude',

Manet had taken this mythological imagery and transformed it into a contemporary setting to controversial effect, where many perceived the woman to be a prostitute, and were particularly disapproving of her confrontational gaze. In a less controversial manner, nautch girls could be used in artwork to explore the contemporary nude female body and associated issues surrounding sexuality and the erotic, dislocating it from a local contemporary "Western" setting and relocating it at a cultural and geographical distance that was comparable to mythical or symbolic status. Through such practices, the British audience could be titillated by the exotic marvels onstage, set in the far-away land of India, resting assured that such immoralities were associated with a distant culture beyond the boundaries of geographical, cultural and social proximity.

In this process, the nautch girl continued to be policed and disparaged:

> This veil the nautch girls manage with great grace and skill in their dances, only while peeping from beneath it with an arch expression of unequivocal meaning, at another exposing the whole countenance, beaming with a radiance that only makes the beholder regret so much beauty should be allied to so much depravity. The eye is usually lit up with earnest animation, every feature being refulgent with expression, that, but for the revolting leaven of sensuality which appears to give it life, would be entrancing to gaze and to dwell upon.[62]

The sexuality of the nautch girl in art was highlighted not only through physical or aesthetic means, but also through narrative ones. For example, there are various references in the

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Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 16 December 2010, http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/degas-and-nude.

[62] Daniell and Caunter, *The Oriental Annual*, 18–19.

libretto of *The Nautch Girl* which imply that the nautch girls are not only dancers but also pursue sexual exploits. For instance, in "Roses are Fair" (No. 3), Indru and Currie exchange the following words about Beebee:

> Indru. Lilies are pure, but not purer than she;
> Currie. She's more wide-a-wake than you think, sir,
> Indru. Comrades are true, but not truer to me;
> Currie. At strangers I've known her to wink, sir.[63]

In this section, Currie appears to suggest that Beebee is calculatingly flirtatious and even promiscuous, while Indru – who is infatuated with Beebee – defends her as pure and loyal. Currie's criticisms are triggered by Indru referring to Beebee's "purity", which would appear to refer to the nautch girl's general wholesomeness and innocence. However, Currie's response appears to clarify that Beebee's purity (or lack thereof) is rather a reference to her chasteness and sexuality. Such a characterisation of the nautch girl echoed the descriptions of numerous literary works of fiction about the nautch girl that emerged during this time, as well as the publicised concerns of the anti-nautch movement, which similarly referred to the alleged licentiousness of actual nautch girls the apparent threat they posed to men through their sexual deviousness.

Shortly after, in the "Chorus and Solos of Nautch Girls" (No. 4), the nautch troupe sings in a cheerful *allegro* aria:

> We never woo
> As others do

[63] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 6.

With passion ardent, firm and true;
For we would stay
Unwed for aye,
To love, and love, and run away.[64]

Of their own accord, the nautch girls of this operetta confirm their intentions – to be licentious and disloyal, never having to settle down with a single partner, reflecting British concerns that were being raised by proponents of the anti-nautch movement, which were led largely by advocates of Evangelicalism. However, the sheer brazenness with which the nautch girls of the operetta sing proudly about their sins seems not so much to define the characters of the nautch girls, but rather to ridicule British perceptions about nautch girls generally. This is particularly pertinent when considered with the fact that this was a Savoy Opera, which – by definition – encompassed satirical commentary on British society. Seen in this way, the nautch girls in this operetta not only represented themselves, but also echoed and perhaps even mocked the concerns of members of British society who felt threatened by the nautch girl. In another reflection of sexuality, in Charles Smith's *A Trip to Bengal*, nautch girls serve as seductresses serving to entice Fitzpatrick with perfumes as hookahs, similarly insinuating the sexual nature of the nautch girls.

The depiction of nautch girls as sexually licentious and immoral were not so apparent in paintings, perhaps owing to the differing temporal, spatial and narratological dimensions compared to musical and literary works. However, the presence of sexual immorality could be implied through partial or full nudity, as explored earlier. But to suggest that all or even

[64] Dance and Desprez, 6.

most artworks in the nautch girl genre depicted their main subject as erotic and sexual in nature would be a lucid fallacy. Instead, it is important to acknowledge that many artworks focused on other aspects of the nautch girl, placing little emphasis (if any at all) on the sexual or the erotic. Mrs C. Belnos' 1832 work 'A Nautch girl or public female singer of India' (Figure 29) depicts a tranquil image of a nautch girl (or singer), seated in loose clothing, eyes directed towards the ceiling in concentration as she sings. This image possesses an air of innocence, which is emphasised by the tender reactions of the audience members, as well as the fact that there are European women (as well as men) in this audience. It is notable that the artist of this work was female and may therefore have focused on different aspects of the nautch girl than her male contemporaries. Similarly, Valentine Cameron Prinsep's 'Martaba, a Kashmiree Nautch Girl' (Figure 25) evokes less of an air of sexuality or eroticism, through a focus on the nautch girl's upper body, which is draped in loose clothing that does not reveal any of her contours. In this image 'Martaba' meets the viewer in a confrontational gaze, as do many of the dancing girls portrayed in a sexualised way – but the context is different in this case because this dancing girl is seated and fully clothed. Additionally, that this nautch girl is named in the title enables the viewer to perceive her as a person rather than as an objectified *thing*. This image, then, appears to avoid any heavy sexual or erotic connotations or references towards immorality, correlating with the artist's own published views that these women's dances were "respectable" despite arising criticisms.[65] Artists' own experiences and agency were of significant importance to their nautch-girl artworks.

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[65] Prinsep, *Imperial India: An Artist's Journals*, 97.

But the significant number of works that depicted nautch girls in a sexualised or eroticised way overlapped with the intensifying fire of the anti-nautch movement as well as general puritanical views, fanning its flames and feeding into its assertions with vivid imagery that was often reproduced and disseminated through popular media. The anti-nautch movement was established in Madras in the 1890s, comprised largely of missionaries from the metropole, along with Indian social reformers who aligned themselves with Victorian moral values.[66] The movement was chiefly based on Christian values, with leading roles played by the likes of Rev. J. Murdoch, who published criticisms of the nautch as part of a broader take on Indian social reform.[67] Publications such as *Nautches – An Appeal to Educated Hindus* warned its readers that patrons of the nautch were subjected to such ills as loss of wealth, health and good character.[68] Significantly, the anti-nautch movement associated social reform with education and Christian values, echoing the imperialist mission. While dynamic and multi-faceted, the anti-nautch movement established a normative framework that was built on anxieties about race, gender, religion and social difference. This movement penetrated Indian society, dispersed further through press coverage[69] and through the arts.

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[66] Pran Nevile, *Nautch Girls of India: Dancers, Singers, Playmates* (Ravi Kumar Publisher, 1996), 164.
[67] Nevile, 165.
[68] Nevile, 165.
[69] For example, anti-nautch works were actively published in *Madras Mail* and *Sanjivani*.

The question arises as to whether British female performers were subject to the same manner of sexualisation in artworks. Of course, sexuality and/or nudity were explored substantially in the Victorian period, from the nudes displaced in literary or mythological contexts, to the classical asexualised bodies in sculpture to even the sensational "modern nudes" that explored sexuality more openly towards the end of the period.[70] In this way, the depiction of nautch girls did not emerge as an isolated phenomenon, but rather contributed to this development in the exploration of sexuality and the female body that deepened in Britain during this period. But more specifically, the nautch girls and other women of the "Orient" offered a key subject that Britons could centre on in their own exploration of female sexuality, nudity and eroticism while displacing it somewhat from the "Occident" to desensitise the controversy and immorality traditionally associated with it. In the case of nautch girls in particular, Britons were generally very aware of their practices in colonial India, often patronising performances, and even supporting their transference and relocation in British society, whether through travelling Indian nautch troupes or local interpretations of nautch performances and songs. In this way, the subject of the nautch girl was exceptionally prevalent in Britain during this period, offering a central vehicle to explore sexuality through a familiar – though distant – female subject. Throughout the long nineteenth century, it seemed, sexuality could be explored far more deeply as a talking point in art if it were done so in an "exotic" (and sometimes also comic) setting, through a process of geographically and culturally distancing oneself from the controversy.

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[70] Flavia Dietrich, 'The Victorian Nude', *The British Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (2002): 78–80.

Irrespective of the existence of a sexual element, nautch girls were usually presented in artworks as distinctly female, through the representation of the body, the face, the gestures and the characterisations that adhered to contemporary tropes associated with femaleness and femininity. As such, the identity of the nautch girl was clear-cut in terms of being gendered as well as culturally located. In combination with the sexual controversies associated with the nautch girl, which became popularised under the anti-nautch movement as well as literary accounts of nautch girls that focused on their allegedly sexualised characteristics, it was difficult to disconnect sexuality from the nautch girl completely. Nautch girls were framed (or staged), where they could be observed, objectified and enjoyed, echoing artistic depictions of odalisques and concubines and offering a visualisation and auralisation of the nautch girl's body and her performance. The artistic representations of the nautch girl in Britain conveyed with it an implied sexuality and alluded towards immoral sexual behaviour, owing to the criticisms about the character of nautch girls that were claimed by various proponents of the anti-nautch movement. However, in doing so, these representations of nautch girls not only resonated with (or sometimes conflicted with) anti-nautch sentiments but also enabled British artworks to delve into a deep exploration of female sexuality and nudity in art within a contemporary setting. This contributed to the development of British artistic practices with regards to depictions of sexuality and nudity on the canvas and the stage. Significantly, the sexual appeal of a dancing woman from an "exotic" land struck the attention of both sexes, as so many British literary receptions of nautch girls that were authored by women demonstrate. As Reina Lewis points out:

> [W]omen were also consumers [… and] [w]omen as well as men looked at Orientalised female bodies and were well schooled in the logic of the Orientalist fantasy harem.[71]

In the same way, the female body of the nautch girl was intended for consumption by both men and women, even through the exploration of sexuality. From Mrs C. Belnos' nautch-girl engravings from the 1830s to Lady Lawley's 1914 watercolour 'A Hindu Dasi or Nautch Girl' (Figures 29 and 14 respectively), to the countless female actors and dancers that impersonated nautch girls onstage, women also contributed significantly to depictions of nautch girls in the British imagination. The artistic productions that culminated from these processes offered great diversity and variability, but garnered particular meanings within the context of British society in the long nineteenth century. More significantly, however, through these processes, the very concept of the nautch girl and its manifestation in British artwork contributed to local British artistic practices and explorations of gender and sexuality.

Objectification

The sexualisation of the nautch girl was also linked to her objectification, where the latter often (though not always) encompassed the former. The objectification of the nautch girl was expressed through a process of dehumanisation; whereby the nautch girl was

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[71] Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, 142–43.

transformed into an object of affection for the beholder. Captured and immortalised in numerous artworks, the nautch girl was reconfigured as a consumable object in the form of paint, ink, melody and movement, to be perpetually defined and consumed by her creators and her observers. These processes took place within the frameworks of imperialism and gender categorisation, whereby nautch girls could be objectified in both (or either) contexts.

Through the processes of immortalising the subject in British artworks, the nautch girl was objectified – transformed into a commodity that could be consumed, owned and traded by artists and patrons alike. This was particularly emphasised through the "ownability" of the nautch girl – the assertion that she could be owned just as an object could be. On one level, this occurred through the materiality of artworks that could be created, consumed, purchased and displayed. On another level, the nautch girl was objectified through her representation within artworks – through the abundant focus on her body and its performativity as well as considerations of sexual dominance. More specifically, this aspect of ownability took place through the insinuations embedded within the artworks.

In Laurence Hope's *The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics from India*,[72] the poem 'The Temple Dancing Girl' offers an intriguing insight into a literary perspective of nautch girls by a female poet. A particular extract is worth taking note of:

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[72] It is pertinent to note that four of the lyrics from *The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics from India* were adapted to music by British female composer Amy Woodforde-Finden, thus highlighting the interart nature of the production.

> And all the Temple's little links and laws
> Will not for long protect your loveliness.
> I have a stronger force to aid my case,
> Nature's great Law, to love and to possess![73]

This extract insinuates a clear desire among the poem's persona to take ownership of the nautch girl – to possess her and to exercise power over her. It mirrors the implications of so many narratives surrounding descriptions and depictions of the nautch girl, whether artistic, musical or otherwise. The casually thrown judgements and emotions expressed regarding the character and physical beauty (or lack thereof) of the nautch girl also implies possession, through the presumptions that the actions of nautch girls *should* be controlled or even prohibited on the one hand, and patronised and appropriated as art or entertainment on the other. The nautch girl's body was subsequently captured and displayed (albeit through a translation or interpretation) on the canvas and on the stage to be consumed and enjoyed, and/or disparaged and despised. She could be owned by the hundreds and perhaps thousands who purchased original or reproduced artworks featuring nautch girls, tickets to musical performances, or published sheet music from theatrical performances to consume at home at will.

The extract from Hope's poem is also indicative of religious concerns, where it is implied that the (presumably) male persona will *possess* the dancing girl in spite of the obstacles presented by the doctrines of Hinduism. This reference to religion was also reflective of a

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[73] Laurence Hope and Byam Shaw, *The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics from India* (London: Heinemeann, 1914), 143.

wider discourse in imperialist Britain – one in which Hindu beliefs were simplified and placed inferiorly compared to Christian ones, with perceived local religious and cultural hindrances that needed to be surmounted. Notably, the plot of the operetta *The Nautch Girl* resounds a similar message in that it is also the Hindu temple's "little links and laws" that prevent the marriage of Holly Beebee to Indru and cause all the ensuing drama to unfold. Such examples remind us of the general British "civilising" mission in India – attempts to overhaul and "improve" Indian society, culture and law, by first claiming ownership of the state and then by attempting to introduce an allegedly systematic infrastructure of legal, judicial, religious and social reforms. This power imbalance was dependent upon a superiority complex, whereby Britain claimed its own superiority in knowledge, power and religious practices in comparison to India (and indeed much of the rest of the world). This was made all too clear during the British Raj and was widely acknowledged amongst official figures and spokespersons. For instance, Lord Mayo, (Viceroy, 1869-72) famously remarked in 1870:

> Teach your subordinates that we are all British gentlemen engaged in the magnificent work of governing an inferior race.[74]

Similarly, Legal Member of the Colonial Council James Fitzjames Stephen said that India was:

[74] Piers Brendon, *The Decline And Fall Of The British Empire* (New York: Random House, 2010), 230.

> a country densely peopled, grossly ignorant, steeped in idolatrous superstition, un-energetic, fatalistic, indifferent to most of what we regard as the evils of life, and preferring the repose of submitting to them to the trouble of encountering and trying to remove them. [75]

With such ardent and assertive claims among the officials and civil servants of the British Raj, there were undoubtedly clear attempts to justify the act of governing and exerting power over India and other colonies through an assertion of self-superiority and claims to ownership during Britain's age of imperialism. This appeared to have been echoed in nautch-girl artworks, through the presentation of a subject to be desired, possessed, judged and regulated. Just like Britain's colony, the nautch girl (itself a "product" associated with the colony) was to be owned and consumed to its owner's content.

This sort of objectification, as shown in various examples, often featured sexual connotations, in which the clear sexualisation of the nautch girl played a role in enhancing her ability to be consumed and enjoyed. The connection between power and sexuality becomes apparent here, in line with Foucault's claim:

> [S]exuality is not an animate or natural quality of the body but is, in fact, an historically specific effect of the operations of different regimes of power on that body.[76]

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[75] James Fitzjames Stephen, A History of the Criminal Law of England (Macmillan, 1883), 554, quoted in Mark Brown, *Penal Power and Colonial Rule* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 122.
[76] David J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 103; For an exploration of sexuality and colonialism, see Greg Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, First Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

The appropriation of the nautch girl in particular in artistic forms could therefore be seen to be reflective or reminiscent of a wider mission, in a clear exertion of power that utilised the qualities of ownability and objectification.

At times, this connection between power and sexuality also exploited aspects of forcefulness, bordering on violence. Returning to Hope's poem, there are dark tones of insistence in the narrative, where the dancing girl appears reluctant to consent to the persona's lustful desires:

> Refuse, withdraw and hesitate awhile
> Your young reluctance does but fan the flame, […]
> You will consent, those slim, reluctant feet,
> Falling as lightly on the careless street
> As the white petals of a wind-worn flower,
> Will bring you here, at the Appointed Hour.[77]

This excerpt demonstrates the imbalance of power between the persona and the dancing girl, where it is implied that the nautch girl would eventually, and perhaps involuntarily, succumb to the persona's advances despite her unwillingness and reluctance. In promoting forcefulness, this excerpt amplifies the significance of possessing the nautch girl, where power plays a significant role in achieving ownership.

However, it is notable that nautch girls were often portrayed in works as free and as living of their own accord, contradicting their ownability. Most of the paintings and musical

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[77] Hope and Shaw, *The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics from India*, 144.

works featuring nautch girls show the women in content and unbound circumstances, being financially independent and exerting power or influence over others, entrancing them with their performances and appearances. In this way, the nautch girls could assume the role of the empowered and inflict ownership on their unknowing beholders. In doing so, the nautch girl was somewhat of an enigma, where her presence in artworks could simultaneously present her as being bound within the shackles of the canvas, stage or page, while also empowering her to impose her will on her patrons and spectators.

Seductress and Manipulator

Through the diverse array of visual and musical artworks, the sexuality and gender of the nautch girl are not only explored in the physical representation of the nautch girl's body and beauty, but also through her characterisation. Amongst the assorted depictions, the portrayals of feminine wiles and powers of manipulation seem to form a theme that spans across a variety works, manifested in various ways. In many such cases, it is the nautch girl who consciously exploits her sexuality and plays on the so-called vulnerabilities of men to achieve particular goals. Prevalent across the realms of visual art, music and literature (fictional and non-fictional alike), the allocation of these personality traits fortifies a very specific and critical representation of nautch girls as deceitful seductresses and manipulators. This framing of the nautch girl is exemplified distinctly within the entire narrative of Solomon's operetta *The Nautch Girl*, which revolves around a troupe of nautch girls that repeatedly boast of their deceitful nature and perform a number of acts to manipulate the way that events unfold around them. The *Freeman's Journal* review of *The*

Nautch Girl aptly describes the protagonist Holly Beebee as "bewitching",[78] appositely signifying both her perceived charm and powers of manipulation. Spanning across various artworks throughout the long nineteenth century, this common depiction is important in allowing one to understand how nautch girls and their characteristics were perceived. It might also have fuelled such discourses, reinforcing tropes already established in the field of literature and other formats.

The development of the plot in the operetta *The Nautch Girl* revolves heavily around the acts of the nautch girls. For instance, when Pyjama is scheduled to attend an appointment with the idol Bumbo in order to attend the sentencing of Indru and the Rajah to death by crocodile, it is the protagonist nautch girl Holly Beebee who devises a plan that she and the remaining nautch girls in the troupe could distract Pyjama from the meeting by enticing him through song and dance. This is just one of several occurrences in the operetta where the female characters use their voices, bodies and powers of manipulation in order to sway events in their favour. The performance chosen to fulfil this purpose features lyrics with strong sexual connotations, furthering the insinuation of seduction:

BEEBEE. Lay her softly on her silken bed;
OTHERS. Cubbadar, Cubbadar, Cubbadar![79]
BEEBEE. Lightly spread her tresses o'er the pillow,
OTHERS. Cubbadar, Cubbadar, Cubbadar!
BEEBEE. Draw the curtains close about her head.

[78] 'The New Savoy Opera'.
[79] Cubbadar, is the anglification of the Hindi word kabbadar, or the Urdu word khabadar. It means "watch out" and was sung in this piece with reference to the danger posed by mosquitos, whether to be taken literally or allegorically.

OTHERS. Cubbadar, Cubbadar, Cubbadar![80]

In this representation, the nautch girls do not shy away from the subject of sex, particularly in its association with acts of temptation and distraction. The intentions of the nautch girls, in this case, signify and attempt to distract a male character from his commitments by dancing and singing sexually suggestive lyrics. Similar representations of nautch girls can be found in other works. In Charles Smith's *A Trip to Bengal*, some ninety years prior to Solomon's operetta, the nautch performance occurs in the *zenana* scene, which is central to the development of the work's plot, in which an act of deception also ensues. In this scene, the male spectator, Fitzpatrick, is made to believe that the Governor's Lady is a nautch girl. The Governor's Lady is dressed in a veil and performs a song and dance after Fitzpatrick is presented with a *hookah* and perfumes. Under this ruse, the Governor's Lady tricks Fitzpatrick into agreeing to marry an Indian Begum, who later transpires to be his beloved Englishwoman Fanny. In this work, the nautch scene is utilised as a platform upon which several female characters play the role of temptress. Albeit for the "good" intention of bringing together two people who are already in love, the dishonesty with which these women operate reflects a particular disposition that could be applied to or associated with female character. In both of these instances, the women exploit methods of temptation as either actual nautch girls or counterfeit ones, in order to encourage a male character to act or respond in a certain way. This depiction of the nautch girl as temptress or manipulator of men can be compared to the anti-nautch comments of such vocal figures as Mrs. Marcus B Fuller, who argued that the enticing power of the nautch girls was enough to cause "ruin"

[80] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 44–45.

among men.[81] It is interesting to note that many of the criticisms of the nautch girl refer to the allegedly corrupting nature of the nautch girls, and the apparent vulnerability of the British male who falls to her charms:

> Many a family's happiness has been ruined, and estrangement made complete between husband and wife, by the husband coming under power and influence of the nautch-girl.[82]

In the visual arts, such complex narratives of the nautch girl as temptress exercising power over male audiences were rarer, perhaps because it was more difficult to express in this form. However, very often paintings did portray the nautch girls as empowered, with significant command over their audiences. In various paintings depicting nautch girls, most eyes of other subjects in the works are fixated on the dancing girls. From Tilly Kettle's 'Dancing Girls' to John Luard's 'A Nautch' and Horace H Wilson's 'A Nautch in the Palace of the Ameer of Sind', crowds appear captivated by the dancers. The male gaze upon the nautch girls is immensely prevalent in these images, where the spectators appear enchanted by the women and their performances. In some cases, the spectator's responses are expressed through strong facial expressions and gestures with their hands, indicating the high level of engagement with the performance. This might be associated with captivation or ensnarement under the seductive spell of the nautch girl. In the numerous works where there are no spectators but for the viewer of the artwork itself, it is often the nautch girl's body and gaze itself, piercing through the canvas or the page at the viewer that can initiate

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[81] Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, 145.
[82] Fuller, 133.

a process of enticement and seduction, sexualised or otherwise. In this way, the nautch girl could ensnare the attention of the viewer, holding him/her captive to her performance and her body.

In exploring manipulation and seduction in representations of the nautch girl, it is important to note how contemporary musical entertainments treated the subject of the Indian woman; an identity that was, understandably, commonly associated with the nautch girl. The French Romantic opera *Lakmé* by Léo Delibes is another story of forbidden love set in India,[83] where the female *brahmin* Lakmé sacrifices herself in order to save the man she loves – a British soldier – from the wrath of her father. As the opera ends, what resonates with the audience is Lakmé's noble love and sacrifice, as well as her lover's despair. This stands in great contrast to *The Nautch Girl*, which also tells the story of a forbidden love. But in the case of the operetta, the female Indian protagonist, Beebee, with the help of her fellow nautch girls, exploits her feminine wiles to manipulate others in order to save the relationship between her and her forbidden love, Indru. Naturally, a comic operetta would differ significantly from a romantic and tragic opera, but the fact that the female Indian protagonist of Solomon's operetta is a nautch girl plays an important role in justifying her actions in a way that is reflective of popular discourse about nautch girls during this time. That the female protagonist in *The Nautch Girl* is a dancing girl might offer a reason as to why her personality differs so significantly from the venerable protagonist of *Lakmé*. Moreover, while the operetta was a British endeavour, the romantic

[83] One of a trend of French romantic operas that were set in South Asia, along with Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1863) and Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore* (1877).

opera was a French one, which could offer sound reasoning for the discrepancies between the portrayal of Indian women in musical entertainments. During the late-nineteenth century (during which both of these works premiered), there was a clear distinction between the political and economic interests of Britain and France in India, which appeared to have been reflected in their respective artistic works. Additionally, foci in terms of musical forms and genres also differed between the two countries, which were reflected in the realm of opera and its sub-formats and variations. Particularly during the latter half of the nineteenth century, French grand operas became particularly popular within the British operatic scene, with a special prevalence of "'distant' exotic settings [that] were not intended necessarily to reproduce a 'genuine' sense of place" but rather to develop a fantastical microcosm free of ethnographic realism.[84] This differed significantly from the British works, that centred more on "authentic" localised portrayals of "other" peoples and their cultures, whether through characterisations or appropriations of aspects of cultural practices (or rather interpretations of them). With this context in consideration, it is also valuable to consider how local audiences consumed and responded to these works, although this transgresses beyond the scope of this thesis.

Returning to the main plot of Solomon's operetta, the nautch girls plan to distract Pyjama through a nautch performance proves successful, and Bumbo is infuriated to learn that Pyjama is late for their appointment. As the narrative unfolds, Bumbo learns that it was Pyjama who had stolen Bumbo's diamond eye, which now rested upon Holly Beebee's

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[84] Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, 110.

breast in the form of a necklace charm. Infuriated, Bumbo sends Pyjama away, presumably to be punished. Bumbo's wrath is hard and heavy, even towards the other characters, but when two of the most prominent females of the operetta, Beebee and Chinna Loofa, beg for the lives of Punka and Indru, Bumbo softens his approach. Elsewhere in the stage directions, it is stated that Bumbo is "obviously amenable to the charms of female beauty",[85] indicating the importance of feminine beauty and, more generally, the power and influence of women on men. In this way, the operetta implied that despite appearing fierce and powerful, the male figure was weak and vulnerable, in stark contrast to the women of the operetta, who were authoritative and enjoyed the power to persuade others. That most of the women in the operetta are distinctly identified as nautch girls is particularly significant, since nautch girls had earned a reputation amongst Britons as being manipulative, sexually aware and able to operate outside of the private sphere within which women were traditionally confined to in nineteenth-century Britain. These are recurring themes in the operetta, where the female characters (predominantly the nautch girls) are empowered and fully capable of exerting their influence on the male figures of Chutneypore as well as on the general European audience. This can be compared with Pal-Lapinski's discussion of the female subject of Frank Dicksee's 1892 painting *Leila*, an odalisque whose "exotic body [points] to a deconstructive impulse within the imperial gaze itself" where she is self-aware of her power over men and commodities.[86] The portrayal of consciously commanding "exotic" women was far from rare during the long nineteenth

[85] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 46.
[86] Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, 11.

century, indicating the contribution of representations of the nautch girl to a broader discourse about "other" women across literature and the arts. It was inevitable that when nautch girls were to be repeatedly portrayed across the arts as mesmerising their audiences, it would contribute to the stereotyping of the characteristics of nautch girls. Even in works where there were no audience members present within the piece itself, the indubitable existence of an audience that laid its eyes on the nautch girl from the external or "real" world meant that a power relationship involving captivation was present. This can be seen in such works as Prinsep's 'Martaba' (Figure 25) and Carpenter's 'Two Natch Girls' (Figure 1), through the inviting and entrancing gazes and postures of the nautch girls represented within. As such, there appeared to be an exchange between the nautch girl and the audience, in which the audience could exercise power through the physical "ownership" of the nautch girl while the nautch girl could exercise power over her audience by captivating and ensnaring it.

It is certainly notable that the entire unfurling of the plot of the operetta *The Nautch Girl* relies on the role of women and their conspiring: from the allure of the nautch girl that lands the Rajah and Indru into trouble with Bumbo, to the conniving women who attempt to rescue the Rajah and Indru from imprisonment and death through deceitful ways, and the nautch girls who use their bodies and their performances to distract men to get what they want. And with each such endeavour, the women of the operetta are successful and are also able to drive the plot of the work forward. Within the historical context of the rise of imperialism, and within this the focus on instilling particular perceptions about Indians during the colonising mission, the significance of works such as *The Nautch Girl* is

extensive. While in other European operas such as the French *Lakmé,* the female Indian protagonist is represented as heroic and socially respectable, the nautch girl Holly Beebee and the other female characters of the operetta are shown to achieve their goals by exploiting their female charm; through perceived immoral and indecent acts that significantly affect the male characters. This is potentially reflective of disparities between British and French representations of the region and its women (given their differing political involvement) and/or the disparities between representations of women and nautch girls.

The nautch girl as temptress could also be explored or corroborated through visual accessories. For example, as mentioned earlier, various works (whether painting or musical entertainment) featured fruits as well as other more luxurious consumables in close proximity to nautch girls. From the Christian perspective, fruit and the presence of a woman already likened to a temptress could be easily associated with the creation story of Abrahamic religions, where Eve is tempted by a serpent to partake of the forbidden fruit before tempting Adam to do the same, resulting in the so-called fall of man and the establishment of the concept of original sin. In this way, the association of fruit to the nautch girl, or indeed to women more generally, could signify the attribution of women with the traits of temptation, seduction, indulgence and sinful activity. This is particularly significant within the framework of the already controversial reception of nautch girls in British society and culture, echoing anti-nautch arguments that nautch girls could cause "ruin" among men.

While the portrayal of nautch girls as seductress and temptresses was damaging in many ways to the heterogeneous group of female Indian performers labelled as nautch girls, particularly in terms of their alleged impact on British men, at the same time these women were represented as very powerful women, with the ability to entice spectators and others through their bodies and their performances. This is made particularly clear in Solomon's operetta, in which the ending of the plot relies on the success of the women's endeavours. That these nautch girls were granted such power of influence could also be seen as a mark of admiration for the nautch girls and perhaps even a celebration of female empowerment. Despite the immorality and deceitfulness associated with nautch girls in this context, it was nevertheless the nautch girls that emerged the victors. Similarly, the Governor's Lady succeeds in her deceitful endeavours when she dresses as a nautch girl during the *zenana* scene in *A Trip to Bengal,* also resulting in a happy end for the romantic plot. In paintings too, the nautch girls might be presented as seductresses, but in doing so they also seem empowered, appearing content, in control, smiling and gracefully poised, enveloped in an aura of confidence and elegance. During a time when the anti-nautch movement was aligning itself with imperialism and the so-called civilising mission was in full swing, such representations of nautch girls became particularly pertinent. The representation of nautch girls in the arts therefore becomes a far more complex affair and somewhat of a paradox. These women were encapsulated or ensnared in artworks that could be consumed, owned and negotiated. They could be admired and judged, loved and hated, enabling the nautch girls to fall victim to the judging eyes and ears of her spectators through the arts. And yet these women were portrayed as harnessing great power and influence over their audiences and the events surrounding them. Considered in this way, it is useful to look beyond the

imperialist connotations of the works and also consider the social and cultural implications of works about nautch girls in the British context. That is, how the representation of nautch girls as powerful temptresses may have contributed to changing attitudes to women in British society.

Indolence and Idleness

The femaleness of the nautch girl in artworks was not only associated with the more conspicuous traits of being sexually aware, seductive and beautiful, but also other aspects that were also common in imperialist discourse. One of the most prominent of these aspects was the trope of the "lazy native", expressed in works about the nautch girl through indolence, leisureliness and domesticity. In being ascribed such traits, the nautch girl was not only perceived from the lens of British imperialism but also subject to gender-, spatial- and profession-specific categorisation. In this way, the nautch girl as a concept represented an enigma that elicited both awe and discontent among her patrons through the arts through complex representations that galvanised both favourable and hostile attitudes towards the nautch girl simultaneously based on her behavioural traits and lifestyle choices.

Solomon's operetta *The Nautch Girl* opens with the lines:

> Beneath the sky of blue
> The indolent Hindu

Reclines the whole day long.[87]

It appears to be no coincidence that one of the first premises that the operetta establishes is that the Indian (or Hindu, in this specific case) is indolent. This assertion continues throughout the libretto of the operetta through various minor references. For example, the nautch girls describe how they are "[t]reading through the idle throng",[88] and throughout the plot of the operetta, the nautch girls appear carefree and idle in their actions, with little else to keep them occupied than to plot and devise conniving plans. Similarly, the nautch scene in Smith's musical work *A Trip to Bengal* emanates an aura of languor and indolence around the subject of nautch girls, where Fitzpatrick is invited in the *zenana* to sit cross-legged before he is presented with perfumes and a *hookah* – goods that are associated with luxury but also with leisureliness. These two examples indicate that idleness and languor were not only traits ascribed to nautch girls but, in these particular cases, also to the patrons, audiences and onlookers of nautch girls, signifying the general quality of idleness that surrounded the nautch girl and those in her proximity.

Representations of languor and idleness did not always harness negative connotations; indeed, languor was also associated with luxury and pleasure. However, within the framework of imperialism and imperialist discourses, languor and idleness were often associated with poor behaviour and bad economy. This sort of narrative was common

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[87] Dance and Desprez, *The Nautch Girl or, The Rajah of Chutneypore*, 3.
[88] Dance and Desprez, 6.

across much of imperialist and colonialist Europe, often for ideological reasons.[89] For instance, in an early twentieth century account of India by French missionary Abbe J.A. Dubois, the author recounts:

> [T]he indolent Hindu has generally more time on his hands than he requires to look after his business, which is never of a very pressing nature. It is indeed quite probable that their natural indolence and dislike for work of all kinds partly contributed to the institution of so many days of rest![90]

Indeed, such an attribution was not unique to India, but rather appeared to be a notion attached to much of the "Orient", particularly those regions of the world that had endured colonialism. Edward Said briefly explored how the observations of various colonial rulers referred very specifically to the idleness and indolence of native labour populations in the "East", which, he argued, "commodified the natives and their labour" and formed part of "the shadowy discourse of colonial capitalism".[91] Considered along these lines, it can be deduced that such a narrative was often intended for political means to justify colonial power, by constructing a necessity to improve labour which was allegedly suffering at the hands of the native population.[92] Artistic works that followed suit might not have had a

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[89] For examples, see Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

[90] Dubois and Beauchamp, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies (1905)*, 274.

[91] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 202.

[92] Further explorations of the 'indolent native' in British discourse can be found in Monika Fludernik, 'The Performativity of Idleness: Representations and Stagings of Idleness in the Context of Colonialism', in *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, ed. Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

direct ideological intention, but they did take advantage of and perhaps even feed into the imperialist narrative, furthering its reach among the masses.

In addition to the context of overarching imperialist ideologies, representations of nautch girls in languor were also important to consider within the related topic of exoticism in the arts. Within the specific context of nautch girls, it is interesting to note that representations of indolence echo two of Pal-Lapinski's tropes for exotic women in British art that relate to women in states of languor.[93] Corresponding with this, William Carpenter's watercolour (Figure 1) portrays the two women reclining on the ground in a leisurely manner, unhurried and in a visible state of relaxation. Here are two nautch girls that are not seen dancing; instead, their "performance" is to sit idly, smoking a *hookah* and indulging in the sweet temptation of fruits as observers of the work look on. Through their idleness and their smiling faces, there is a calming and inviting aura that is furthered through the presentation of the luxurious objects that decorate the scene, offering various pleasures to tempt the viewer. Prinsep's 'Martaba' (Figure 25) equally shows its subject in repose, enjoying tea. Even Tilly Kettle's *Dancing-girl*, (or *An Indian Dancing Girl with a Hookah*) stands in a serene pose languidly, with little interest in the observer or her other surroundings.

It is clear that traits of idleness and languor have been ascribed to Indians more generally in imperialist discourses, as part of the "lazy native" trope. Within the context of nautch

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[93] '(1) an infectious, erotic atmosphere in which "languor" or "lassitude" predominated' and '(4) women (either individually or collectively) lounging, reclining, or performing in public and/or private spaces'. Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, 17.

girls, however, there was also the consideration of the representation of the exotic woman in public and private spaces, which enabled such traits to take on multi-layered meanings. The reclining "exotic" woman was a common subject in artworks, often associated with eroticism, which did not necessarily denote *laziness* in the negative context. However, in the case of the nautch girl, this could be coupled with the imperialist allegation of the lazy native, obfuscating the positivity or negativity of the representation and enabling both to exist mutually. Indeed, not all depictions of nautch girls represented their subjects in such repose; mentions of nautch girls in Elgar's masque *The Crown of India* and images by Thomas Daniell and Charles D'Oyly focus far more diligently on the performative and *active* aspects of the nautch girl, rather than on languor and indolence. However, the depiction of nautch girls at ease and idly resting in *zenanas* is a common trend that appears to convey and confirm attributions of indolence to Indians (as well as other colonised subjects) in various European discourses while also adhering to the norms of portraying "exotic" women in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art.

Traversing Spheres & Shifting Roles

Considering that the movement of culture was both multi-faceted and multi-directional, it is significant to note the manifestation of nautch-girl culture in British society during the colonial period. This is particularly pertinent in the context of gender, sexuality and morality, which Ann Stoler has explored within her framework for understanding colonial

society and its associated hierarchies.[94] More specifically, the challenging and sometimes conflicting representation of the nautch girl in works of art can be resoundingly linked to tensions associated with the changing role of women in British societies as well as contributing to changing attitudes towards sexuality in Victorian Britain.[95] In considering this process, Catherine Hall's distinction of the historically perceived male public sphere and the female private or domestic sphere is particularly important. She argues that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, gender divisions were reworked where "men [were] placed firmly in the newly defined public world of business, commerce, and politics [while] women were placed in the private world of home and family".[96] Similarly, Gillian Perry notes how women's social roles and "'feminine' propriety" were commonly discussed in contemporary literature during this period, particularly with the publication of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.[97] Perry also demonstrates how the period saw the growth of a middle class that placed emphasis on family values and domesticity that "reinforced women's exclusion from professional roles in the arts, trade,

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[94] Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[95] Pal-Lapinski notes that representations of the exotic woman, which embraced a crossover with representations of the courtesan's body, were linked to the 'intersections of "power" and "pleasure" within the discourses of Victorian sexuality'. Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, xvi.

[96] Catherine Hall, 'Private Persons versus Public Someones: Class, Gender and Politics in England, 1780-1850', in *British Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Terry Lovell (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990), 52.

[97] Gillian Perry, 'Women in Disguise: Likeness, the Grand Style and the Conventions of "Feminine" Portraiture in the Work of Sir Joshua Reynolds', in *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture*, ed. Gillian Perry and Michael Rossington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 19.

politics and law."[98] At the same time, extensive missionary work in the colonies and dependencies normalised a religious framework within which gender roles could also be governed. During this important transitional period in British society, the concept of the nautch girl – amongst other factors – contributed substantially to destabilising these gender ascriptions to the public and private spheres respectively, instilling conflict amidst the new cultural and societal norms.

Notably, nautch girls were frequently compared with perceived "Western" equivalents in order to contextualise the nautch girl within a more recognisable and relatable environment for the British audience. Ballet dancers offered a typical point of reference, as commonly commissioned performers of dance (many of whom were female) usually accompanied by music, against which nautch girls were often considered inferior, whether in their performance or their propriety. Importantly, French romantic ballet spread in popularity in Britain from the 1830s, with a particular emphasis on "picturesque and exotic settings".[99] Yet, while pitting "oriental" nautch girls against "occidental" ballet dancers contributed to establishing a power asymmetry that reinforced the colonialist mind-set, such representations of nautch girls correspondingly reinforced an idea of an empowered female that appeared, in some ways, antithetical to the imperialist cause.

[98] Perry, 19.
[99] Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*, 24.

The nineteenth century witnessed a notable amplification of British women's voices fighting for women's social rights, coinciding with the aforementioned expansion of the British middle class. Corresponding with this development, there was a growing movement of British women raising concerns for the rights of allegedly helpless women in India. As Antoinette Burton has demonstrated, this enabled British feminists to exploit the Indian woman in their own pursuit of social progress, thereby intertwining feminist ideology with imperialism.[100] This emerged during a significant period of industrialisation, which – as Catherine Hall has demonstrated – led many of women's traditional skills to become redundant, such as spinning owing to the invention of the sewing machine.[101] Hall argues that the challenges to the role of the "Western" woman, owing to the corollaries of industrialisation, contributed to a shift in women's roles. This included a growing interest in exploiting the allegedly disadvantaged women of the "East", denoting a type of feminism that contributed to imperialist ideology.

This was particularly apt in many British women's discourse about nautch girls, whereby the Indian dancing girl was often portrayed as a victim, serving as a gauge for her "Western" counterpart:

> [I]n her public capacity, the ballet-dancer can choose her profession, or if she wishes can leave it and enter into any other walk in life for which she is fitted; and lead a useful career. But the nautch-girl is born into her

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[100] Antoinette M. Burton, 'The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865–1915', *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 4 (1 January 1990): 295–308, https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(90)90027-U.

[101] Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, 153.

> profession, and must follow it just as a carpenter, goldsmith, or farmer is born into his caste and follows the trade of his father.[102]

Quite significantly, Fuller compares the nautch girl to male labour workers, offering a remarkable interlacing of social and gender considerations in addition to asserting that ballet dancers were far freer than nautch girls in their choice of profession. Paradoxically, despite her claims that nautch girls were forced into their profession and did not enjoy the freedoms that ballet dancers did, Fuller also admitted that nautch girls also enjoyed a certain kind of freedom:

> It frequently happens that these dancing-girls are rich, beautiful and very attractive, besides being witty and pleasant in conversation; and they are the only women that move freely in men's society.[103]

Fuller acknowledged that nautch girls enjoyed the power of traversing within the male public sphere, indicating that nautch girls could transcend beyond the defined domestic sphere traditionally reserved for women. Similarly, the artist Prinsep noted upon his visit to some Rajput courts that the nautch girls "are a kind of privileged people [who] wander through the palaces unveiled and unmolested".[104] This empowerment was also reflected in nautch-girl artworks, through the depiction of bold women that drove the narrative and held entire audiences captive through their charms and, at times, their deceitful schemes. In comparison, Perry describes how the artist Joshua Reynolds often "depicted many of

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[102] Fuller, *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*, 145.
[103] Fuller, 130.
[104] Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *A Nautch Girl*, 1878, Oil on Canvas, 1878, 94.Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *A Nautch Girl*, 1878, Oil on Canvas, 1878, 94.

his female sitters engaged in activities traditionally associated with women's roles", such as sewing, reading and holding children.[105] In the case of nautch-girl artworks, the subjects were often positioned in public spaces, although elements of domesticity were upheld through the cultural signifiers that formed the backdrop of nautch-girl imagery. Similar to Perry's observations about Reynolds's works, the representation of nautch girls offered a contradictory and unstable view of women's role in society, both reinforcing and challenging the conventional association of the "feminine" with the private social sphere and the "masculine" with the public one. Moreover, these works of art were commonly commissioned to be exhibited or performed in public spaces, contributing to furthering the presentation the nautch girl as a woman who could move openly within the public sphere.

Notably, British female performers discovered a "newfound independence" during the *fin de siècle*, manifesting itself in various innovative ways, including self-choreography and individualised performances that borrowed from the dances of nautch girls (amongst others).[106] Furthermore, characterisations of temple priestesses, slave girls and harem women grew increasingly popular on the European stage during the nineteenth century and beyond.[107] This development, in addition to the growth in paintings and musical entertainments about nautch girls, indicated that the concept of the nautch girl had permeated the fabric of British culture and society, contributing markedly to the ongoing

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[105] Perry, 'Women in Disguise', 30.
[106] Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win', 222.
[107] Bor, 'Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères', 66.

exchanges about women's role in both the public and private spheres of society. Similarly, nautch-girl fashion and art pervaded cultural practice in Britain. For instance, Linda and Michael Hutcheon examine the "orientalized choreography" in productions of Richard Strauss's *Salome*, beginning in the early twentieth century.[108] Similarly, Farrell notes how on a particular occasion in 1900, English girls dressed in "ethnic" costumes and performed 'Hindoo Maidens, "A song, dance and tableaux for 16 girls"' in the presence of the Lord Mayor at the Guildhall.[109] In turn, this piece of work was published in its entirety and distributed for performances in schools and halls nationwide in a mass re-appropriation of an artistic representation of a nautch performance.

Generally, the performance of "Eastern" styles of dance among British female dancers increased, much to the disdain of more conservative audiences who did not like to the "traditions of English femininity" challenged.[110] With the growing wave of transcultural performances, criticisms against them swelled correspondingly. Critics argued that these new methods of performance were not "part of a European heritage, but instead the influence of non-Western practices."[111] Despite the absorption of "oriental" practices in British dance, criticisms of the nautch prevailed for decades, with nautch girls being

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[108] Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, 'Staging the Female Body: Richard Strauss's Salome', in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart, Princeton Studies in Opera (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 217.
[109] Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*, 99.
[110] Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win', 226.
[111] Jagpal, 225.

disdainfully described as the "Queens of [musical] beggary in the Orient" as late as 1940.[112] However, these movements of criticism were not strong enough to quash the rise in reinterpreted dance that borrowed from "other" cultures. These shifting perspectives also manifested themselves in musical practice. For instance, Sophie Fuller notes how, in *fin-de-siècle* Britain, there was finally a space for female musicians to artistically explore the fantastical "exotic" in music for purposes outside of creating a masculine type of national music, which was particularly apt for female musicians.[113] In this way, the concept of the nautch girl penetrated British society, with a particular effect on considerations of gender roles in the arts and beyond.

Moreover, the nautch girl became increasingly appropriated in Britain as a fashion – a cultural and artistic practice that flourished through costume, jewellery and performance in a way not dissimilar to Chinoiserie in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, during a time of increasing trade with East Asia,[114] and Japonisme later in the nineteenth century. For instance, in addition to being an avid collector of Persian songs, Sophia Plowden – the wife of an East India Company servant – wrote to her sister in 1783 that she had attended a masquerade ball in Calcutta dressed as a nautch girl. She was accompanied by an ensemble of Englishmen dressed as Indian musicians, complete with

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[112] Dennis Stoll, 'Musical Beggars of the Orient', *The Musical Times* 81, no. 1172 (1 October 1940): 398, https://doi.org/10.2307/921843.
[113] Sophie Fuller, 'Creative Women and "Exoticism" at the Last Fin-de-Siècle', in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s to 1940s: Portrayal of the East*, ed. Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 255.
[114] David Beevers, ed., *Chinese Whispers: Chinoiserie in Britain 1650-1930* (Brighton: Royal Pavilion Libraries & Museums, 2009).

Indian instruments, a *hookah* and *paan*.[115] More than a century later, American dancer Loie Fuller had her costumer reproduce one of the dresses she had seen during a production of the operetta *The Nautch Girl* in London,[116] enabling the relocation of the British interpretation of nautch-girl fashion in the USA. Nautch fashion also saturated British literature in the *fin de siècle*,[117] showing its multifaceted permeation in British society and culture. Jewellery fashions also appeared to be similarly responsive, as noted by artist William Daniell and author Hobart Caunter in *The Oriental Annual*, who commented on their experiences of nautch girls in India:

> On the forehead, just between the eyebrows, they always wear an ornament, which has no doubt given rise to the Sevigné now almost universally worn by European ladies.[118]

This process was part of a broader transformation of fashion that took place during the long nineteenth century – a period within which women's fashion was to change significantly. The era of industrialisation saw the increasing availability of sewing machines and synthetic dyes,[119] which helped to diversify clothing styles. Moreover, advances in technology led to the proliferation of publications, including fashion magazines for women that served as a medium to establish trends and to disseminate them. The period also saw

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[115] Woodfield, *Music of the Raj*, 172–73.
[116] Christiansen, *The Victorian Visitors*, 222.
[117] Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win'.
[118] Daniell and Caunter, *The Oriental Annual*, 20–21.
[119] Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 145–80.

a substantial expansion for "Western" countries in trade, including textiles from across Asia, instigating the movement of material as well as subsequent copying, adaptation and incorporation in local dress.[120] It was within these processes of negotiation that the incorporation of nautch fashion flourished in Britain and beyond.

For female artists in Britain, here was an opportunity for a new kind of liberation – an expressive form of performative feminism that undermined some of the traditional values of Victorian society. This took place during a period in which issues of racial and sexual identity were under great scrutiny and subject to shifting attitudes, coinciding with debates surrounding nationalism. In this way, women could redefine their identities and roles while embracing (or perhaps exploiting) artistic performance from other cultures. At the same time, the British – and indeed the European – stage embraced oriental embellishments, from costumes to iconography,[121] thereby diluting colonialist discourse.

Through considerations of female identity associated with representations of the dancing girl of India, Britons could explore these very issues at "home" in a process of self-reflection. First and foremost, this self-reflection involved positioning the British woman in an asymmetrical power relationship with her Indian counterpart, contributing to an imperial feminist discourse. Indeed, as Clayton and Zon have demonstrated, orientalist

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[120] For more, see: Harold Koda and Richard Martin, 'Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress | Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art', The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, accessed 6 August 2017, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/orie/hd_orie.htm.
[121] Jagpal, 'I Mean to Win', 228.

artworks by British artists can tell us more about the Britons than the subjects of their works.[122] On the one hand nautch girls were sexualised, objectified and ascribed negative character traits that reflected imperialist discourse. And by placing nautch girls as inferior to the European ballet dancer, literary narratives bolstered the notion that "Western" female performers were superior to their Indian counterpart. But on the other hand, nautch girls were portrayed in these works as powerful and successful, destabilising imperialist notions. The nautch girl was presented as free from the typical social constraints of being a woman (as defined by British societal norms), enjoying the luxuries of freedom in the public sphere usually granted only to men.[123] This could be perceived either as a criticism of nautch girls, since women were traditionally discouraged from entering the "masculine" public sphere, or it could be seen as commendation of nautch girls, reflecting on how attitudes at home could adapt accordingly to accommodate women's changing role in society.

The Power of the Nautch Girl

Conceptualisations of femaleness played a significant role in representations of Indians in artistic discourses. Apparent through the mid- and late-nineteenth century, there were increasing portrayals of Indian women who were sexually aware, sensuous and sometimes

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[122] Clayton and Zon, *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire*, 2.
[123] An extension of Pal-Lapinski's theory on representations of the odalisque in British and French art. Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, 23.

even predatory, which conflicted deeply with Victorian notions of the "proper" British woman. Within this context, nautch girls offered a particularly apposite case study, as a group consisting solely of women, frequently associated with sexual controversy and increasingly recognised throughout Britain and other European nations. Notably, within artistic discourses nautch girls and other Indian women were often contrasted with buffoon-type males, typically represented with traits of aggression, stupidity, greed and violence, differing from the portrayal of British, European or "Western" men. In this way, conceptualisations of the "Other" were appropriated differently according to categories such as gender and profession. For instance, a common trope involved the feminisation of the Indian man, with a particular expression in the "effeminate Bengali".[124] In this way, representations of aspects of femininity and masculinity became deeply embedded within the discourses of imperialism and acts of Othering. Dualities are often inherent in such works, particularly through an emphasis on differentiation, with gender playing a significant role within this framework. As Leo Treitler notes:

> The linkage of the duality of the rational and the sensual with that of the masculine and the feminine is a fact embedded in Western tradition.[125]

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[124] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and The' Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Clare Midgley, *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

[125] Leo Treitler, 'Gender and Other Dualities of Music History', in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 24.

When considering "Western" artworks that contain[126] "exotic" subjects (which explore race and culture), these dualities or differences can be explored on a further level – one that is often interwoven with the so-called problematics of gender and sexuality. There is a strong link between the "essentialisms of race and gender", owing to the fact that both emerged during a particular ideological framework of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Treitler indicates.[127] During this period, commercial interests in music also grew, providing another dimension to consider in artistic production in the form of marketing.[128] The application, then, to the female subject of the nautch girl in artworks becomes especially interesting, owing to her gender, her sexuality, her race, her reception and her (usually erroneous) affiliation to prostitution in British discourse and the social taboo that accompanied it.

It is of great significance that artistic – and indeed other – representations of the nautch dwelt so profoundly upon the distinctly female and often sexualised depiction of the performer. Understandably, there was a particular emphasis on how the nautch girl appeared visually, how she dressed and how she danced, for these were aspects that were more effectively transferred and expressed in the visual and musical arts:

> To this juvenile succeeded the *prima donna* of the Nautch girls, who possessed at least the attractions of beauty and grace. Her dress was

[126] The term *contain* is used here to emphasise both the act of including content within the artworks but also the enclosure or retention of the subject with specific boundaries.
[127] Treitler, 'Gender and Other Dualities of Music History', 44.
[128] This could also be arguably extended to other forms of art (although in varying quantities and manners). McClary, *Feminine Endings*, x.

> gorgeous, and its ample glittering folds were displayed and changed in its arrangement with decorum and elegance as she moved in minuet time, and changed a recitative in accordance with the music, which had now the addition of an instrument, half cymbal, half castanet. The movements of her arms in arranging her veil was [sic] strikingly graceful.[129]

Significantly, these were also aspects that were strongly interconnected with concepts of femininity, eroticism, performativity and beauty – topical issues that heightened especially from the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. These concepts could also be expressed through characterisation and narrative, offering glimpses into the perceived nature of the Indian dancing girl and the homogenised culture that she ostensibly represented. Often, these representations were charged with sexual inference, playing on the rhetoric of the anti-nautch movement of the nautch girl as a morally decadent, indecent and devious woman. The emphasis on the physical aesthetics of the nautch girl, as well as the forged associations to prostitution and sexual deviance, were transferred into British artworks to some extent, echoing the sentiments of literary accounts. At the same time, these artistic representations appeared to celebrate the beauty, freedom and power of the nautch girl, generating a contradictory confluence of aversion to and admiration of the nautch girl as an Indian, a woman and an artist.

On the one hand, these representations could be seen to present the allegedly unconventional and improper ways of the nautch girls in order to distinguish from the familiarity of the "Self" in an act of self-definition. In doing so, these representations were

[129] 'East Indies', *The Morning Chronicle*, 10 January 1840.

important in ascertaining aspects of Britishness – more specifically of womanhood and sexuality by presenting what they were not. On the other hand, these portrayals could be seen to challenge the conventions of the "Self" by presenting the unfamiliar. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of the visually eye-catching and often sexualised way that nautch girls were portrayed. Within the "exotic" setting, it was possible to explore issues of sexuality more explicitly than would have been considered acceptable in a work with a British setting and British subjects. In doing so, it also offered the opportunity for patrons of these works to examine and question the roles of women, men and sexuality more generally. Subsequently, through such artworks, the boundaries between the public and private sphere could be destabilised.

The nautch girl was inevitably defined by her gender and sexual identity, beginning with the very term used to name her. Critical approaches towards the nautch girl's beauty, body, eroticism, alleged sexualised characteristics and languor adhered significantly to anti-nautch discourse. Audiences were constantly reminded that these were unquestionably the bodies of women, highlighting this fact in various ways. In doing so, it contributed notably to imperialist and orientalist stances, particularly where the cultural "Other" was often feminised and/or ascribed feminine characteristics in a derogatory manner. And yet, the nautch girl was presented in the arts to surpass particular Victorian social conventions and, in doing so, to live a life of contentedness, luxury and empowerment. British depictions of nautch girls, therefore, did not only reinforce negative stereotypes of Indians with the imperialist context, but also appeared to explore and perhaps even challenge social conventions at home.

This was by no means a one-way exchange. British presence in India inevitably left a substantial footprint in many aspects of Indian life as well as British life. The very concept of the nautch girl (as a British construct) was dynamic and ever-changing, responding to British and Indian societal changes, and the interrelationships that existed between them. Considering this, it is important to avoid casting nautch girls merely as muted victims of imperialist art, but rather as contributors to a complex multi-directional and multi-layered process of transculturation.

Representations of the nautch girls were incorporated into the folds of British arts, culture and society and thereby emulated and reinterpreted endlessly. Through this process of negotiation, it was possible for British artists and their patrons to explore aspects of gender and sexuality that might have otherwise been considered controversial or taboo, owing to the conventions of Victorian society and concepts of Christian morality that were common during this time. Even further, it can be seen that the very ideas of women's freedom in public spaces as represented in works about nautch girls and other "exotic" female women eventually began to penetrate into British society, contributing to changing perceptions of the roles of women, particularly in public spaces and in performative aspects. Within this context, the normative framework of the anti-nautch movement proved fragile, allowing the lure of the nautch girl and her fashion to disrupt it. During and following the multitude of nautch-girl artworks that pervaded the long nineteenth century, what emerged was a form of female empowerment that enabled an exploration of women's role in society and within the arts.

In essence, representations of the nautch girl articulated both her disempowerment in some ways but her empowerment in others. While bound by the yoke of imperialism, the nautch girl was also depicted as a woman free to move between the public and private sphere, and to transcend beyond the traditional role of women as established in nineteenth-century Britain. Notably, in contrast to the generally elegantly presented "Oriental" females in operettas, and paintings, of the long nineteenth century, the "Oriental" male has been treated less kindly in the artistic genres. As Gerry Farrell aptly notes, "the Indian girls remained alluring and desirable, even if the male characters descended into oriental evil, duplicity, or buffoonery."[130] This contrast warrants comprehensive discussion, particularly in the context of artworks featuring nautch girls that also featured male characters – Indian and otherwise. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to focus on this aspect, it is at least acknowledged that disparities between representations of nautch girls and their male Indian companions or acquaintances in artworks are connected to complex and deep-rooted disparities related to gender and sexual incongruence more generally, within the imperialist framework and beyond it.

While imperialism resonated strongly throughout artistic discourses, it seems that it was also challenged through such mediums. By appropriating the culturally distant and "exotic" body of the nautch girl in ways that circumvented the conventions of Victorian society, imperialist values could also have been seen to have been destabilised and challenged.

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[130] Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*, 96.

V
Conclusion

> Das Kunstwerk, das etwas sagt, konfrontiert uns mit uns selbst. Das will sagen, es sagt etwas aus, das so, wie es da gesagt wird, wie eine Entdeckung ist, d.h. die Aufdeckung von etwas Verdecktem.
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> *The work of art that says something confronts us itself. That is, it expresses something in such a way that what is said is like a discovery, a disclosure of something previously concealed.*
>
> — Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*

There is a palpable connection between the protracted British intervention in India and shifts in artistic, cultural and social practices both within Britain and India and, conceivably, beyond. Artistic production and discourse served as particularly valuable markers of the impact of imperialism on the cultures and societies involved. Within this context, the nautch girl functioned as a notable example of how colonial subjects were defined and problematised through the colonial relationship though provocations and proclamations, but also of how they contributed to transformations amongst the very societies that produced artistic works about them and patronised them. The depictions and representations of India would not have taken the form they had, if it had not been for the imperial relationship. These artworks can thus be seen as products of transculturality – a process whereby cultural entities converged and initiated the construction of new ideas, entities and spaces of exploration. As British interactions with India developed during the long nineteenth century, so too did cultural products deriving from the relationship. India

was often considered the jewel of the British Crown, and became the subject of many a writing, painting and song. This fascination was by no means limited to the arts, but its role and impact in the arts warrants particular attention, owing to the dissemination of cultural products and its impact on society in general. Considering notions surrounding Orientalism and imperialism, furthered by conceptualisations of transculturality and exchange, this research contributes to our understanding of how significant the cultural products of imperialism were. Sara Suleri identifies the complexities of the relationship between Britons and Indians through their cultural exchanges in a similar way in *The Rhetoric of India*. She emphasises that there are guilty transactions that take place between Britain and India – an uncertainty of their own respective authorities that leads to the cultural productions that existed and continue to exist even today.[1]

Reflections of India through the British lens were by no means homogenous; rather these representations and understandings tended to be discursive and dynamic. However, there are various patterns that emerge within contemporary artworks, whether visual, musical or literary, which are suggestive of particular leanings. While it may not have been an immediate or direct purpose of the artworks, the time, the place and general socio-political atmosphere within which these works were produced and directly presented contributed to particular political, cultural and social discourses. Even if art makers and receivers were aware that these depictions of Indians, Hindus, *brahmins*, nautch girls and other such entities were crudely inaccurate, the production and reception of such works continued to

[1] Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

present a grossly racist, stereotypical (mis)representation of a colonised entity, whose cultural, social and religious structures were often copied, mocked or satirised for the purposes of art, entertainment and meaning-making. As such, the subjects of such works of art could be seen to have been victimised and persecuted, reduced to comical or controversial caricatures and consumed as objects of fascination and intrigue. In many cases, there was nothing directly educational or informative about these depictions, and yet these works contributed to establishing knowledge and, subsequently, power within British discourses. Such actions resonated with the broader principles inherent within the relationship between art and imperialism. Moreover, such persecution – in this case the nautch girl in particular – could be seen to deem the colonial subject voiceless and defenceless through the transportation of the subject to the muted feature in a work of art, for mass consumption, reception, performance, display and reproduction.

Visual and musical works were chosen specifically in this study because of their significance as understudied carriers of transcultural discourse during the long nineteenth century. Musical works about nautch girls, such as the operetta *The Nautch Girl* and the 'Dance of the Nautch Girls' number in *The Crown of India*, offer a range of musical devices that combine to contribute to the soundworld of nautch girls, in all their effeminacy, colour and rhythm. Similarly, paintings of nautch girls adopted and incorporated particular devices, methods and symbols that could often be seen to reflect the assumed characteristics of the nautch girl. However, all of these works need to be understood within the context of their production; many paintings were observational in nature – painted by travelling artists who were generally part of a particular social, and sometimes political,

circle – while musical works tended to represent the translation of these observations at home in Britain. While *representation* appears to be an important aspect of these works, one must not discard the artistic and entertainment values and intentions of the works, which often incorporated many elements of fiction within their folds. Art was, of course, to follow the fashions of time and place, and the result is reflected clearly in depictions of the nautch girls (which were also somewhat of a fashion in Britain during this time, albeit a rather controversial one).

Such works reveal how the female body was appropriated in the visual music of imperial Britain to promote a politically laden narrative. A comparative analysis of these musical works alongside the numerous contemporary paintings and sketches of nautch girls reveals similarities in theme and analogy that suggest an imperialist narrative that transcended artistic form. Additionally, by locating a beautiful, lustful and often corrupting female body in an "exotic" setting, British art of this period could evade the controversy of eroticism on the canvas and stage through spatial and cultural distance.

Artworks such as these remain problematic even today, but that is the very reason why they must be scrutinised further. They are also records of our history; markers of particular discourses that prevailed during the age of imperialism. As William Hicks notes of musical works in particular:

> The operettas, like Japanese imitative parlor rooms and costumes, Moorish smoking rooms, Indian tearooms, Turkish rugs and stools, as

> well as the countless pieces of exotic bric-a-brac consumed by the public, were illusory ornaments to the privileged Victorian way of life.[2]

In a comparable way, the appropriation of the nautch girl in different forms of visual and musical art enabled significant insight into British societal affairs, with a specific focus on gender, sexuality and performance. It appears that the nature of the representations of "Other" cultures in British works like *The Nautch Girl* and many others were the result of an amalgamation of various factors: a lack of understanding of foreign cultures; an intentional discourse that emphasised a particular view of the Orient which endorsed political or popular views; and devices of representation which were perpetuated for artistic or entertaining effect. It is certainly notable that earlier British works about nautch girls, from the late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century, tended to present its subjects in a more conventional (by European standards) and less controversial manner. The coincidental change in tone of representations of nautch girls to being more daring, troublemaking and powerful suggests a pattern that adheres to the changing political and social mood of Britain during this period, and with the increasing number of publications by British women and men on the so-called "wrongs" of Indian women, as well as a growing feminist movement in Britain.

It appears, therefore, that British artworks often absorbed or resonated politically-loaded, or comical and satirical tropes. Whether intentionally or not, they were enmeshed of an imperial discourse that set out to portray a collective of different performers under the

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[2] Hicks, 'Social Discourse in the Savoy Theatre's Productions', 82.

reductive term "nautch girl" within a particular and rigidly defined framework. One in which the British agents could dictate the rightness, or indeed the wrongness, of the nautch girls and their performances. There appeared to be crossovers among the various genres of arts, for example, with borrowings from literary accounts in order to portray visual depictions of India, and successive adaptations of visual depictions to embellish the sets of lavish musical entertainments on the stage. In general, it seemed that the nautch girl as a concept in British art was first and foremost established in literature and painting before moving to onstage musical works and other formats, forging a multi-dimensional artistic representation. Through the various art forms, laden with political implications, British discourses about nautch girls seemed to contribute to and sometimes challenge the broader imperial vision. The increasing presence of nautch girls in British works of art during this period demonstrated that this particular "exotic" body necessitated policing within the imperial framework, in ways similar to how Gita Rajan describes her study on Company painters' evolving focus on the female Indian subject:

> My analysis of the Company artists is based on scholarship that notes a slowly evolving practice of circumscribing the body of the colonial woman as always already exotic, therefore needing to be policed by imperial agents. Interestingly, since this exotic, available object was believed to have mysterious powers over the imperial subject, the imperial agent was required to curb his fantasies by instituting societal and cultural norms to control masterfully the object of his desire. The political implication of this was that, because colonial bodies represented simultaneous and conflicting sites of play and desire, the empire mandated the policing of these women's bodies. Numerous scholars now note that many of these visual texts were anthropological in nature, with perhaps an undertow of commercialism. Thus, while such images of colonial women were thought to represent a mimetic reality of India, Indian customs and clothing, Indian festivals and rituals, they were painted in western styles for European consumption. Postcolonial scholars now concur that the art of the Company Painters,

> for example, served as a conduit of ideas and images that were circulated in both the empire and the colony, and such exchanges left visible marks in both cultures.[3]

The distinctive focus on nautch girls by British artists similarly perpetuated a manner of control over the eroticised female body, instilling it with aspects of sexuality and desire on the one hand, and cultural and societal constraints on the other.

However, as this dissertation has sought to demonstrate, there is a deeper layer of meaning embedded within many works of art during the age of imperialism that sheds light on a far more localised (culturally speaking) type of social reflection – one in which the colonised subject serves as a beacon of reform in the metropole. While it is irrefutable that many of the most renowned works of nautch-girl artworks from Britain colonised, objectified and disparaged nautch girls through display of character, appearance and behaviour, many of these works also celebrated the standing and status of the nautch girl as a woman and a performer within social spheres. More specifically, these works demonstrated the how nautch girls enjoyed the freedom to flaunt themselves and practice their art within the public sphere – to monetise it, to captivate and manipulate others with it and to achieve goals with it. All of this is suggestive of an empowered figure that challenged the traditional values of the woman in the public sphere in Victorian Britain. Representation of the other could be used as a means through which socially sensitive or controversial issues could be explored in the public sphere. For instance, Herbert Lindenberger notes that the heroines

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[3] Gita Rajan, 'Pliant and Compliant: Colonial Indian Art and Postcolonial Cinema', *Women: A Cultural Review* 13, no. 1 (January 2002): 52–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/09574040210122977.

of the orient in such musical works as Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* and Strauss's *Salomé* provided a "voice" for European women.[4]

Exoticism could be seen not only to attempt to homogenise India (and other "Others") but also to pervade the boundaries and rigid definitions of national identity in Britain. Often, representations of India in the arts did not conform to the conventions of British society, through an equivocal mixture of admiration and condemnation that frequently contradicted rather than mirrored the British socio-cultural sphere. In this way, orientalisms and exoticisms are not to be dismissed merely as inscribed within imperial hegemony, but as part of the development of social and cultural thoughts and practices in nineteenth-century Britain. As such, the processes of transculturality in this work lie not only in the representation of India from Britain, but in the trajectory of discourses and concepts that travelled from these constructed representations (or imaginations) to British society in general.

The imperial (and often masculine) gaze on the Indian female is certainly existent, yet it is limited and controlled by the nautch girl, suggesting a sense of male disempowerment through the Indian woman's ability to transcend beyond the conventional European social boundaries of gender roles.[5] Perhaps the fascination with the nautch girl resulted from her

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[4] Lindenberger, *Opera in History*, 108.

[5] In artworks such as those by Gérôme and Ingres, Pal-Lapinski argues that there were explorations of 'the fragile barriers between domestic and public women, the limitations of the male gaze, the celebration of the libertine female body and the infiltration of domestic space by the courtesan.' Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, 7.

seemingly enigmatic and paradoxical state of existence: imprisoned by her profession yet free to transcend the conventional social boundaries of gender; immoral and destructive yet celebrated and admired; criticised and criminalised yet desired and culturally legitimised. Indeed, this was, by no means, a one-way exchange. These depictions would not have taken the form they had, had it not been for the interaction between India and Britain, and the exchange of information and practices. For example, in order to better understand Indian cultural and religious practices, the British employed Indian pundits and scholars in order to learn more about them. Additionally, many Indians in high positions of power and influence commissioned paintings by British artists, suggesting that there was also a demand for and impact of these artworks amongst Indian audiences.

While one might pick up on some of the "Oriental" musical devices that Derek Scott defines, these devices must be taken into account within the wider context of British musical entertainments of the time, when such devices were becoming somewhat fashionable, with the abundance of exotically set operas coinciding with the expansion of global trade and colonisation. As a result, such musical devices, which were once perhaps developed and reserved for works referring specifically to the "Orient", were incorporated into the wider musical canon, regardless of how "exotic" they might have been. As such, the cultural interactions and resultant artistic productions were to be assimilated into local practices. But what is genuine "Western" music and what is the "Oriental"? It is a troubling issue: just how far back one can trace the "exoticness" in so-called "Western" music. One could delve very deeply into the possible, or proven, roots of musical traditions and practices according to region, although this would require substantial probing. The results

would undoubtedly prove challenging to derive, owing to the constant and dynamic processes of exchange that took place over centuries of interaction. However, if we are able to understand "Oriental" musical devices within particular historical contexts, we can come closer to understanding the purpose of the implementation of certain soundworlds for particular subjects.

Transcultural Art and the Legacies of Imperialism

In assessing the significance of visual and musical works of art about a particular subject in the imperial context, this thesis acknowledges the complexities and confrontations of a diverse set of issues surrounding gender, cultural identity, power and society. Focusing on the production and reception of these works of art within the contexts of imperialism, colonialism and Orientalism, it becomes possible to obtain a somewhat clearer picture of works of art as carriers of meaning and contributors to cultural and societal change based on the complex relationships between the various agents and negotiators involved. Further research is required to evaluate the longer-term impact of nautch-girl artworks from the age of imperialism, through their reconfigured and renegotiated forms within the British context and beyond.

This work has sought to closely examine the connections between art and politics, particularly in the context of imperialism. It has attempted to demonstrate how British imperialism has so profoundly impacted the nation's artistic practices, but also traces the trajectories of cultural exchange that took place during the process and how they

manifested in British politics, society and culture. Considering this exchange acknowledges that the intersections between the political, cultural and social realms beyond geographical boundaries are rife and multi-faceted. Through processes of transculturality and exchange, cultural practices and concepts developed substantially during the age of Company Rule and the British Raj. This was a time that saw momentous developments in conservational and cultural institutions such as through the establishment of the National Gallery in London, as well as the prolific expansion of public displays of power and imperialism through the likes of the Great Exhibition. It was from within these circumstances that art and politics around the nautch girl intertwined vigorously to foster debates around categories of identity in colonised India but also in metropolitan Britain.

It is important to note that artistic similarities and borrowings in this context occurred not only between painting and music, but also transcended other forms of art, such as literature, poetry and sculpture. For instance, a description of Carpenter's famed watercolour by the Victoria and Albert Museum reveals that Carpenter's romantic vision of India was heavily influenced by the popular poem *Lalla Rookh* by Thomas Moore. In turn, Moore's poem was based on travellers' tales and pictorial sources, relying on generalisations and Orientalist practices that used exotic imagery with a mixture of Indian, Iranian and Turkish elements.[6] This example shows that it is possible to trace a multitude of differing source elements involved in the composition of a single work, with a diversity

[6] 'Two Natch Girls, Kashmir | Carpenter, William', V&A Search the Collections, accessed 21 December 2014, http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O82215/two-natch-girls-kashmir-painting-carpenter-william/.

of formats, genres and cultural entities embedded within them. The result of such an accumulation of differing and often conflicting entities is not a "British work", nor even a "British Indian work", but an amalgamation of the ideas and concepts of an entire array of cultures and genres that collectively contribute to not only bolstering existing notions and concepts but also challenging them. The meanings behind such works of art were not only significant in terms of the cultures and concepts that they were imbued with, but also the social and cultural impact that such works were to have on the societies and spaces within which they were received. A representation such as this one, therefore, cannot merely be simplified to a linear assessment of Indian dancing girls from British artists, but is rather an acknowledgement of an infinitely more complex accrual of the conceptualisations of multiple cultures and art forms clashing together and feeding back into society and culture to reengage in the process of meaning-making. In this regard, nautch-girl artworks tended to reflect abstractions of India loosely based on secondary or unfounded accounts that resulted in imaginary and illusory generalisations and stereotypes. These depictions were, by no means, static and monolithic polarisations of India versus Britain, or the "East" versus the "West", but rather a dynamic process of imagined societies and cultures constructed by ever-changing societies and cultures themselves. However, patterns, similarities, parallels and allegorical considerations show us how particular stereotypes came into play and became widespread. The trajectories of these representations are arguably one of the most valuable aspects to analyse, owing to the effects and the legacies that were produced as a result.

In considering all of this, it is important to note that these processes are by no means a new phenomenon; cultures have been converging and clashing since the beginnings of civilisation, problematising the very definitions of cultural entities as they historically exist. But transcultural works of art serve as important sources that allow us to understand fragments of these developments. From a historical perspective, such art forms acted as a central means of communication or reverberation of contemporaneous concerns. The methodologies used in this dissertation could be expanded upon for further exploration of transcultural art (particular in its various other formats) in the imperial context. As such, this thesis presents only a case study of an interart comparison of artworks in this context. Changes in artistic practices and cultural identity in long-nineteenth-century Britain were part of a system of broader conceptual shifts in concepts of power, society and culture, within which nautch girls played a prominent role. And in many ways the legacies of imperialism and Orientalism continued throughout the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries (and arguably continue today), warranting further and broader investigation into how it has unfolded and developed through its boundless journey through time and space.

Appendices

Chronology

1505-1961	Portuguese India
1556-1605	Rule of Mughal emperor Akbar
1600	East India Company chartered by Queen Elizabeth I
1605-1627	Rule of Mughal emperor Jahangir
1605-1825	Dutch India
1612-1947	British India
1620-1869	Danish India
1627-1628	Rule of Mughal emperor Shahryar Mirza
1628-1658	Rule of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan
1658-1707	Rule of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb
1668-1954	French India
1674-1818	Maratha Empire
1707	Death of Aurangzeb Muhammad Azam Shah becomes titular Mughal emperor
1707-1712	Rule of Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah I
1712-1713	Rule of Mughal emperor Jahandar Shah
1713-1719	Rule of Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar
1719	Rule of Mughal emperor Rafi ud-Darajat Rule of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan II
1718-1748	Rule of Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah
1748-1754	Rule of Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur

1754-1759	Rule of Mughal emperor Alamgir II
1757	Battle of Plassey: Robert Clive defeats the Nawab of Bengal – a key development leading to British control of North India
1757-1858	Company Rule in India
1759-1760	Shah Jahan III becomes titular Mughal emperor
1760	Battle at Wandewash – British troops defeat the French
1760-1806	Rule of Mughal emperor Shah Alam II
1764	Battle of Buxar – British defeat allied Mughal, Bengal and Oudh forces
1765	East India Company given rights to collect taxes from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa provinces
1767-1769	First Anglo-Mysore War - Haidar Ali of Mysore defeats the combined armies of the East India Company, the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad
1770	Occupation of Agra and Mathura by Marathas – competing against British rule. Bengal famine under East India Company rule
1773	Regulating Act passed by British Parliament to control actions of East India Company Warren Hastings appointed first Governor-General of India
1775-1782	First Anglo-Maratha War, resulting in the Treaty of Salbai
1780-1784	Second Anglo-Mysore War, resulting in the Treaty of Mangalore
1785	Lord Cornwallis becomes Governor-General
1789-1792	Third Anglo-Mysore War, resulting in the Treaty of Seringapatam
1793-1850	Liberal-Utilitarian reforms Establishment of British education in India
1798-1799	Fourth Anglo-Mysore War, resulting in Anglo-Hyderabadi victory and the death of Tipu Sultan
1799-1805	Polygar Wars, resulting in direct British control over Tamil Nadu
1803-1805	Second Anglo-Maratha War, resulting in British victory
1806	Vellore Mutiny

1806-1837	Rule of Mughal emperor Akbar II
1817-1818	Third Anglo-Maratha War, resulting in decisive British victory and formal end of the Maratha Empire
1824-1826	First Anglo-Burmese War, resulting in British victory
1837-1857	Rule of Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah II
1839-1842	First Anglo-Afghan War, resulting in Afghan victory
1845-1846	First Anglo-Sikh War, resulting in British victory
1852-1853	Second Anglo-Burmese War, resulting in the British annexation of Pegu province (Lower Burma)
1856	Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act
1857	Indian Rebellion, or "Mutiny", against British rule
1858	Direct British rule of Indian Empire begins
1877	Coronation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India
1885	Indian National Congress founded Third Anglo-Burmese War, resulting in total annexation of Burma
1903	Coronation of Edward VII and Alexandra of Denmark as Emperor and Empress of India
1903-1904	British invasion of Tibet
1905	Partition of Bengal
1909	Indian Councils Act
1911	Cancellation of Bengal Partition Coronation of George V and Mary of Teck as Emperor and Empress of India New Delhi is named capital of India
1915	Provisional Government of India established in Kabul Gandhi returns to India and introduces *Satyagraha* into nationalist movement
1916	Lucknow Pact between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League to pressure the British government for more political representation of Indians

1919	Massacre of Indians in Amritsar under General Dyer
1920	Non-cooperation campaign
1930	Civil Disobedience Campaign Salt March Gandhi works on social programme
1935	Government of India Act 1935 allows some Indian representation in government
1940	Lahore Resolution, calling for independent state for Muslims
1942	Quit India Movement; Gandhi and Nehru are jailed Indian National Army established
1947	Independence for India and Pakistan from British rule, culminating in widespread communal bloodshed

Map of India in 1857

'Map of India in 1857 - Britishempire.Co.Uk', accessed 8 February 2018,

http://www.britishempire.co.uk/images3/india1857.jpg.

Glossary

Bibi: a respectful title for a woman used across South Asia.

Charak puja: a Hindu festival in which devotees were traditionally hung from hooks in their backs, attached to a large bar and then swivelled around.

Daya: the smaller right-hand drum of a *tabla* set.

Devadasi: a female servant of god, dedicated to worship and service of a deity or temple.

Ganikā: a courtesan with artistic accomplishments and high social status, owning her own establishment as well as slaves and servants.

Kalavantin: devadasi practices regionally specific to Goa.[7]

Kanchani: female dancers belonging to the *kanjari* caste.[8]

Kathak: a major form of Indian classical dance attributed to ancient north Indian storytellers who performed stories from the great epics and ancient mythologies through song and dance.

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[7] Teotonio R. De Souza, *Goa To Me* (New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co, 1994), 68.
[8] Verma, *Art and Culture*, 163.

Khabardar: to be careful or cautious.

Khussa: South Asian footwear usually made from tanned leather, often embellished with beads, mirrors, bells or other decorative elements.

Hijra: a eunuch, or an intersex or transgender person.

Hookah: an instrument for vaporising and smoking flavoured tobacco.

Matha patti: jewellery or an ornament worn on the forehead in various regions of South Asia.

Mojari: see *khussa*.

Nautchwali: a woman who dances and is not necessarily attached to a court or temple.

Paan: a preparation of betel leaf, areca nut and sometimes tobacco, chewed for stimulant or psychoactive effects.

Pardah: a curtain, but also used in reference to the societal practice of female seclusion associated with Muslim communities.

Patka: a sash traditionally worn by nobles in India that enables the wearer to display his wealth.

Rajah: king.

Rekhta: a form of poetry based on a mixture of Persian and Hindi.

Samovar: a distinctively shaped metal container used to heat and boil water.

Sati: the practice of self-immolation of a widow on her deceased husband's funeral pyre.

Tabla: a membranophone percussion instrument consisting of two hand drums.

Talwar: a curved sword found in various parts of Asia, including the South Asian subcontinent.

Tawaif: a female courtesan, traditionally offering expertise in music, dance, theatre and literature and an authority on etiquette.

Zenana: the part of a house or establishment that is reserved for women, adhering to practices of *pardah*.

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Images

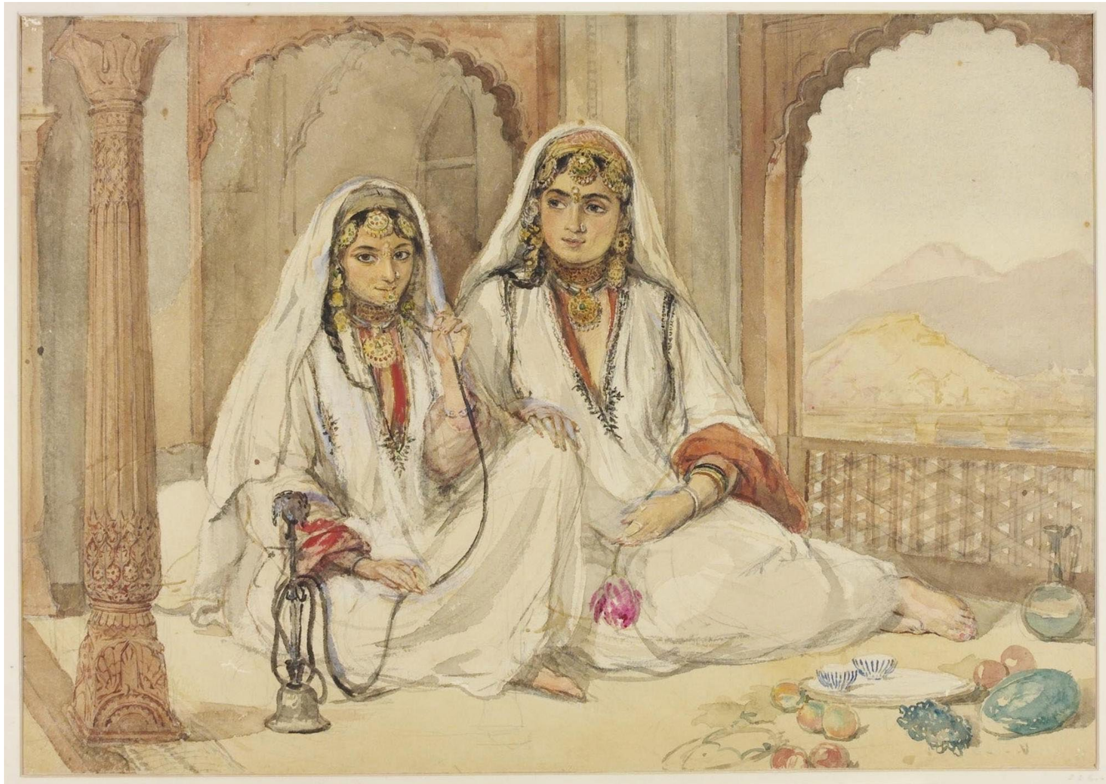

Figure 1: William Carpenter, *Two Natch Girls, Kashmir*, 1854, Watercolour on paper, 53.8 x 38.3 cm, South & South East Asia Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 2: John Cleveland Milbourne, 'Page 47 of Mr. Milbourne's Scrapbook Showing Costumes from THE NAUTCH GIRL Produced on June 30th, 1891, at the Savoy Theatre, London (London, 30 June 1891), UKC/SCRAP/MILB: F203528/P47, Special Collections, University of Kent at Canterbury. https://www.kent.ac.uk/library/specialcollections/all/r.php/31522/show.html

Figure 3: Tilly Kettle, *Dancing Girl*, 1772, Oil on canvas, 194.9 × 121.3 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

Figure 4: Mortimer Luddington Menpes, *Kashmiri Nautch Girl with a Hookah*, n.d., Oil on panel, 27.9 x 18.4 cm.

Figure 5: Thomas Daniell, *The Nautch*, c 1850, Oil on canvas.

Figure 6: Unknown Artist, *Colonel Antoine-Louis Polier Enjoying a Nautch at His House in Lucknow*, c 1785, Watercolour and bodycolour heightened with gold, 30.8 x 34.3 cm. http://www.artnet.com/artists/indian-school-lucknow-18/colonel-antoine-louis-polier-enjoying-a-nautch-at-n98ntM7cktbGKLXYaiMW3A2

Figure 7: William Daniell, A Palace in Juanpore, India with a Nautch Girl Performing in Front of a Nobleman, Oil on Canvas, n.d. http://www.artnet.com/artists/william-daniell/a-palace-in-juanpore-india-with-a-nautch-girl-Hiqadq-sO0GWxfoBdW1gJw2

Figure 8: Thomas Hickey, *'Portrait of Three Princesses from Mysore', Previously Known as 'Dancing Girls, Madras'*, c 1805, Oil on canvas, 124 x 100 cm. http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2007/important-british-paintings-l07122/lot.45.html

Figure 9: Francis Frith, *Nautch Girls, Kashmir*, c 1870, Photographic print, c 1870, Columbia University. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchphotos/kashmir1870s.jpg

Figure 10: Unknown Photographer, *A Photograph of a Nautch Girl from 'The Nautch Girl' at the Royal Theatre and Opera House, Abbey Road.*, 1901, Photographic print, 1901, TOPS Musical Productions.

Figure 11: Shepherd and Robertson, *A Nautch Girl with Two Musicians*, c 1870, Albumen print, 16 x 20.7 cm.

http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.340.html/2014/art-imperial-india-l14502

Figure 12: Robert Brown, 'Bayaderes (Professional Dancers) of Calcutta,' from "Peoples of the World", 1892, Engraving.http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchlater/calcutta1892.jpg

Figure 13: Tilly Kettle, *Dancers*, c 1770, Oil on canvas, 1320 x 1613 cm.

https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/VQGzM_ioSH0Qug

Figure 14: Lady Lawley, *A Hindu Dasi or Nautch Girl*, 1914, Print from watercolour , Columbia University.

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchlater/lawley1914.jpg

Figure 15: Frederic Shoberl, *'Devedassis or Bayaderes' in R. Ackerman, 'The World in Miniature - Hindoostan'*, c 1820, Hand-coloured engraving.

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchearly/nautchearly.html

Figure 16: Unknown Photographer, *Photograph of Lenore Snyder as Bee Bee in 'The Nautch Girl'*, 1891, Photographic print. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bee-bee_l.jpg

Figure 17: 'Illustration of Holly Beebee's costume by Percy Anderson' on 'Kurt of Gerolstein: Savoy Theatre, London, 1891', accessed 13 July 2016.

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Figure 18: Horace H. Wilson, *A Nautch in the Palace of the Ameer of Sind*, 1841, Lithograph, Columbia University. http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/019xzz000000724u00004000.html

Figure 19: Mortimer Luddington Menpes, *Nautch Girls, India, from 'World Pictures: Being a Record in Colour'*, c 1919, Hand-coloured engraving. https://sangeethas.wordpress.com/2012/12/11/old-vintage-photos/#jp-carousel-2784

Figure 20: Johan Zoffany, *Group Portrait of Sir Elijah and Lady Impey*, c 1783-1784, Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 122 cm, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/zoffany-johann/group-portrait-sir-elijah-and-lady-impey

Figure 21: Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *Begoo, A Kashmiri Nautch Girl, from 'Imperial India, An Artist's Journal'*, 1879, Sketch print. https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-HoLknAqkdFE/UswlwiyIoII/AAAAAAAAQUE/yoREkfo6gyc/s1600/Kashmiri+dancing+girl+1879+by+V.+C.+Prinsep.jpg

Figure 22: Charles D'Oyly, *'A Dancing Woman of Bengal Exhibiting Before an European Family' in "The European in India and The Costumes and Customs of India"*, c 1824, Coloured lithograph, The British Library. https://www.akg-images.com/archive/A-Dancing-Woman--of-bengal--exhibiting-before-an-European-Family-2UMDHU1RD9OX.html

Figure 23: Charles D'Oyly, *'A Dancing Woman of Lucknow Exhibiting Before an European Family' in "The European in India and The Costumes and Customs of India"*, c 1824, Coloured lithograph, British Library.

https://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/asian-and-african/page/9/

Figure 24: Thomas Hickey, *An Indian Lady*, 1787, Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Ireland. http://onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/objects/2775/an-indian-lady-perhaps-jemdanee-bibi-of-william-hickey;jsessionid=3781B348C55D8E0A7438AC9BD3513A76?ctx=f5981dae-f53f-4d14-a465-01c6f5a386f9&idx=2

Figure 25: Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *Martaba, a Kashmiree Nautch Girl*, c 1878, Oil on canvas, 68.5 × 51.3 cm, Christie's. https://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=5834267

Figure 26: Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *The Green Dress*, Oil on canvas, 91.4 × 71.1 cm, Christie's. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valentine_Cameron_Prinsep_-_The_green_dress.jpg

Figure 27: Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *A Nautch Girl*, 1878, Oil on canvas.

Figure 28: Byam Shaw, *Front Page of 'The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics' by Laurence Hope*, 1901, Illustration. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Garden_of_Kama_by_Byam_Shaw01.jpg

Figure 29: Mrs. C. Belnos, *A Nautch Girl or Public Female Singer of India*, c 1832, Hand-coloured engraving, Columbia University.

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/women/nautchearly/nautchearly.html