Introduction

My journey towards art began in the 1990s in Stockholm. Seeing shows on modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec opened out a world that had been out of reach to Indian audiences in those decades. On returning to India, working in an auction house with an impressive art archive exposed me to modern Indian artists and their works. Writing about artist works in catalogues for art auctions while being surrounded by those same works brought a hands-on experience that no purely scholarly work could match. The Indian art market was at its high point in the first decade of the twenty first century. The constant push and pull between the pricing of an artist's works, and the positioning of the modern artist within styles and themes, became dead serious when the *Hindu Janjagruti Samiti* (a right-wing Hindu organisation) protested the sale of M. F. Husain and later Tyeb Mehta's works in 2007, claiming them to be anti-Hindu.[1] This was the first time that I saw an artist's identity appear to be in direct conflict with the tangible reality of the nation. Driven by the need to understand and contextualize the goddess iconography that lay at the bottom of such a conflict, a close reading of modern representations of the goddess Durga in modern Indian art became the first topic for my thesis. The focus was on line drawings that had so offended national sentiment (Husain *Durga* 1956, *Saraswati* c.1970), the *Mahishasura* legend in flat, solid colors emphasizing the dynamic relationship of the demon with the goddess (Tyeb Mehta *Mahishasura* series 1996) and on photo-real portraits of real women who were surreally given a third eye and designated as goddesses (Bikash Bhattacharjee *Durga Series* 1980s). Clearly the goddess iconography appeared to be closely intertwined within a more complex understanding of

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1 Accessed on June 15, 2016. https://www.hindujagruti.org/news/7123.html. The work in question was from Mehta's *Kali* series created in 1989. https://www.hindujagruti.org/news/4064.html. Husain's work was from his *Mahabharata* series created for the 11th Sao Paolo Biennial in 1972, titled *The Battle of Ganga and Jamuna.*

the Indian feminine. It became increasingly clear to me that there were broader contemporary questions that urgently needed to be addressed around issues of sexuality, identity and gender politics *vis-à-vis* the nation, and that my research needed a concerted and direct engagement within contemporary artistic practice itself, where these ongoing dialogues continue to occur.

In order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of this engagement within an area as heterogeneous, multi-faceted and vast as contemporary art, where no complete over-view is possible, it appeared that the only way was to narrow the focus of my research. Concentrating on the tension between cultural specificity and claims of universality on the one hand and a similar pull between national-ism and critiques of nationalism on the other, offered a direction. The category of the postnational—taking the postnational to mean not 'after' or 'beyond' the nation, rather to transcend a normative sense of national belonging, and with Menon, taking the 'post' in the postnation to be understood as having *passed* through the nation[2]—it is this definition of *passing through* the nation that drives the understanding of the postnational as I explore these contradictions through the work of three contemporary 'Indian' artists as case studies.

The initial impulse towards the selection of the three artists began with a few fortuitous encounters with their works. My first encounter with diasporic artist Chitra Ganesh's (b. 1974, New York) comic-based collages occurred in Gothenburg, Sweden at the Gothenburg Konsthalle in 2012. The gigantic banner proclaiming her solo exhibition *She the Question* displayed a colored nude woman sitting in a yogic pose with her head aflame. The banner made an emphatic statement not only about women and identity in general but also about color and the possibility of imagining alternative worlds. Here was an image that was not only proclaiming the pres-ence of queer feminism, referencing science fiction but also simultaneously claim-ing a connection with India through its yogic pose. After I had viewed Ganesh's works in the exhibition, I too had some questions of my own, the images were familiar, the figures had clearly been sourced from Indian comics—but their queer performative gestures and their unfamiliar words were not. The violence in the works was repeated panel after panel. Just a few months earlier I had viewed Tejal Shah's (b. 1979, Bhilai) multiple media installation work *Between the Waves* at Doc-umenta 13, in which the colored 'Indian' cyborgian[3] bodies, located in precarious,

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2 Nivedita Menon, "Outing Heteronormativity: Nation, Citizen, Feminist Disruption," in *Handbook of Gender*, ed. Raka Ray (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 138. Menon clarifies that she uses the term both to build upon and depart from the scholarship that has problematized the nation in various ways.

3 The cyborgian reference coming from Donna Haraway's 1985 essay, *A Cyborg Man-ifesto*, with its rejection of rigid boundaries between human-animal-machine provides

endangered landscapes performed an aggressive and explicitly queer sexual narrative. Around the same time, early 2013, Nikhil Chopra (b. 1976, Calcutta) performed as *La Perle Noire* at La Marais, Paris, the quixotic Indian Raja furiously transformed the gallery walls into a "sea of blood-red," in a 50-hour performance.

Ganesh, Shah and Chopra form an interesting trio to interrogate the relationship between contemporary art and the nation, as they are located in a postnational context in interesting ways. Geographically in the diaspora (New York) and away from mainstream art centers in India (Goa), both Ganesh and Shah politically identify themselves with the global queer community.[4] As artists who travel, exhibit and perform their art on the international exhibition circuit, they provide this study with a materially rich practice to analyze the questions of belonging and locatedness *vis-à-vis* the nation.

All three employ different mediums, digital collage, video, live performance in their art practice, even with their employing of diverse mediums, I could discern common threads in the practices of the three artists and how they centered around the performative 'Indian' body, this intersecting of 'national' identities and contemporary art in a globalizing world seemed propitious at a moment when the idea of the nation itself was undergoing several iterations ranging from the postnational and the transnational on the one hand and on the other, signalling towards a return to the nation with the rise of neo-nationalism in different corners of the globe. The nation is a crucial framework for mediating identities within socio-cultural contexts. Our sense of belonging still stems from the nation state and in the case of India, a nation that emerged under the aegis of colonial modernity, it acquires an even sharper valence for the Indian artist. When nation, gender and sexuality intersect, the body becomes an important marker for the nation. My aim in this study is, therefore, to focus on the complex ways in which contemporary Indian artists negotiate their identities through engaging with the concepts of nation and the "postnation" using the queer performative body (often the artist's own).

The understanding of the term 'queer' that informs this study begins with Sedgwick who defines queer as an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resources, when the constituent elements of anyone's gender

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a significant entry point into Shah's work which essentially draws upon a rejection of binaries, identity politics and notions of affinity — moving onto greater interdependencies.

4   Ganesh and Shah have also shared exhibition space in some early exhibitions such as at Thomas Erben Gallery New York in 2006, in *Subcontingent – The Indian Subcontinent in Contemporary Art,* Torino (2006), *Shifting Shapes – Unstable Signs* at Yale University School of Art Gallery (2009), *Lighting the Way: Artists' Short Films from India,* Glasgow Short Film Festival (2011), to name a few.

or anyone's sexuality are not made or cannot be made to signify in a monolithic manner,[5] and moves beyond it towards the term's indeterminacy and elasticity[6] that allows for a wide range of possibilities as to its applicability. While an understanding of queerness is crucial to this work, this is not a study about queer artists or queer art, queerness works rather in opposition to the stereotype and as a heuristic device that transcends the zone of identity.

The Contemporaneity of the Art World

The period that this study focuses on is marked by the pervasiveness of the phenomena of globalization—1990s was a decade when transnational capital made its way into India and the nation became part of a global geo-political unification process. With the onset of globalization processes, fears of cultural homogenization lead to questions of the nature and survival of social and cultural identity. Therefore, the process through which external and internal forces interact to produce, reproduce and disseminate 'global' culture within local communities became the most active area of debate in globalization.[7] In the artworld, this is when large scale exhibitions began to take place with more frequency, the art market's mechanisms infiltrated many parts of the world and when museum spaces and policies also adopted a more self-reflexive mode. Globalization and its concomitant issues formed a focal point for artistic discourse in practices from various regions and diverse cultures, bringing contexts together in single exhibition spaces. Arjun Appadurai names the impact of electronic medias and mass migrations as two connecting diacritics that have shaped the cultural dimensions of globalization, as global media has had the effect of blurring the divisions between the realistic and the fictional. Within contemporary art practice, borders and territories and nations recede as media and the virtual begin to play a key defining role as on the one hand, an increased circulation of images now assumes a non-grounded form of visuality via social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram and on the other, as artworks constantly move from one continent to another, (sometimes being shown simultaneously), they lead to forms of deterritorialisation with a sense of affinity and interconnectedness. Media facilitates not only this increased circulation of images but also the ideas

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5   Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 18.

6   Anna-Marie Jagose, *Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 3.

7   Bill Ashcroft, "Glocalisation," in *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Griffin et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 102–104.

and discourses surrounding them, and it is as part of this that the perception of the post-national is reinforced.

The contemporary art world, marked by rapid biennialization and the concomitant emergence of an international job market for artists and curators with a growing number of international residencies and exchange programmes,[8] has seen a growth in prosperity of a large number of art centers, biennials and art fairs taking place beyond the western art world, all of these developments have facilitated a simultaneous movement of young artists from the peripheries towards mainstream western art centers.

Addressing the problem of defining the contemporary as a critical category, Peter Osborne argues that rather than as a spatially imagined conception, the contemporary functions critically and is posed within an ongoing temporization of histories in a dynamic process. He terms contemporaneity as the form of temporality that best describes the historical present. The idea of contemporaneity assumes a significant position as, with the geo-political unification of the globe, multiple social forms of time in different places are in some senses forced into contact with each other out of a compulsion of globalization of capital, and new forms of contemporaneity are produced every time there are new and forced conjunctions between different social spaces. Contemporary art, critically understood therefore, is standing at the conjunction of two intertwined temporalities, firstly the temporality of the history of twentieth century art that is an ongoing narrative of retrospective unification, and secondly, the temporality of the historical present, that present in which the contemporary has itself become a historical category.[9] The retrospective unification of art practices within a universal western modernist canon has been superseded in contemporary art by a desire to find a universal common language for art practices from all corners of the globe, gesturing towards the growing importance of contemporaneity.

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8 Charlotte Bydler, *Global Art World Inc: On the Globalisation of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004), 53. Further, discussing the globalization of art, Allan Cochraine and Kathy Pane cite three features that support this view—the dissemination of new art biennales in non-western countries, and international spread of art institutions such as the Guggenheim, secondly the heightened mobility of artists and curators, emerging worldwide communication network, and thirdly the fact that non-western artists and curators have been more and more included in mainstream exhibitions during the last two decades. Accessed on August 2, 2018. http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_buchholz_en.htm.

9 Peter Osborne, "What makes Contemporary Art Contemporary? Or other Peoples' Lives." A talk given at Nottingham Contemporary on May 14, 2014. Accessed on June 5, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KI7zNsZjreo.

This discussion about contemporaneity and its importance to contemporary art is useful to understand how an intensified planetary interconnectedness of different times and experiences of time functions, acknowledging that different people maybe inhabiting different temporalities with differing pasts and presents while being contemporary to each other. The artists in this study contemporaneously connect their works through layers of time—mythological, colonial—as all become part of their lived realities. These 'lived' times in different locations across the globe, however, closely engage with local knowledge and are not merely passive receptors of applying western ideas. Nikos Papastergiadis, gesturing towards this interconnectedness, states that anyone who enters the context of contemporary art is already part of the complex process of intervention and feedback that now cuts across the world, there are many parallel stories and competing genres which are being constituted out of a shuttling between the discourse of art and the cultural politics of everyday life. Hence for him, art cannot be explained as a social activity that fulfills the stated goals of a national agenda or an economic order. The specific place of art is now increasingly located in networks that are both above and below the reach of the nation state, through the process of collaborating with community networks in local places, providing artists the opportunity to uncover counter cultural pockets and forging new transnational diasporas that would defy the hegemonic order of the nation.[10] Papastergiadis's argument is very useful to understand the work of the three artists, and how they circulate globally through exhibition and gallery spaces, and biennials where their works are temporarily embedded and where issues of national identity are often part of the art discourse, for example when they participate in country specific shows like *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* (2011), or *Indian Highway* (2009–2012).

Shared Discourse

Contemporaneousness is also visible in the dialogic relationship between global forces and local experiences, Papastergiadis argues that there is a significant conjunction between artistic practices and curatorial strategies—citing examples in art practice from Latin America by Medina, from South East Asia by Wong Choy Lee, and from India by Ranjit Hoskote, he comments on how these writers and curators through attention to the edges of local encounters, observe the ways

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10   Nikos Papastergiadis, "Spatial Aesthetics: Rethinking the Contemporary," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture*, eds. Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, Terry Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 364 & 373.

in which artists throw themselves into extreme conditions, act as mediators in complex cultural crossroads, give form to nebulous threshold experiences and create situations in which imaginations can take the participants into unknown worlds, picking up on Hoskote's view on how artists do not confine their imagination to their place of origin alone.[11] Irit Rogoff too comments on the sharing of issues and urgencies, pinpointing towards,

> [A]a certain critical currency, but perhaps most importantly a performative *enablement*—a loosening of frames all around us, which means we can move around more freely, employ and deploy a range of theoretical, methodological and performative rhetoric and modes of operation, inhabit terrains that may not have previously made us welcome.[12]

Artists all over the world directly and strategically engage with human, political and queer rights and ecological concerns that increasingly transcend national borders, demanding for a concerted international effort and focus. These can all be termed as postnational issues that cannot be subsumed within nations and treated as national concerns, even as they occur at the local and national level.

Political and queer rights come into the frame with works such as *What are you?* as Shah foregrounds the absence of equal rights to the transgender community in India, with *Tales of Amnesia,* as Ganesh focuses on the marginalization and patriarchal violence against women apparent in the narrative of the original *Amar Chitra Katha* comics. Human rights and growing economic inequality enter the frame in this era of *crisis globalization* (Demos 2012) that is marked by an increasing influx of migrants and refugees into the affluent North as they seek decent standards of living escaping from the repressive regimes and zones of conflict. Chitra Ganesh's work on *Index of the Disappeared* in collaboration with Mariam Ghani focuses on such migrants as it archives the absences and disappearances of thousands of South Asian Muslim immigrants from the United States after 9/11,[13] while Chopra's incessant travel across sites and histories addresses migration histories following the apolitical route, as artist and draftsman he not only memorializes site-specific landscapes but also marks them with his ephemeral presence.

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11   Nikos Papastergiadis and Gerardo Mosquera, "The Geo-politics of Contemporary Art," *Ibraaz Foundation* 2014. Accessed on June 12, 2017. https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/109.

12   Irit Rogoff, "Academy as Potentiality," in *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.*, eds. Angelika Nollert and Irit Rogoff (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver Verlag, 2006), 19.

13   For a more detailed analysis of this project please see Bindu Bhadana, "Index of the Disappeared: Representing the Invisible South," *Artl@s Bulletin* 5, No. 2 (2016) Article 9.

Introducing the 'Indian' Artists—Why Them?

Chitra Ganesh

Chitra Ganesh, a post-graduate in Fine Arts from Columbia University (2002), keenly felt the absence of any courses on the Indian contemporary art scene during her course of study. A desire to bridge absences has largely driven her art practice. Living and working in Brooklyn (New York) she works across mediums, from installation, works on paper, paintings, photo, digital collages, murals, animation. In her projects she eclectically draws from Indian, Buddhist and Greek myths, from local street art, graffiti, from comic books and from the zine culture. Her queer activist practice centers exclusively on the female queer performative body, the female body that, in India, occupies a clearly gendered space and, in some of her works, Ganesh's critique of this gendered space queers the female category itself. From within her large oeuvre of works, this study focuses upon two sets of digital collages, *Tales of Amnesia* (2002–2007) and *She the Question* (2012). While *Tales of Amnesia* draws almost exclusively from the Indian *Amar Chitra Katha* comics—a materially rich resource that visualizes the nation's histories and visual presence through mythological narratives—the next set of collages in *She the Question*, this study argues, moves away from this nation-centered focus. Ganesh's positioning as an artist from the South Asian diaspora not only provides this study with an in-built postnational framework to engage with the relationship between art practice and diasporic belonging but also to draw upon the tension between national and diasporic identities, positioning Ganesh as the queer resistant "impossible subject."

Tejal Shah

Tejal Shah, an undergraduate in commercial and illustrative photography from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (2000) spent a year as an exchange student at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago where a concerted engagement with mediums other than photography marked a shift in their practice. Shah works mainly with video and multi-media installations and their practice continually resists the binary in all its forms, and centers on the queer, and variously gendered 'Indian' body. This study focuses on the following works: *Chingari Chumma* (2000), *What are you?* (2007), and a photographic archive, titled *Women like Us* (2009). Later works in video, *Between the Waves* (2012), and *Some Kind of Nature* (2013), mark the changed direction in their practice towards queer ecologies. Shah's critique of the national body runs the gamut of bodies that are "different,"—from the transgendered body *(What are you?)*, to

"masculine" female wrestlers *(Women Like Us)*, and the "ideal feminine" from Indian Bollywood cinema *(Chingari Chumma)*—all are examples of bodies that defy a national logic of identity.

Nikhil Chopra

Nikhil Chopra completed a master in Fine Arts from the University of Ohio (2003), where he performed live for the first time and adopted his first persona of *Sir Raja*.[14] Back in India, as a post-colonial traveller / explorer donning a semi-autobiographical character, *Yog Raj Chitrakar* (2007), Chopra has travelled and performed at sites[15] all over the world.[16] This study analyzes Chopra's perceptive shift from an identity-based *Yog Raj Chitrakar* (2007–2011), towards notions of color as *La Perle Noire* (2013). Chopra's performances span a few hours to a few days as he engages with site-specific histories across the globe. Chopra's stringent critique of pretentious Indian royal portraiture in the colonial period that began in *Sir Raja* continues with *Yog Raj Chitrakar* in the guise of a colonial explorer and takes on an even more extreme form of post-national subversion as he recreates his persona into a Victorian queen[17] or an English noblewoman.

The three artists are united in their poststructuralist view of gender and focus their practices on the 'Indian' body, the queering of this 'Indian' body

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14   *Sir Raja II* Ohio 2003; *Sir Raja III What will I do with all this land* 2005; *The Death of Sir Raja III* Mumbai 2005; *Sir Raja visits Khowaja Press* New Delhi 2007; *Sir Raja III visits New York City* New York 2008.

15   'Site' in the context of the art world is a loaded term, it relates not only to the particular aesthetic experience constituted by social, political, racial and economic contexts at play but is also exemplified through the circulation of art and artists between art residencies, art biennials and art fairs. For the purposes of this study the word is often used in its simple definition as the location where Chopra performs.

16   *Yog Raj Chitrakar Memory Drawing I* 2007; *Yog Raj Chitrakar visits Lal Chowk* 2007; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing II* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing III* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing IV Yokohama Triennale* 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar and Tokyo Mori Museum* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing V Part I* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing V Part 2* 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing VI Brussels* 2010; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing VIII Manchester* 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing IX New York,* 2009; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing XI Chicago* 2010; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing X Part 2 Mumbai* 2010; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing V Part 3 Lyon* 2011.

17   *Yog Raj Chitrakar and Tokyo Mori Museum* 2008; *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing II* 2008.

becomes the central lens to study their work. The performative body is always in a flux, constructing gender and selves, distancing itself from the normative nation with the acting out across the surface of the body through practices ranging from photography, video and live performance. As these mediums engage with the complex ways of representation of the queer body this engagement with technology in diverse ways builds a contemporaneous dialogue between live and virtual, time-based and static imagery.

Research Questions

While geographically the concept of identity is closely connected to a place and is often expressed by assumptions of ethnic or racial homogeneity, the category of 'belonging to a nation' is constructed at a political and legal level and continues to exercise authority through citizenship rights and institutional structures connected to the modern state. In a post-independent India, the modern Indian artist occupied a critical position with the project of nation-building, but this frame of reference started to unravel with some characteristic features of globalization entering India in the 1990s. With increasing mobility and interconnectedness identities are being formed not only as a result of the cultural and national history one has inherited, but rather as a result of the different spaces through which one travels, and identity is no longer seen as an inherited construct but rather as a more flexible construct that changes as one moves through spaces and internalizes a mix of the different cultures and ideas one encounters. Negotiating between the local and global meta-narrative, the process of identity formation becomes a flexible, open-ended questioning and de-limiting of oneself, as the 'Indian' aspect in this identity is in a continuously dialectical relationship with broader notions of belonging.

The presence of this broadening dialectic comes into a sharper focus in the works of the three artists in the second part of this study. Shah fuses their narrative with Charcot's archive in Paris (2007), with that of Rebecca Horn's *Einhorn* for Documenta at Kassel (2012), Ganesh's multi limbed amnesiac woman / goddesses surreally mouth dissonant disjointed phrases infused with historical references across cultures and continents from Hindu, Buddhist and Greek mythologies, from Catullus and Sappho to Pandora, and combine with graffiti and street art, with science fiction and 1960s psychedelia, Goya, Dürer[18] and Roy Lichtenstein,

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18 Ganesh's *Melencolia* directly references Dürer's work, for further detail, please see Bindu Bhadana, "Transculturality," in *Twentieth Century Indian Art,* eds. Partha Mitter, Parul Dave-Mukherjee and Rakhee Balram (London: Thames and Hudson, 2022).

all come into her work. Chopra performs 'inside and outside' cultures, between capitals and continents employing the politics of representation through the critiquing of racial stereotypes—that attempt to reduce members of social groups to their racial features—drawing on a complex history of these stereotypes as he switches guises to transform into a Turkish gentleman in Berlin or a flamboyant colored showgirl in the style of Josephine Baker at Centre Pompidou, (April 2011).

How do we characterize this broadening of frames and transcultural exchanges in contemporary art practice?

Rather than relying on pre-constructed notions such as national 'gendered' belonging, their positionality connects with the meta-narrative of a collective past that partially draws from memory and narrative. In an age marked by displacement and deterritorialization in which fixed associations between identity, culture and place are being sundered and existing nationalist narratives are being brought under scrutiny by those marginalized and excluded from them, postcolonial studies certainly brought in critical voices that questioned the mainstream narrative, however, the guiding historical framework was, still determined by the territory of the nation state. With the continuing processes of globalization, "... for many national citizens, practicalities of residence and the ideologies, of home, soil and roots are often disjunct," and often the territorial referents demonstrating civic loyalty can be divided within different spatial horizons—work loyalties, residential loyalties, religious—all as different registers of affiliation. In fact, as Appadurai argues, ideas of nation are more often driven by other sorts of affiliations—linguistic, racial, religious,—but rarely ever *territorial*.[19] The postnational, understood as *passing through the nation*, therefore, provides us with the setting to engage with this shift and look for answers to some key questions such as,—i) Is there a shift away from the nation in artistic discourse in India? ii) If there is, where does this shift "locate" itself? iii) How do contemporary artists respond to this situation from various locations?

Research Framework

The research framework for this study is inter-disciplinary and draws from a range of disciplines and theories—post-structuralism, postcolonialism, queer theory, political science and histories and narratives of contemporary art. An interdisciplinary approach is essential not only to find answers to questions

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19 Arjun Appadurai, "Sovereignty Without Territoriality: Notes for a Post-national Geography," in *The Geography of Identity,* ed. P. Yaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1996), 40–58.

dealing with contemporary art, a field too broad and complex to be encompassed within a single discipline, but also in order to contextualize the common thematic of this research—the performative body, which largely drawing from queer theory also draws from socio-religious understandings of the body. To investigate the body and its relationship to the nation, viewpoints from various aspects of the humanities and the arts are brought together in order to construct a complex understanding of the broader cultural and social meanings of the queer body and its positioning in contemporary art.

It has been successfully and numerously argued that modes of binary thinking are not useful in looking at either an "imperialized past" or a globalized present. My analytical framework in the first instance draws from scholars such as Judith Butler and Eve Kofosky-Sedgwick who critique such essentialist modes of thinking. Drawing from queer post-structural understandings of the body as a transparent subject, from the understanding of "woman" as a construct, Butler argues that the category of "woman" only finds stability within the context of a hetero-normative matrix—normative sexuality fortifies normative gender and that one is a woman, "to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one's sense of place in gender." Therefore "gender trouble," states Butler is the fear of losing one's place in gender, and this is a "crisis in ontology experienced at the level of both sexuality and language."[20] Questioning the feminist view of sex as biological and gender as cultural, Butler advocates of reuniting of the two discrete units, claiming both as constructs.[21] Butler's arguments, though widely critiqued,[22] also brought the body back into feminist discourse which was a welcome shift.[23]

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20   Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), xi–xii.

21   Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10.

22   Butler was termed as a Foucault flunky by Camille Paglia, accused of displaying a 'hip quietism' by Martha Nussbaum. Susan A Speer and Jonathan Potter consider Butler's theoretical language-based approach too abstracted to be applied to 'real-life' situations, Susan Bordo also criticizes Butler for reducing gender to language and ignoring embodied reality. Mark Hansen, critiquing her theory of performative iteration says it subordinates the agency of the body to the content of social images, whereas what matters about the body is that which is material *to* the body. Peter Digeser argues that Butler's focus on language in the performative body is 'too pure' to account for identity. In viewing the gendered body as purely performed, Digeser says Butler ignores the gendered body. Accessed on June 5, 2018. https://judithbutler.wordpress.com/category/criticisms.

23   Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv–xvi. *In Bodies that Matter: The Discursive Limits of Sex,* Butler more or less accepts that there is such a thing as 'the physical body.' 61.

By bringing in the notion of performativity Butler stretched the notion beyond J.L. Austin's speech acts to include not just words but all sorts of assigned behaviors along with words that when they were reproduced over time, created a gendered identity. Challenging us to rethink gender outside the categories of the metaphysics of substance Butler argues that: "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results."[24] If gender is a "repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being,"[25] what subversive repetitions could be put in place to question the regulatory practice of identity itself ? Butler suggests that the possibilities for gender transformation and subversion lie in the arbitrary relation between the "bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds," that constitute performativity. These acts include visible markers such as makeup, dress and comportment, which taken together convey a constituent gender. The idea of performativity is useful for the queer body since it suggests that subjectivity is always de-centered and never fixed. Despite its various critiques,[26] Butler's understanding of performativity provides this study with a productive framework to apply to its analysis of artworks, as it is via the practices of dis-identification with regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized and both feminist and queer politics mobilized.[27] Dis-identifications characterize the work of all three artists in this study as they performatively engage with aesthetic representations of the body to contest arbitrary notions of gender that are imposed on the field of appearance.

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24   Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31–34.

25   Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2010), 415.

26   Sara Salih, *Judith Butler*, 2002, 149. Salih discusses Butler's key concepts and how her notion of performativity has been critiqued by various writers and theorists. Among these, Jay Prosser rejects the notion of the performative claiming that, 'there are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be non-performative' (1998: 32). Martha Nussbaum does not regard parody and drag as viable alternatives for certain classes of oppressed women, McNay regards performativity as inadequately historicised and contextualised, Susan Bordo too, argues that Butler's notions of the body and gender are too abstract. However, Butler's concept of performativity forms a suitable framework for this study to engage with the works of all the three artists.

27   Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 4.

Performativity and the constructed-ness of gender as a resistant practice frames almost the entire set of works that forms part of this study but in differing ways, Chopra effectively builds up and constitutes gender materially in his performances that not only heavily borrow from theatre but are also spontaneous/partially choreographed role-play, he actively engages with visible markers of gender performativity, make-up, dress, comportment, to critique not only gender but also particular postcolonial personas such as the Indian royal and the British queen. Shah highlights the instability of genders through their work on transgenders variously, including through a documentary on surgical 'mtf' (male to female) procedures and through drag performances. Shah's engagement differs from Chopra's in its focus not only on the transgendered body but on the deliberate foregrounding of the attributes of femininity and masculinity as essential characteristics of gendered selves. Both Chopra and Shah employ drag in their works and these methods of dis-identification trouble the gender binary. In the case of Ganesh, the construct of the woman itself becomes a masquerade of performing a social role that is 'woman.' Here, Riviere's 1921 essay on masquerade proves to be a valuable resource to engage with the idea of 'woman' as sign and the 'true' image of femininity, the performance of 'womanliness' in a social role deconstructs essentialized notions of femininity and of costuming as a superficial masquerade of 'womanliness.' Ganesh's performative women not only engage with womanliness through a familiar historicized comic genre, but also subvert the sanctity of the mythological narrative through queer performativity—these are queer abject bodies awaiting recognition in the contemporary world.

The queer performative body connects with the nation in the writings of political scientist Nivedita Menon who locates the presence of the postnational in the queer body. In the world of "transnational and corporatized flows" which has superseded the static organisation of the nation states, Nivedita Menon attributes the postnational with the two following dimensions—one, "over" the nation, across national borders and two, "under" the nation, resisting inclusion into the 'larger' national identity. Regarding the first as an example of subversive strategy interrogating the nation, she cites the activities of Black Laundry, an Israeli anti-occupation queer group. Through breaking down hierarchies of both the nation and sex, the group employs twin strategies of national betrayal and sexual depravation, using slogans such as '*Free Condoms Free Palestine*', '*Transgender not Transfer*'—to deliberately situate itself outside the framework of Israel/Palestine as well as that of the hetero/homosexual. Menon cites a diasporic location as an example for post-nationalism "over" the nation in the Indian context, referring specifically to the relationship of gay and lesbian people of Indian and South Asian origin in the US to the National Federation of Indian Associations, a private organization dominated by Indian businessmen in the US. The Federation

refused the *South Asian Gay and Lesbian Association* (SALGA formed in 1992), permission to march in the Indian Independence Day parade in New York in 1997 on two grounds, firstly that a south Asian identity would have allowed non-Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis to march in the parade and secondly, that gay and lesbian identities could not by definition be 'Indian' since homosexuality did not exist in India. Similarly, *Sakhi,* an organization that addressed the question of domestic violence against women in the South Asian community was also refused permission, since it exposed dis-junctures in the family system which is the cornerstone of the Indian nation. After sustained pressure *Sakhi* was allowed to join but SALGA could only join the parade as late as 2000.[28] As Menon states, "The presence of these two organizations is a constant reminder of the inherent conflict between national and diasporic identities, demonstrating how the idea of a unified and homogeneous nation has the potential to unravel through feminist, queer and counter-nationalist politics."[29] This view has been corroborated in the work of Gayatri Gopinath (2005)[30] and Svati Shah (2001). Gopinath further emphasizes the male bourgeoise construct of the National Federation of Indian Associations that classified India as Hindu, patriarchal, middle class and free of homosexuals, arguing that within the patriarchal logic of the Indian immigrant bourgeoisie the "non-heterosexual Indian woman," occupies a space of impossibility.[31] This classification of the Hindu diaspora is useful to understand its role in the nation-building process itself, both as a contributor towards India's financial health and through indirect interventions such as its diaspora standing in for the state in national identity construction—and even more specifically the assertion that queer diasporic identities can serve as a threat to the idea of a united nation—views that further highlight the legitimacy accorded to the construct of heterosexual normative identities within the national matrix.

As Myra A Waterbury's discussion of the Hungarian state's politics towards its diasporic population argues, it is the reframing of national discourse that invokes those beyond its borders that can provide a form of legitimacy to new political actors who position themselves as "nationalizing elites," as saviors of

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28   Please see the following link for a potted history of exclusions and inclusions over the years. Accessed on June 25, 2017. http://theaerogram.com/when-gay-pride-was-excluded-from-india-pride/.

29   Nivedita Menon, "Thinking through the Post-nation," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, Issue No. 10 (March 2009), 70–77.

30   Gayatri Gopinath highlights the two incidents in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 16.

31   Gopinath, 18.

the nation who can right the wrongs of the past,[32] and Waterbury's argument can be supported by many examples of transnational entanglements from India itself that demonstrate the intimate connection between diaspora and nationalism,[33] and how the two support each other.

Nivedita Menon's insights into the postnation that foreground the queer body as a resistant framework provide this study with an inbuilt example of how the presence of queer identities can not only counter a nation's politics but also the functioning of queerness as a resistant practice. The artists in this study especially Ganesh and to some extent, Shah, operate with and utilize these resistant frameworks.

The Birth of the 'Idea' of India

Before the nineteenth century a classificatory identification as 'Indian' did not exist, despite a shared narrative of structures deriving from epics, myths and folk tales and a resemblance in art and architectural styles that was in existence through centuries. 'India' was defined as a precise territory by a British Act of Parliament in 1899. While Gandhi's invocation of an Indian identity turned towards stories from popular religious traditions, it was Nehru who installed an "intricate, pluralist definition of Indianness," creating an imaginary of an Indian past as one of cultural mixing and of a people coming together to determine their own futures and benefit from economic progress.[34] The creation of a historical narrative that was not exclusively Hindu, but secular in nature, was a deliberate move in order to create the modern nation state. It was enunciated powerfully by Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru that India had to open itself to western modernity, tempering it with traditional social understandings.[35] And Nehru's idea of India tried to follow the form of a modern nation state and its values—democracy, religious tolerance, economic development and cultural pluralism. It steered towards a "layered adjustable and imagined Indianness," that

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32 Myra A Waterbury, "Bridging the divide: towards a comparative framework for understanding kin state and migrant-sending state diaspora politics," in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, eds. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 140.

33 See Latha Vardarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* 2010, for example.

34 Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997), 154–167.

35 Prasenjit Duara, "Historicizing National Identity," in *Becoming National*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Gregor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 160.

was based on a commitment towards protecting religious and cultural difference convinced that such a model could only emerge within the institutional framework of a modern state. No attempt was made to impose a uniform 'Indian' identity upon the new nation and citizenship was based on a universalist criterion, rather than ethnic, guaranteeing all an inclusion into the democracy.[36] Therefore the "idea" of India that existed after 1947 was based on the recognition that diversity was the source of its strength, a source of innovation and creativity. National identity was almost postnational,[37] as it was layered and multiple, one that acknowledged regional belonging to be as important as national belonging. Indian-ness as an identity along with being Tamil or Bengali was more robust than an exclusive thin Indian-ness.[38]

With the Indian-ness of identity further complicated with categories such as class, ethnicity, gender, religion and caste, India's success as a nation state, therefore, depended on its capacity to recognize and sustain these different types of diversity—religious, ethnic or linguistic—and this recognition has been the corner stone of Indian democracy. Thinking about regional and class variations and the need to de-link factitious constructions of Indianness, Bharucha wonders whether an "Indian culture" really exists outside the boundaries of a given state. Rather than accentuate religiosities through an institutionalization of secularization, and prevent a communalization of public culture that defines *Bhartiya Sanskriti* within the confines of Hindutva, Bharucha suggests that a closer attention to intracultural consciousness as a practice can provide a possibility to negotiate and share differences across languages, regions, genders and professions so as to develop a more reflexive perspective and a reading of diversities through regional and class variations, and a reimagining of the

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36   Khilnani, 12.

37   Menon, 2009. The idea of the post-national has been in some ways present with the national formation itself. Menon reminds us that the idea of the nation has not been an unchallenged one, even from the initial period of nation-building when certain princely states negotiated relationships with the British government. The north-eastern part of India, with its majority borders being international is a case in point with its armed insurgents who consider India as an occupying power rather than connect with it nationally. (Manipur, Nagaland, ULFA) Right from the forced linguistic reorganization of the Indian states to water-sharing disputes between in the south and continued dissension at the two flashpoints, Kashmir in the north and the north-eastern part of India, the 'idea' of India cannot be assumed but subjected to a 'daily plebiscite.' ('daily plebiscite' are Menon's words).

38   Sunil Khilnani, "Balanced on a Billion: The idea of India in the era of globalization," *The Little Magazine*, 2004, Vol. 5.

nation beyond "Unity in Diversity."[39] In this diverse space of Indian democracy—electoral politics, inequal opportunities and innumerable caste and class hierarchies govern the space of proliferating voices that is a "secular" India. Given this fairly recent yet complex construct of 'Indian-ness,' in what ways does the body's gendered identity cohere or alternately conflict with the national imaginaries?

Research Contribution

Although engagements with the body and its identity have been widely researched across disciplines, periods and regions, in the field of contemporary art, engaging with representations of the body is much more complex in the present than it was in the period of visible body politics in the 1990s when marginal bodies and their representations occupied center stage with the works of women artists such as Carolee Schneeman, Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, Kara Walker, Louise Bourgeois, VALIE EXPORT, Marina Abramovic among many others. Today, audiences for art are much more aware about 'difference' and the politics of marginalized colored and queer bodies are more visible.[40] In India's engagement with the body in modern Indian art, I will go back to its close resonance with the nation's history to demonstrate how the body as such has been imbricated in the national discourse since the independence movement, in these narratives the nation is virtually always feminized and characterized in need of protection. The presence of these deliberate constructs has been featured in other parts of the decolonized world where women are figured as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, "pure" and "modest," with men defending the national image, the territory and womens' "purity" and "modesty."[41]

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39 Rustom Bharucha, "Thinking Through Culture," in *India: Another Millenium,* ed. Romila Thapar (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001), 73–82.

40 Jerry Saltz and Rachel Corbett, "How Identity Politics Conquered the Art World: An Oral History," April 21, 2016. Salz discusses this with some examples, in 2007 both Kara Walker and Lorna Simpson held retrospectives at the Whitney. The 2010 Whitney Biennial featured a majority of women artists for the first time and Glenn Ligon's retrospective opened at the Whitney in 2011. In 2008, '30 Americans,' a show from the Rubell family collection included works by David Hammons, Kehinde Wiley, Renee Green and other black artists. The Brooklyn Museum mounted a Kehinde Wiley retrospective in 2015. Accessed on June 18, 2018. http://www.vulture.com/2016/04/identity-politics-that-forever-changed-art.html.

41 Tamar Mayer (2000), Anne McClintock (1999), and Yuval Davis (1989), in their case studies from various parts of the world have also demonstrated how the female body

The connection between the gendered female body and its unique status as the "bearer" of inner spiritual values had formed a necessary part of the India nationalist discourse, re-inscribing a traditionalist role for the nation's women even while espousing a counter-colonial agenda. Partha Chatterjee, in his discussion on the Indian nation and its women, argues that the specific ideological form in which the "Indian woman" was constructed in modern literature and the arts of India, is "wholly and undeniably a product of the development of a dominant middle-class culture coeval with the era of nationalism," a period when "woman" as a sign for the "nation" was imbued with the spiritual qualities of "self-sacrifice, benevolence devotion and religiosity."[42] The best visual example of these qualities can be exemplified in *Bharat Mata* (1905) Abanindranath Tagore's iconic work on the creation of the nation Bharat as a simply garbed virginal figure holding the *Veda*, *Māla*, *Paddy/Wheat* and *Ambara*, re-inscribed women in a traditional role as child-bearers and the repositories of spiritual values. These stereotypes were likewise imprinted on the popular Indian imagination through cinema, where films like *Mother India* positioning the nation as mother, foregrounded the enduring strength of the woman as the 'bearer of the nation' and its injustices. Tagore's iconic representation was brought back into contemporary artistic discourse by Pushapamala N. once again in 2011, when the artist enacted a photo-performance at Khojlive, dressed as mother/icon/goddess and accompanied by poet Mamta Sagar reading a text by Kannada writer and nationalist Nanjangud Thirumalamba.[43]

The gendered body has often featured directly in the work of women artists in post-independent India including works by Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Gogi Saroj Pal, Rekha Rodwittiya, Anjolie Ela Menon among others who have variously addressed the female gendered body in differing social contexts, following a politics of subjectivity. However, it was with M.F. Husain's *Bharat Mata*, (2004) that the conflation of gender with nation—the configuring of a nude body of a woman on the map of India that single-handedly invited an immense right-wing backlash and entangled with the artist's Muslim identity questioning his temerity to 'speak for the nation' ultimately leading to the

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has been used as the favored site for representing diverse political agendas out of which nation building occupies a significant place.

42 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton, 1993), 237–239.

43 A nineteenth century Kannada author and writer who constantly strove for the upliftment of women.

artist's exile from India in his last years.[44] The ensuing years have seen a grad-ual shift in the ways that contemporary artists engage gendered bodies with the nation, however critical writings on the gendered body in India are limited. While writings on modern art [45] have contributed immensely to an understand-ing of modern art practice in India, there is considerably less scholarly work undertaken towards theorizing the body in contemporary art and the focus has been within the nationalist paradigm. (Vidya Dehejia 2009; Geeta Kapur 2003, 2007). Essays in exhibition catalogues on artists participating in group exhibi-tions or having solo shows discuss specific works and styles thematically and usually with a focus around the curatorial selection. Monographs written by art critics / curators—a role that often overlaps in the Indian art world—are valuable resources for individual artists, but are limited in their scope to only a few artists and published by galleries[46] with commercial interests. Studies on queer histo-ries stemming from other disciplines have either focused on historicizing the presence of queerness in India through history (Vanita and Kidwai 2002, 2005), or on narrating personal experiences from the queer community, (Narrain and Bhan 2006). But these writings while remaining informative, offer little direction to this study.

Conflating the relationship of the queer body with identity and belonging *vis-à-vis* the nation has not received attention in writings in Indian contem-porary art and it is this gap in the existing scholarly literature that this study attempts to address.

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44   For a detailed and critical reading on this issue please see Sumathy Ramaswamy, ed. *Barefoot Across the Nation: M.F. Husain and the Idea of India* (London: Routledge, 2011).

45   These include Partha Mitter (2001, 2007), Gayatri Sinha (1996, 2003), Yashodhara Dalmia, (2001, 2002, 2011), Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh (1989, 1997), K.G. Subramanyan (1987), and R. Siva Kumar (1997), Shivaji K. Pannikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji and Deeptha Achar (2003).

46   Publications by Vadehra Art Gallery include Nancy Adajania's monograph on *Shilpa Gupta* (2009), Ranjit Hoskote's monograph on *Tyeb Mehta* (2005), and *Atul Dodiya* (2014), R. Siva Kumar's monograph on *Jogen Chowdhury* (2005) and *A. Ramachandran* (2019), Deepak Ananth's monograph on *Arpita Singh* (2015), and Chaitanya Sambrani's work on *Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh* (2019).
The Art Alive Gallery's publications include *K.S. Radhakrishnan* (2004), and *A Life in Art: Raza* (2007), *Faces of Indian Art: Through the lens of photographer Nemai Ghosh* (2007), *An Enchanting Journey: Paresh Maity's Kerala* (2008), and *Sakti Burman: A Private Universe* (2015).
The Guild Gallery has published monographs on *Sudhir Patwardhan*, *K.G. Subramanyan*, *G.R. Iranna, Riyas Komu* and *N.N. Rimzon*, among others.

Review of Literature

This study is indebted to a vast array of scholarly literature on modern Indian art, works by Partha Mitter (2001, 2007), Gayatri Sinha (1996, 2003), Yashodhara Dalmia (2001, 2002, 2011), Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh (1989, 1997), K.G. Subramanyan (1987), and R. Siva Kumar (1997), Shivaji K. Pannikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji, Deeptha Achar (2003), Karen Zitzewitz (2010), and Sonal Khullar (2013), have been very useful for an understanding of the decades leading up to the last decades of this study, especially so Geeta Kapur's contextualization of the national modern as a defining practice for Indian art post-independence in *When was Modernism* (2001). These provided this study with an overview of the historical framework that was in place. However, most of these deal with modern art practice within a national framework and present Indian art and artists within a broad national overview. Scholarly writings on contemporary Indian art, often analytical essays on artists and art works in exhibition catalogues, proved a good information resource and they remain the single most important source of an exhibition's history,[47] but while they do provide some insights into the curatorial selections a broader understanding of the field of contemporary art practice in India is still limited. Ranjit Hoskote's arguments however, have proved useful for this study, Hoskote suggests that rather than repeating the exhausted question of what makes certain artists definitively or unmistakably Indian, we can reflect on their work and reframe our question in order to ask what sort of resemblance, if any, we can trace among artistic practices that emerge from within a shared history or a common set of political, cultural and institutional circumstances.[48] Hoskote and Adajania propose a new cartography based on the mapping of continents of affinity and a search for commonalities based on jointly faced crises and shared predicaments and a move towards a 'critical transregionality.'[49]

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47 For example, *Body City: Citing Contemporary Culture in India* (2000), *Indian Highway* (2008–2012).

48 Ranjit Hoskote, "Kaleidoscopic Propositions: The Evolving Contexts of Contemporary Indian Art," in *India: Art Now*, 2012.

49 Accessed on May 12, 2017. http://www.chitraganesh.com/5118-2/. An example of this kind of critical transregionality was perhaps foregrounded at the Dhaka Art Summit in 2016, when part of Ganesh and Ghani's ongoing *Index of the Disappeared* (2004) project, titled *Black Sites I: The Seen Unseen,* focused on the post 9/11 impact on Afghanistan, while works such as *Lost and Found* (2012) by Hema Mulji focused on state violence, Hitman Gurung's *I Have to Feed Myself, My Family and My Country* (2013), recorded the plight of Nepalese migrant workers and Amar Kanwar's *The Torn First Pages* (2004–2008), documented Burma's struggle for democracy.

No understanding of contemporary art as a frame would be possible without relating with the processes of globalization. Contemporary globalization has reconfigured relationships of societies and territories by moving power and influence away from nation states (Appadurai 1996; Beck 1999; Young 1999; Habermas 2001; Hedetoft and Hjort 2002; Held 2002, 2010; Held and McGrew 2003), and created a postnational sense of belonging. (Menon, Appadurai). Appadurai's writings on the processes of globalization and how they have altered the equation between the global and the local via the internet and media culture have been very useful in framing the shift away from the nation towards the postnational for this study. Writings on contemporary art, (Harris 2011; Groys 2014; Nicholas Bourriaud 1998; Claire Bishop 2012), particularly the insights offered by Peter Osborne (2013), and Terry Smith (2011), on defining contemporaneity as the simultaneity of shared times through different lives, have foregrounded the challenges that defining contemporary art has posed to the discipline of art history as a closed discipline. Papastergiadis (2012) argues that in contemporary art, there is a dual level of commitment to the aesthetical and the political, and that artists now adopt strategies that are more cross disciplinary and operate in an expanding field. Travel, migrations, nomadic lifestyles are the ways in which Papastergiadis links ideas of hospitality and the stranger with concepts of cosmopolitanism that resonate closely with some aspects of this study.

An insight into global exhibitions and how the contemporary art world works through and with them is essential to understand art practices of these three artists as well and Charlotte Bydler's (2004) work provides some key insights. Of particular interest here is her statement that while globalization processes have perhaps exploded the idea of national borders delimiting a single community—but national representation is not a thing of the past—as individual artists with deviant passports continue to participate in representations of national pavilions other than their own to represent local art scenes[50] this is yet another example of a move away from the nation.

Postcolonial studies critically challenging the Enlightenment project as value-laden and dependent on west-centric assumptions, especially those addressing the particularities of 'difference' have been extremely useful in understanding the homogenizing effects of utilizing the western art historical frameworks. The most productive example for my study would be Homi Bhabha (1991), especially Bhabha's argument on mimicry and the subversive power of its articulation that offered an insightful analysis for Chopra's performances.

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50   Bydler, *Global Artworlds*, 390.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2007) highlights concepts of belonging among home and communities in the diaspora through a different lens—the lens of the Asian-American diaspora. For the diasporic artist-intellectual, the limitations of nationalism as a space to articulate rights and demands of inclusion are fraught and plural since there is more than one nation at stake, more than one history and more than one community to belong to. Mohanty argues in favor of a transnational approach that is critical of the nation state as a unit of analysis and instead is attentive to the links, similarities and power differences that exist across cultural settings within and across nation states, (for example. queer Indians from Delhi and queer South Asians from New York).[51] An awareness of the limitation of the nation as a framework in these last decades, has been exhibited by both Ganesh and Shah who are more at ease exhibiting their work in a global queer setting rather than being part of an India specific showing.[52] Mohanty's argument for adopting a transnational approach is further corroborated by Nivedita Menon who argues for a similar kind of postnational solidarity exhibited by diasporic queers "over the nation."[53] An understanding of the diasporic condition *vis-à-vis* the nation is applied though Brah's focus on home as a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination," and also the site of everyday experience. For this study the inbuilt tensions between home and diasporic belonging *vis-à-vis* the nation play out as key signifiers for the diasporic condition, Gayatri Gopinath's definition of diasporic queer sexualities as "impossible desires," is useful to critically interrogate nationalism and cultural identity within diasporic configurations. While post-nationalism as a condition and context has been explored in various studies,[54] Demos's attention towards the processes of globalization and concentrated attention towards ecology as he examines the aesthetic and political engagement of

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51   Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2*, Vol. 12, No. 3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism (Spring–Autumn 1984), 333–358. Accessed on January 5, 2017. http://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/IPD%202015%20readings/IPD%202015_5/under-western-eyes.pdf.

52   Artist interview 2014, Goa.

53   Menon, *Thinking through the Postnation*, 76.

54   *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins 1998), *The Postnational Constellation Political Essays* (Jurgen Habermas 1998), *Post-national Enquiries: Essays on Ethnic and Racial Border Crossings* (ed. Jopi Nyman 2009), and *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity* (eds. Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort 2002). In contemporary art discourse significant studies are those by James Elkins (2007), T. J. Demos (2013), and Kit Dobson and Aine McGlynn (2013).

contemporary artists with environmental conditions and processes have provided this study with keen insights on the ways in which artists engage with ecological concerns in different parts of the world including South America, Africa and Asia.

Feminist and queer theory have played a key role in visual art studies since the 1980s. Butler's theory of gender performativity and her perception of a "true," "stable" and "primary" gender as a fictitious concept is a defining trope for this study. Feminist and queer theory, drawing on Foucault's writings on sexuality, and on the notion that bodies are given meaning by discourse and social structures of knowledge and power, specifically so in the writings of Judith Butler (1990, 1993), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985), demonstrate how heterosexuality and homosexuality mutually define each other. Gender performativity as a fictitious concept is practically applied by all artists of this study in their art practice. Amelia Jones' (2011) argument that we must acknowledge the way our bodies are identified and positioned in the world without allowing our assumptions about identity to congeal into fixed binaries,[55] further reinforces the need for utilizing and engaging with concepts of queer subjectivity that have been instrumental in framing Shah's continued resistance of a simplistic binary framework—with reference not only to gender, but also to the ideas and practice continue to guide their work.

The excavation of local cultures and traditions through foregrounding the presence of queer histories and subjectivities in literature and narrative in pre-modern India, extensively researched by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (2000), the focus on the politics and queer lives to pinpoint the reality of queer spaces and experience of queer lives in contemporary India in Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan (2005), have been important interventions to contextualize the reality of the existence of queerness in India. Often the writing of art histories has been linked to the nation, but, within the context of a globalizing world, this idea of representing a local place or reacting to local issues can no longer be isolated from global concerns as the links to global debates and transnational dialogues on art practices are as important as their being located. This is a practice that artists all over the globe increasingly follow and specifically so the three artists in this study whose work forms a part of these transnational dialogues.

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55   Amelia Jones, *Seeing differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.

Disciplinary Concerns—Locating the Study Within the Discipline

As these three artists engage with their 'Indian' identities in disparate ways, the diasporic location becomes a valid point for all three artists, given their practices and their outreach. Where then, would such a study position itself? My disciplinary concerns stem both from the relationship between the postnation with global processes and the writing of "inclusive" global art histories from the "margins." The contemporary art world with its extraordinary mobility between people, places, and times, has increasingly brought art from the margins into the mainstream. Discourses emerging from multiculturalism and postcolonial studies—all of which question Eurocentric discourse in the writing of a traditional western art history, have gathered pace.[56] The writing of "inclusive" art histories that include art practices from all parts of the globe, therefore, has increasingly become a concern of art historians from all over the globe.

One of the early manifestations of this concern was in the work of James Elkins. Critiquing the claim of a universal competence for western art history for every part of the world in his edited volume *Is Art History Global*? Elkins advocated for the use of a given tradition's core concepts and indigenous terms as an appropriate form to define art from that particular region. In the case of Indian art, his proposal of the adoption of pre-modern models such as *Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa* to understand Indian art was critiqued by Monica Juneja and Parul Dave-Mukherji with regard to its unsuitability as a frame for the writing of a modern Indian art history.[57] In a different context, Hans Belting, proclaiming the end of art history, argued that the globalization of art represents "a new stage in art's exodus from the patronage of art history" as it becomes increasingly apparent that art flourishes in parts of the globe where art history has not been a concern at all. According to him, the "crisis of the master narrative" does not necessarily help the former periphery countries to reinvent an art history of their own. Belting agrees that art history is an outmoded model

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56   The academic and institutional discourse was taken forward in the 1990s through the work of David Summers (2003), Thomas da Kosta Kaufmann (2009), John Onians (2004; 2006; 2007), Julian Bell (2001; 2007), James Elkins (2007), David Carrier (2008), and Hans Belting (2009), among others.

57   Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the "Burden of Representation," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), 279–280. Juneja argued that the whole debate around the applicability of art history as a global concept could not be separated from its origin and recognizability in a certain way due to its western origins, the ways in which it is practiced itself is an impediment to the thinking of the telling of a world-wide history.

and no longer valid for discussing the art of our time. He instead offers the term "post-ethnic" as an analogy with the post-historical, since artists now view their ethnicity as an unwelcome burden and the exoticism of the "other" is outdated. Belting argues that with new medias, art has entered the realm of public communication, removing not only geographical but cultural distance between the center and the periphery, and artists have taken a step towards global art with statements that are now rooted in their own world experience.[58]

Kitty Zijlmans argues in favor of an "intercultural" perspective to study world art history to connote a two-way process of artistic exchanges in sociocultural settings, which as she herself admits, can involve conceptual, epistemological and methodological problems and many theoretical challenges,[59] while Juneja is particularly sharp about the potential for world art history to slip into a "conceptual imperialism" which she thinks might be avoided by global art history viewed through a transcultural perspective, tracing some of the genealogies and the premises on which they rest. She argues that looking at past histories we encounter moments of tension but "the process of framing those moments is far from teleological," it is important she says to recover those to investigate their dynamics and that in such moments, recourse to the world becomes a need.[60] This is a useful frame with which to understand the connected-ness and links between art practices from various parts of the globe over the past centuries.

Critiquing Belting's position citing *Magiciens de la Terre* as marking the end of art history and Elkins' attempts to incorporate pre-modern forms of regionalism and globalism into a globalized form of art history, Farago finds Juneja's argument in favor of a transcultural framework of analysis more suited towards the creation of a global art history—an analytical model that, according to Farago does not take "historical units and boundaries as given, but rather constitutes them as a subject of investigation." The category of Universalism—a heritage of

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58   Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World* eds. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 73–79. Belting proffers the example of the conference panel in India in 2008, during which the global competence of an implanted model of art history was denied, it was he says, generally agreed by the participants that colonial history still dominates the cultural topics and guides the attention to long time experiences with foreign art.

59   Kitty Zijlmans & Wilfried van Damme, "World Art Studies in Art History and Visual Studies in Europe," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe. Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, eds. Mathew Rampley, Thiery Lenain, Hubert Locher et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 6.

60   Monica Juneja, series of lectures on *Global Art History* at Karl Jaspers Cluster of Excellence: Asia and Europe in a Global Context, Heidelberg University 2011.

Enlightenment metaphysics, demands scrutiny and reconceptualization rather than being taken to be self-evident. If the category of art or the discipline itself is the product of a particular history then, Farago says, "we all share the ethical responsibility as producers of knowledge to understand how our knowledge shapes the institution." She observes how postcolonial and transcultural approaches "admit history through the front door, calling attention at the local level to the uneven playing field, speaking back to the empire, asking difficult, previously unasked questions of the historical records that survive." Farago insists that it is precisely for this reason that historical understandings belong in discussions of contemporary global art, rather than limiting the frame to discussions around the nineteenth century.[61]

Piotr Piotrowski too finds that postcolonial studies offer us a suitable model/impulse with which to engage with global art history writing.[62] However for him, rather than engage with the notion of the margins and their relationship to the centers, the best way for moving towards a new paradigm of global art history would be through comparative studies.[63] Postcolonial scholars have argued that the practice of traditional art historical method is itself a colonial practice. Dave-Mukherji has critiqued such sweeping assumptions that it is possible to have an equal dialogue between the west and its ex-colonies while disregarding the implicit politics of power that have created modern speech and still render it legible.[64] Enwezor claiming that "the constitutive field of art history is a synthetically elaborated one, that is, a man-made history," argues that the writing of a global art history has to draw therefore, from specific contextual, historical and sociopolitical contexts rather than from a diffused universalism as there is a need to historicize art historical terms within their temporal-contextual usages

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61   Claire Farago, "Cutting and Sharing the 'Global Pie': Why History Matters to Discussions of Contemporary Global Art," *On Curating*, Issue 35. Accessed on July 1, 2018. https://www.on-curating.org/issue-35-reader/cutting-and-sharing-the-global-pie-why-history-matters-to-discussions-of-contemporary-global-art.html#.Y0iGaC1Q3q0.

62   Piotr Piotrowski, "From Global to Alter-Globalist Art History," *Tetsky Drugie* (2015), 118. He cites examples from Partha Mitter's *Triumph of Modernism* to support his argument. Nevertheless, the western interpretative methods continue to dominate research frameworks. Can art history be studied through native intellectual frameworks, and this is a question that continues to dog debates on art history writing in non-western contexts.

63   *A Way to Follow: Interview with Piotr Piotrowski*, written by Richard Kosinsky, Jan Elantowski and Barbara Dudas (Lublin). Published January 2015. Accessed on May 1, 2017. https://artmargins.com/a-way-to-follow-interview-with-piotr-piotrowski/.

64   Parul Dave-Mukherji, "Whither Art History," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 96, No. 2 (June 2014), 151–155.

in specific contexts.[65] The global turn is clearly a paradigm shift that involves a shift towards broadening the scope of art practice towards multiple ways of developing art history from a global perspective.

It is with an understanding of these approaches that I position this work within the framework of global art history as it engages with the complex layers of the 'Indian' identity within a postnational context, keeping the category of the nation as a contested site. The 'Indian' identity works as a connecting thread through the case studies of the three artists and this study pays particular attention to the transcultural (with Juneja) processes at work, an approach that helps me to move across regions / nations / cultures in multiple ways to foreground a sharper and more nuanced understanding of their works.

The 'global' can also serve as a critical tool to bring in the transcultural perspective. If we look at transcultural as something that is being constituted through relationships with outside cultures and which the nation then tried to give a mono-lingual tone, then it becomes clear that this has to be resisted.[66] Therefore transcultural research, initially taking its cue from writings on globalisation, migration and modern medias, foregrounds a world of flows—and aims to investigate the multiple ways in which difference is negotiated within contacts and encounters through a selective appropriation, mediation, translation, rehistoricizing and re-reading of signs. Transculturation as an analytic method looks closely at transformations that unfold *within* the dynamics of actual encounters at the micro-level.[67] Following the transcultural approach it is the dynamics at the micro-level that point towards new morphologies—local, national, transnational, geo-political, demonstrating a synchroncity and coevalness,[68] and given the extraordinary connectivity of our world today it is only through a closer look at the transformations being wrought through these mediations that some understanding of the contemporary and its dynamics with the nation can emerge.

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65 Okwui Enwezor, "Post -Colonial Constellations; Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition" *Research in African Literatures.* Vol. 34. No. 4 (Winter 2003), 57–82.

66 Monica Juneja, "Salon Suisse," Panel with Monica Juneja and Jorg Scheller, Venice Biennale 2013, 1st June. Accessed on June 2, 2018. https://vimeo.com/67520781.

67 Monica Juneja in conversation with Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturism," in *Transcultural Modernisms Model House Research Group,* eds. Fahim Amir, Eva Egerman, Moira Hille, Christian Kravagna, et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 22–33.

68 Monica Juneja, "'A very civil idea...' Art History, Transculturation and World-Making, With and Beyond the Nation," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* Vol. 81 (4), 2018, 469–470.

Research Methodology

As the performative bodies are in a state of flux forging new identities for themselves, a 'national Indian-ness,' is always in a dialectical relationship with the 'international' global. The role of the nation in shaping identity in the modern nation is generally implicit, becoming so ingrained that most do not take notice of its presence. Nationalist ideologies draw on social constructions of gender, race, sexuality and nation to generate a nationalist discourse, positioning the binaries of identity constructs in particular ways. Binary constructs around race, gender and sexuality break down into white / non-white, man / woman, heterosexual / homosexual—far too broad as categories and also contentious in the ways that they are applied to embodied objects—they leave out queers, transsexuals. But it is precisely these constructs that in some ways resist the "idea" of an India that was built on freedom and diversity, not on a narrow definition of culture and religion.

It is from these ongoing dialectics that the questions for this study emerge, asking whether the framework of the nation has outlived its usefulness and whether artistic discourse has moved away from the nation into a postnational space. The gendered body is at the base of the ways in which the body is shaped and constructed by way of a historical framework and through specific discourses. Butler's arguments in *Gender Trouble* are useful to perceive how the appearance of gender is often taken as a sign of an internal truth, since gender is prompted by a set of obligatory norms that we materialize, or fail to materialize, in our daily life. Obligatory norms usually demand that we become one gender or another within a strictly binary frame. For this reason, the reproduction of gender is always a negotiation with such obligatory norms and therefore an exercise of power. How do bodies that do not fit the norms of what a body should be—women, queers, transgendered, inter-sexed persons, living under precarious conditions as de-humanized subjects, suffering harassment and violence, emerge from the shadows into some kind of light? Butler, while expanding on conditions of livability for gender non-conforming people states that this recognition depends partially on presentations in media in which the body can appear in various forms. The aesthetic domain therefore becomes an important forum for contesting arbitrary notions of gender that are imposed on the field of appearance.

Menon argues that any idea that is counterhegemonic, referring to the development, sexuality, caste and community, can represent the politics of postnationalism. Menon's discussion provides this study with an in-built example of how queer sexualities critique the nation and also further an understanding of the Indian nation as a contentious space since its creation. The discussion around the writing of global art histories has been crucial in designating a space for this study. The global turn in the writings of Belting and Enwezor for example,

is a paradigm shift that acknowledges that there are diverse and heterogeneous spaces, subjects and objects that contemporaneously circulate and exist beyond the Euro-American paradigm and canons of Western art. It also postulates that the concepts of 'circulation' and 'networks' along with the transcultural and postnational are part of this new epistemic order. There are, therefore, multiple ways of understanding and developing a new art history from a global perspective. A transcultural framework that focuses more on mediation and transformative processes such as that outlined by Juneja, rather than on 'positions' and 'places' where actors are located, is a useful tool to surmount the conceptual limitations that attach to the strict local-global dichotomy. Adopting a transcultural approach both at the macro and micro levels offers a useful direction to analyze how global cross referencing, dialogic interactions, mobility and networking interweave in lifestyles and practices in a form of 'forward-looking'[69] translation during contact and exchange between cultures.

Contemporary art practice is an immense and highly dynamic and evolving field in our networked world. The decision on what research method to apply did not come easily, considering the vast amount of information available and to be sifted through. The closely guarded niche that is the artworld in India follows the same pattern of elite exclusivity that defines artworlds everywhere. Having spent many long evenings at lavish art auctions and previews in Mumbai where conversations were driven by commercial viability of artworks rather than the relevance of the discursive contexts driving their production, I chose to focus my research on the impulses driving the ideas underlying the creation of the works themselves—the discourse within the frame as it were—foregrounding the artist's voice and the surrounding milieu of transnational contexts, talking back to this voice.

My study has therefore limited its scope to a close reading of select works by the three artists at the site of **production and its contexts**, rather than the site of reception.

The structure of the analysis undertaken in this research at the macro level provides a broad understanding of the overarching phenomenas underlying the field of research that derives from the nation/postnation, the processes of globalization and the characteristic defining features of the contemporary art world. The next level comprises the thematics that unite the three case studies which provide the framework for this study, specifically the performative body in contemporary art and the fluidity of its gender, employing its queerness as

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69   I take 'forward-looking' to mean a visionary outlook towards planning for the future and this approach is adopted by all three artists in this study.

the heuristic concept. At the micro level lie the various discourses that emerge through a closer analysis of the artworks themselves—masquerade, postcolonial mimicry, queer utopias and ecologies, female masculinity, science fiction, the anthroprocene age and cosmopolitanism. Throughout the study, these layers interact with each other in dynamic ways to provide direction and possible answers for the questions being asked in this study.

Gerring defines a case study as an intensive study of a single unit, a spatially bounded phenomenon, for example, a nation-state, revolution, political party or person, that when observed at a single point in time or over a limited period of time, can offer the possibility to generalize across a larger set of units.[70] Though an intensive case study can be an effective methodology to understand and to investigate complex issues, it is limited in its reliability to offer an external validity as a generalization. How can one case study offer anything beyond the particular? Seawright and Gerring note that the solution to this limitation can be by the strategic selection of cases that offer a broader view of the phenomena being studied.[71] And my strategic selection of these three mid-level career artists for this study has focused both at the macro-level, seeking an understanding of the relationship of the nation with its diaspora with its inherent tensions and at the micro-level, through a study of contemporaneous discourses that cohere in the artists' practices through diverse mediums. The case study method has allowed me firstly to concentrate my analysis on the three artists and to conduct an in-depth analysis of their specific works, as well as to trace clear-cut connections between cause and effect from within the larger contexts of the art world. The rationale behind selecting this approach has partially resulted from my own experience of the professional artworld at a broad level and has been driven by a desire to understand the ideations driving artistic creativity at the micro level. The source of the primary data collection has been through direct interviews with the three artists themselves. The set of questions for the interviews emerged after studying their works and before meeting with the artists. This approach not only provided this study with first-hand information but also contextualized their art practices within their specific contemporary settings, both in the global and local contexts, their intense global connectivity also offered a glimpse into the ubiquitous presence of the artworld that functions across mainstream and peripheral locations. For example, the first time I witnessed Chopra's live performance

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70   John Gerring, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?" *American Political Science Review* Vol. 98, No. 2, 2004, 341.

71   Ben Willis, *The Advantages and Limitations of Single Case Study Analysis,* 2014. Accessed on April 1, 2017. https://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/05/the-advantages-and-limitations-of-single-case-study-analysis/.

was when he performed as *La Perle Noire: La Marais* in Paris in 2013. The genre came alive for me in Chopra's studied involvement with his tasks, the curiosity and engagement of the gallery visitors streaming in and out of the performance space, as well as the post-performance exhilaration felt by the artist after he exited the performance space and mingled within a haloed and exclusive art circle of gallerists, sponsors and collectors. All of these highlighted the exclusively elite business that contemporary art can be, even within a non-commodified art form such as live performance. Shah's first solo gallery showing of *Between the Waves* occurred in 2013 in Munich after the work had premiered at Documenta a couple of months ago. This was a special preview showing where the artist guided some of us through the exhibited panels and videos on display. All of these interactions and the semi-structured conversations with Shah and Chopra at Goa that followed spontaneous trajectories were extremely useful to understand the artists' impulses and ideations guiding and sustaining their practices.

In fact, viewing Chopra's performance site at Sonaparanta Gallery in Goa with Shah in 2013, where Shah's own video work *Some Kind of Nature*, was on display, marked a transformational moment. *Rouge* marked Chopra's first performance on his return from a one-year residency in Berlin and it marked not only the transition of the artist's drawing tool from charcoal to lipstick, but also a move away from post-colonial histories, whereas *Some Kind of Nature* predicated Shah's shift away from the queer body towards queer ecology. These two transformative moments in their art practices were on display in the same space and time, and I could witness them for myself. I met Chitra Ganesh while the artist was visiting Delhi in 2013 for her show at Gallery Espace (*A Zebra among Horses*, September–October 2013), and once again when she and Dhruvi Acharya jointly worked on a series of panels at the India Art Fair in Delhi in 2015. Viewing the synergies in their collaborative work proffered insights into the open-ended field that contemporary art is, where even at a commercially driven public event like an art fair, it is possible to witness creative performative acts away from the studio space and in the here and now.

In terms of collecting data for my research, this monographic case study has followed a multi-pronged approach—the interview data from the artists, gallerists, curators has been supported by a vast amount of secondary information from multiple sources and the documentary analysis has involved a close and critical reading of the contexts and concerns displayed in their artworks. Among the materials available to this study, moving forward from the foundational texts that provided the scaffolding for creating the research framework, the scholarly analytical essays in exhibition catalogues or interviews with the artists themselves have been useful. These are artists who are regularly exhibiting and being written about constantly, in newspapers, magazines, journals and academic publications. A lot of this material is available online and also on their own websites,

and the internet has proved an invaluable resource since all three artists have a strong web presence. The artist statements on their own websites offered a quick and easy entry point into their ideation and inspirations. New media technologies through information retrieval systems and user-friendly interfaces have been extremely useful and instrumental in extending the reach of their art practices and it is sometimes possible to read a review or interview about an artist's exhibition almost the same day as it takes place. Moreover, social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram provided up-to-date information on their shows and projects instantaneously.

While this kind of connectivity is a very useful information gathering resource, the artist of today is an intensely aware and connected individual who is also a highly articulate and successful communicator aware of his / her / their publics and profile and this has served to constantly temper my analysis of the research materials and critical interpretation of their artworks. The chapterisation in this study follows a fairly simple structure since the focus of this study are the two different sets of works by the three artists that I analyze to demonstrate the transformational shift. In the first chapter I begin by providing the historical context through a brief overview of the background of modern art practice in post-independent India, marking this pre-contemporary moment and simultaneously highlight characteristic features of the contemporary—new medias and the forums for their creation and display. The second and third chapters entail a formal analysis of the two sets of works by the three artists along with the discursive contexts connecting with their production. Although the sets of works are sequenced chronologically, I must reiterate that this is not a linear interpretation, while the works in question were being created, the three artists continued to work with other thematics that are not part of this study.

Chapters

The first chapter provides us with a brief overview of modern art practice in the decades preceding the contemporary moment within which the three artists in this study, Chitra Ganesh, Tejal Shah and Nikhil Chopra began their practices. It briefly traces the presence of the 'national modern' and indigenism in post-independent India and signposts the *Place for People* exhibition—which took place at Baroda in 1981—as marking the pre-contemporary moment when art practice became increasingly located through the politics of place particularly within the practice of Bhupen Khakhar, India's first visibly queer artist. The nation's first steps towards neo-liberalization in the 1990s happened almost simultaneous to the rise of right-wing fundamentalist violence and tensions through communal riots in Mumbai and Gujarat. During this period, the new

mediums such as video and installation became the via media for articulating artists' voices against these disturbing developments. Early pioneering works by Vivan Sundaram, Rumanna Hussain, Nalini Malani and by Navjot Altaf in video, installation and performance marked these parallel moments of protest and the introduction of new technologies.

In the same decade the founding of Khoj in 1997 as an experimental art space opened up a space for frequent global transcultural dialogues with its international workshops and residencies. Both Shah and Chopra initially established their practices at different Khoj residencies in India after completing their art studies in the West. Shah and Chopra's participation in India-survey shows such as *Indian Highway* and *Paris-Delhi-Bombay,* as well as their participation in the exhibition circuit through other shows played an important role in establishing their presence internationally, while the career of the third artist in this study, Chitra Ganesh, followed a broader trajectory in establishing her presence within the contemporary art scene in the diaspora. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Hoskote's curation of the India pavilion at the *54th Venice Biennale.*

The next chapter begins with a short overview of the performative and gendered body and analyses the following works: Ganesh *Tales of Amnesia* (2003–2007), Shah *Chingari Chumma* (2000); *What are you?* (2006); *Women like us/I AM* (2009), and Chopra *Yog Raj Chitrakar* (2007–2011). The analysis employs Butler's poststructural approach towards the constructedness of gender for all the works, and Riviere's concept of womanliness as masquerade to deconstruct Ganesh's masquerade of the 'Indian' body. This body, with all its forms of experience—sensory, corporeal, and discursive—entangles with a specific sense of belonging, (especially so in the cases of Shah and Chopra) even as national discourses around gender, sexuality and colonial histories all come to play in their works. Contemporary mediums facilitate their articulation and it is through the 'live-ness,' of new mediums such as video and performance—and supported by the availability of a plethora of visual imagery deriving from camp, kitsch and the postcolonial condition—that Ganesh, Shah and Chopra create their versions of the queer performative body. Even as they almost succeed in resisting their 'Indian-ness,' the nation continues to feature as the central point of reference and critique, though the body is increasingly becoming a construct strange to the nation.

With the next and final chapter, the queer and performative body becomes the signifier for concepts associated with conditions of de-territorialisation and reterritorialisation. This chapter argues that even as the artists increasingly function within global spaces through their travel and residencies (Chopra in Berlin 2011–2012, Shah at Skømvaer 2016), their works also reflect these mobilities and the postnational context is reinforced in the next set of works as the performative body opens itself out to concerns shared across the globe. Ganesh's set of digital

collages in *She the Question* (2012), not only entangle with planetary vistas and employ tropes from science fiction but also gesture towards queer sexualities, Shah's cyborgian unicorns in *tranimal* drag draw attention towards the age of the anthroprocene as *Between the Waves* (2012), and *Some Kind of Nature* (2013) move towards an interspecies subjectivity and queer ecologies while Chopra's performances as *La Perle Noire* (2013–), reference racial histories of color and passing. Their use of medias and social networking sites like Facebook, spaces which these artists inhabit virtually, increasingly open up public dialogues in the virtual social sphere, dialogues that may be purely artistic (Chopra) or aggressively activist (Ganesh). Forging global connectivities through social networks and global discourses around queerness, ecology and hospitality, the artists' body increasingly functions in a postnational context. Seeking points of convergence and accommodation with others in this global world, it is a cosmopolitan outlook that registers and reflects on the multiplicity of issues, questions, processes and problems which affect and bind people together[72] that offers a useful direction.

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72   David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge / MA: Polity, 2007), 42.