Conclusion

This study began by proposing 'post-national' as an empowering term and a critical framework to understand the dynamics of contemporary art practice. It seemed to offer a lens to view a set of art works which at the very outset had debunked the category of the nation. And to navigate across this large spatiality, the methodology of case studies proved to be a rewarding direction.

At the macro level an understanding of the 'idea' of an India suffused by the politics of the nation contextualized contemporary art practices centering around the performative body, at the micro level a closer contextual analysis of the works revealed the transcultural multiplicity in both iconography and text and on the diasporic artists' body itself. The conflating of the paradigm of transculturality resisting the category of the nation as 'container' of a culture, pointing towards multi-sited cultural practice is an understanding that my study demonstrated in its discussion of the artworks. The analysis gestured towards how an artwork even as it is situated within a set of relations that interact with the production of the image can contain elements of futurity within the artwork itself. My close attention to the practice of the three artists has enabled me to get a sense of the workings of contemporary art in general especially in its broad politics of representation: The collusion of 'Indian-ness,' and its exclusionary nationalism has been variously critiqued and exposed by these artists via multiple artistic strategies: they range from performative masquerade (Chopra), a critical revisiting of a nationalist/popular visual culture (Ganesh) or radical embodiments that blur the distinctions between binaries (Shah). Each of them dismantles the ideas of national belonging precisely through their focus on identities marginalized by the nation—women, queer, trans.

The first chapter laid out the historical context and background that preceded the work of the three artists in this study and introduced their practices and their growing visibility. It included a brief overview of the decades preceding the last decade of the twentieth century as the defining period that not only marked the entry of contemporary mediums in India that highlighted India's disturbed politics but was also an era characterized by *avant garde* art practices

in experimental art spaces especially at Khoj where both Shah and Chopra intro-
duced their practices after their return from art studies abroad. In my discussion
of the mega-exhibition format in these decades I focused on the presence and
increased visibility of Indian artists and their works both in Asia and in the west.
I demonstrated how two country specific shows, *Indian Highway* (2007–2012)
and *Pari-Delhi-Bombay* (2011) and specifically the latter offered a productive lens
with which to analyse the curatorial vision or its lack thereof. I concluded the
chapter with Hoskote's curatorial choices for the Indian pavilion at the Venice
Biennale in 2011, these proffered rewarding insights into art practices passing
through and beyond the nation.

The second chapter argued that all three artists critique stereotypical notions
of an 'Indian' identity with their 'gendered' performative masquerading bodies
in differing mediums. Ganesh, engaging with the comic genre in the *Amar Chitra
Katha* comics not only confronted the marginalized social condition of women
and conflicts with the patriarchal heterosexual ideologies of the nation via the
queer body, but also the experience of 'woman' as a category constantly in pro-
cess—not only as a marginalized woman of color but also queer and classed as
against the white, middle class hetero-sexual feminist, presumed to represent all
womens' interests. Shah's multiple media works intervened against the national
discourses around the gendered body—employing an outrageously theatrical
camp sensibility—as a Bollywood heroine, a female 'masculine' body, and as
a transgendered body, always resisting the gender binary. Chopra's post-colonial
immaculately dressed body appropriated the nation's colonial past as it simul-
taneously intervened in global histories, masquerading as Indian royal, trave-
ler, explorer, often exiting performances garbed as Queen or feminine Other,
as he performed across the globe, emphasizing the exotic-ness of this 'other'
in a reminder that identity is a construct and that this identity can be garbed
according to will to create this Other.

All three artists employing different mediums presented the body in a dialec-
tical relationship with the nation in differing ways—the comic, a static genre—yet
dynamically playing with the image-text relationship to create a queer, parallel
narrative giving 'women' a voice;—the video, with its immersive qualities—chal-
lenging notions of gender stability within the nation; and live performances,
effectively critiquing stereotypical figures of power. In this first set of works, var-
ious theoretical discourses around feminism, queer studies, and post-colonialism
came to the fore to critique issues of difference and yet this set of works drew
from a thoroughly particularized 'national' self, with its gender, sexual orienta-
tion, ethnicity, and other identifications clearly enunciated and in full view.

With the third chapter, the study demonstrated the shift away from the
nation, arguing that global mobility intertwines with the artist's body itself in
two ways, firstly through their physical movement via artist residencies and also

virtually via social networking sites such as Facebook. Both forms of mobility lead to forms of deterritorialisation and towards creating a stronger sense of affinity with others in diverse corners of the globe. In the analysis of another set of works by Ganesh, Shah and Chopra, I argued that the works increasingly engaged with global issues such as queer sexualities, and ecologies—concerns that cannot be subsumed under the rubric of the national. In the concluding part it was argued that it is the flows of affect that link the performing of heterosexuality or homosexuality, to the body's personal and cultural contexts and connections across and beyond spaces. In this final chapter, the study showed how Shah chooses to reduce the sex act to an affective immersive experience rather than explicate it in discourse.

All three artists engaged identity via the national body—the first part of the analysis, with the artists' critique of the normative gendered 'Indian' self, indicated that the nature of this national identity itself is a construct—the Bollywood heroine, the rapist villain, the demure goddess, the colonial gentleman—all of these personas are part of the nation's cultural memory. They are constructs that 'perform' in certain stereotypical ways that have been concretized within the national imagination. And in their work all three artists demonstrated that there is no real self within these constructs—it is purely masquerade and roleplay. Without marking the shift chronologically, this study further demonstrated how this 'national' body from the nation's cultural imagination gets de-territorialized in two ways, firstly via the artist's body itself as it travels, participates in residencies and secondly how the concerns expressed in their artworks shift their focus towards concerns that transcend the nation.

But does the postnational have the same valence today in terms of their current practice? What has changed in these five years since I started my research *vis-à-vis* this critical framework given the present "return" of the national in today's shifting global geopolitics?

To one's utter consternation, even the Merriam-Webster dictionary has revealed that *nationalism* is the most looked for word of 2018, in the Oxford dictionary the word for 2018 is *toxic*. The toxicity of nationalism continues to be felt in political conflicts across the world, along with social disharmony, poverty and environmental degradation, all combine to make the world a worse place to live in. Geopolitical conflicts and rebellions of civil society in different regions continue to occur across the globe, even as deeply contested, often fixed boundaries of states continue to embrace a diversity of ethnic, linguistic groups. In all of this, the national and local cultures remain robust, there is no common *global* pool of memories or *global* way of thinking to unite people and the meaning of 'place' in contemporary art practice remains intertwined with the nation as a fall-back framework in order to explain the origin of art works and translate their meaning.

In this fraught situation, how do the terms of belonging and identity get recalibrated for each of these artists?

A concerted look at some of their subsequent work post my analysis can point us towards some possible directions that their practice is specifically poised towards, capturing a possible general thrust of contemporary art.

In 2018, Ganesh created her second animation film, *The Scorpion Gesture*, the work comprises of a series of five large-scale animations that inter splice traditional Buddhist art and the figures of *Padmasambhava, Mandarva* and *Maitreya* with modern graphics. One of the animations, "*Sillhouette in the Graveyard,*" appears on the wall directly behind a gilt copper sculpture *of Maitreya*, a deity figure stands up out of a river of blood as images of political protest and climate change appear on and around her body. The jittery montage of news clips of wars, protests and forced immigrations, interspersed with dancing skeletons, playing directly behind *Maitreya*, becomes the universe he exists in, and resists. *Maitreya* is the future Buddha, prophesied to arrive on Earth at a time of global crisis. The invocation of such figures uncannily aligns with shifts in the contemporary political climate, and its growing turn towards authoritarian ideals and leadership in many countries resulting in polarized citizenship along with the threat of ecological disaster that looms larger in the contemporary moment.

Shah's afffiliations have moved towards Nonduality, Buddhism and a study of the Middle Way Path followed by the Buddha, through following the practice of embodied knowledge. As they get in touch with traditions in which the very idea of a truly existent self, and 'I' as an identity is flawed, their entire perception changes. Through a deep study of the mind, applying the tools of somatic therapy and cognitive affect, Shah's practice indicates a move from violence towards love in these times of dystopia and helplessness. This introspective speculation has moved them away from object-based practice, and from the expensive medium of video installation. *Unbecoming,* a drawing installation series created in 2017 are part drawings and part photos and draw from Shah's research interests in Buddhism, they feature found images of figures washed up on the shores of beaches speaking to the migrant crisis and conflicts occurring all over the world and images of the Tibetan self-immolation processes as forms of protest, display an 'unbecoming' from various positions as a sign of the times. Their practice is simultaneously moving towards a closer interactive process through the format of workshops and performance lectures where they directly engage in participative and performative dialogue.[397]

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397   For example, at the Kunsthaus Hamburg in 2017, their solo show was accompanied by a performative dialogue between Shah and documentary filmmaker and musician

When Nikhil Chopra was invited to take part in Documenta 14, he decided to undertake a one-month long road trip connecting its two venues, Kassel and Athens, via Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, driven by the impulse to cut across regions conflicted with borders, migrations and the refugee crisis. Rather than present the journey as an embodied experience of these traumas, Chopra chose the apolitical route—connecting with art schools and experimental art spaces, plotting his trip along their locations. In this longest performance to date, (twenty-eight days), the persona went by the name of Will (also *desire* in an indirect reference), an anonymous generic name for William. Will went about creating his drawings as usual in each location during the road trip, all of these were then displayed at the Kulturbahnhof at Kassel for the last few days of his performance. His costumes were created from material sourced from the cities he visited, but the dwelling tent that he carried on his road trip and that was pitched at all his stops had been produced in India, this act brought in an ambivalent connection to notions of hospitality. Here the hospitality to the stranger angle reversed itself from Chopra's usual performance structure as Chopra himself played host and the dwelling tent served as the meeting place for visitors to his performances. Music composed specially for the performances, partially inspired by the gypsy country he was travelling in, played at all locations, breaking the studied silence of his previous performances. Chopra clearly signposted silent signifiers of a shared language among strangers—music, food, art—all of which served as conversation starters and icebreakers. Music, food and the welcoming of strangers into his dwelling tent became an important component of each performance, although concepts around offering hospitality to strangers were often tested in this road trip. In contrast to the warm welcome they received in the smaller places where people would arrive with blocks of cheese, olive oil as gifts, the team's run-in with authorities at Budapest exhibited the paranoia of a mistrustful city, showcasing two contrasting kinds of engagements with the stranger in their midst.

This performance offered some important insights for our world of today where the refugee crisis has polarized the globe. Concepts around hospitality and the welcoming of strangers have assumed a topical relevance, for Derrida, unconditional and conditional hospitality are inseparable, welcoming the foreigner cannot be separated from placing certain terms and conditions on his stay. But the act of hospitality also brings in the politics of the nation state and boundaries, the ethics of hospitality is always already a form of politics—without

Shabnam Virmani along with a day-long collaborative workshop on art and nonduality offered at the art school.

the welcome of the stranger there is no hospitality and opening up to the Other. For Zizek on the other hand, this act of hospitality and opening up to the Other occurs through a pre-conceived set of assumptions that we bring with us and it is thus flawed in its enactment itself.

Through an analysis of these artists' works, the direction of their practice could be grasped in terms of these three broad positions:

Position 1 Artists through their take on the migration issue come across as pleading for new models of a global citizenship and a borderless world. This is 'the migrant's time' and is as political as it gets.

Position 2 On the other hand, there is a turn away from the political/queer into a space of spiritual utopianism.

Position 3 And lastly politics and aesthetics (Ranciere) are not viewed in antithetical terms but as mutually inflecting positions.

In the discussion of the works in this study—Shah a deeply political artist not only shifted away from gender politics towards concerns around queer ecologies but almost retreated into a space where politics does not exist, drawing closer to the second position, Ganesh's diasporic location even as it does not allow her the choice of transcending the politics of identity, handled the relationship by referencing the potential of meta-narratives from religious traditions to rethink the politics of the times, drawing closer to the third position, and Chopra's abiding interest in a geopolitically borderless world drew him towards the first position.

Shared concerns towards environmental degradation, ethnocentrism, the politics of human rights, the borders between human-animal-technology technology pose contemporaneous questions of transnational responsibility in all corners of the world. Clearly the era of identity politics is passé, giving way to a more dispersed understanding of politics that spills well out outside of national boundaries. But this spilling can have an altogether different connotation in contemporary art in India if the case of the Kochi Biennale in 2018 is considered. Even though dialogues around inclusivity-exclusivity, center-periphery have reduced in intensity in these last decades, new borders are being drawn out between the local and the international. The Kochi Biennale in its fourth edition, proposed yet another equation between aesthetics and politics with a stress on feminism; it sought equal allegiance to the local "rooted in its sociogeographical setting" and to the cosmopolitan "receptive to winds blowing in from other worlds." These equations appeared fragile when the curatorial intervention harked back to the feminism of *Guerilla Girls* in a nostalgic celebration of '80's moment while paying scant attention to the local gender politics where womens' right to enter the Sabarimala temple was being vehemently resisted; the right to enter the temple is predicated upon the civic right of citizenship.

It was in the setting of this very Biennale that Ganesh's goddesses mocked at traditional iconography and fiercely broke out of their sacred spaces. Whether such a frontal attack on Hindu patriarchy by a diaspora artist or the curator's celebration of anachronism of Euro-American feminism comes across as a critique of the current resurgent nationalism is open for speculation. What is more certain is that the dynamics of postnational with which I began my interrogation of the contemporary is now almost like a 'vanishing mediator' and slowly appears to be relegated into history. Here in lies the dilemma of theorization of Contemporary Art, it cannot be easily historicised or situated within a theoretical framework since those very artistic frameworks that may provide an answer or a direction today maybe easily overturned by those very actors tomorrow. It is this fluidity, plurality and multiplicity of perspectives that facilitates boundary transgression so easily. Trying to understand contemporary art is like looking at a phenomenon from the other end of a telescope. It is too close at hand to offer any hindsight and all we can do is reckon vague and uneven oscillations across the poles of a global cosmopolitanism and a strident localism overriding a geography of political borders.