



CHAPTER 12

Curating the Fragments of Local Modernities: The Menaka Digital Archive from the Perspective of Ongoing Research

*Markus Schlaffke, Isabella Schwaderer,
and Parveen Kanhai*

The Menaka-Archive (www.menaka-archive.org) is a digital meta-archive that collects, links and researches documents related to the choreographic works of Leila Roy-Sokhey (1899–1947), better known under her stage name ‘Madame Menaka’. The collection focuses on materials from the broader context of the Menaka ballet’s European tour of 1936–38. A

M. Schlaffke (✉)
Bauhaus-University Weimar, Weimar, Germany
e-mail: markus.schlaffke@uni-weimar.de

I. Schwaderer
University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany
e-mail: isabella.schwaderer@uni-erfurt.de

P. Kanhai
Schiedam, The Netherlands
e-mail: info@toentezen.nl

collaborative group of authors from different research fields run the archive project (Schlaffke and Schwaderer 2021). Since 2019, the project's database has been publicly accessible as a website. It links digital holdings from various international archival institutions (for example, the Dutch digital library *Delpher*, numerous German state archives, or regional newspaper archives and collections). At the same time, previously non-indexed documents in private ownership have been digitized and mapped in the context of the Menaka-Archive group. The website also contains a research blog inviting authors to document and comment on their engagements with the findings in the Menaka Archive.

The collection is a repository for all documents on the tours of the 'Menaka Indian ballet' through Europe and South Asia. Moreover, it hosts international dance history research focusing on the post-colonial history of the arts in India and the reinvention and rediscovery of traditional performance arts, for example *Kathak* and *Bharatanātyam*, in the course of national cultural reform in India and their transnational history of entanglement (Bakhle 2005; Qureshi 2006; Schrage, Chap. 7 in this volume; Soneji 2012; Walker 2016).

The Menaka Archive also provides a framework in which to explore new forms of digital archiving. The findings on modernizing international dance in the 1920s and 1930s, including the role of the relationship between India and Europe in it, thus call for a much broader examination of the constitution, modalities, and epistemology of the tangled archive on modernism. The structure and practicality of the digital collection make it necessary to reflect critically on the archive's productivity, namely its collecting, registering, ordering, curating, and publishing practices.

The way in which the memorabilia of Menaka's Indian ballet are scattered around the world and embedded in the most diverse archival institutions and individual memories is gradually making apparent what we are trying to grasp with notions such as multiple modernities, heterogeneous temporalities, and local modernities.

Here, digital archiving should not only be understood as preparatory work for historiographical research but also as a research method in and of itself. This helps to classify the complex political, geographical, and artistic impact of the dance avant-garde in the context of transcultural, post-national and colonial historical narratives in a nuanced way. Some ideological links between India and Germany presented in this publication intersect with those in the Menaka archive, for example, the ethical-aesthetic arguments and the spiritual or racist categories in which dance was discussed in the first half of the twentieth century.

Since the publication of the digital collection of the Menaka Archive, a number of items in the archive's collection have been examined by a range of international researchers from several different disciplines (Cradduck 2022; Fernando 2022; Sawjani 2021; Vargas-Cetina 2020; Vargas-Cetina and Kang 2020; Zedler 2021).

Some of the research in this volume on references to India in German art and philosophy in the lead-up to the First World War has drawn on the preliminary work done in setting up the Menaka Archive (see Schwaderer's and Schlaffke's Chaps. 5 and 6 in this volume). Parveen Kanhai succeeds in placing the actual dance repertoire of the Menaka ballet in the context of the international dance world of the inter-war years by connecting Dutch and German sources in the collection (see Kanhai, Chap. 8 in this volume).

These studies trace the Indian dance avant-garde backwards and thus bring into view a far-reaching perspective of entangled Indian–European art history. This shows, for example, how much the perception of Indian artists in 1936–38 was anchored in the continuity of a distinctively European discourse before the First World War. To illustrate these connections, in this chapter, we offer a brief overview of the methodological approaches of the Menaka Archive and some results of the ongoing research (Fig. 12.1).

BUILDING THE ARCHIVE

The Menaka ballet's tour of Europe lasted from 1936 to 1938. With five other dancers and a supporting orchestra of six musicians, Leila Sokhey's ensemble performed at hundreds of German theatres over three years. The tour mostly covered France, Belgium and the Netherlands, but there were occasional performances in northern and eastern Europe as well. As it turns out, this extensive programme is well-documented but needs to be researched. Apart from the biography of Menaka's student, Damayanti Joshi, who took part in the tour as a thirteen-year-old girl (Joshi 1989), little was known about the international activities of Indian ballet. For national dance research in India, Sokhey's work has been considered essential to the revival of the traditional *Kathak* repertoire. However, there was little further research on this because no coherent heritage survived Sokhey's premature death in 1947. The numerous documents in European archives on the reception of the Indian ballet were difficult to access and had not been indexed. Hence, the initial idea of creating a

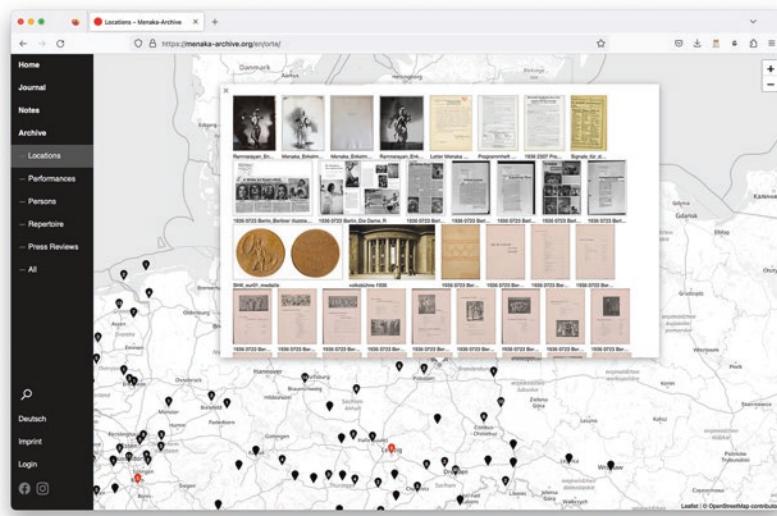


Fig. 12.1 Menaka-Archive website interface, www.menaka-archive.org, © Markus Schlaffke

digital Menaka collection was to compile the documents that could be found in Europe and make them accessible to international research on an open-source basis. The collection, therefore, primarily represents Sokhey's artistic activity over a period of more than twenty years, as mainly anchored in the avant-garde of international dance and in the aesthetic discourses of European modernism.

When research for the Menaka Archive's digital collection began in 2015, it initially seemed as if the Menaka ballet's tour of Europe would forever remain a mystery because only fragmentary sources were available. These were mostly *ad acta* documents, random testimonies and marginal footnotes from European sources. From the scattered findings, only a very rough picture could emerge—a newspaper article, a programme, a ticket, or a faded photograph. In the history of international dance, a seemingly marginal event like the Menaka tour had yet to promise new insights. As irritating as the presence of Indian artists in Nazi Germany shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War may have seemed at first glance, it fitted with the dazzling kaleidoscope of exotic decor that characterized the

end of the 1930s, without which neither the entertainment industry, avant-garde art, nor fascist aesthetics could have survived.

However, with each additional finding, the overall picture of the tour became exponentially denser. The Menaka Archive was initially designed to store material associated with Sokhey's 1936–38 tour. At present (beginning of 2023), the website has approximately 1400 documents stored in its database. These cover the entirety of Sokhey's journey, including her initial performance in 1928, her 1931/2 tour of Europe, and her productions staged in India between 1938 and 1947. The collection has reached a critical mass of documents, thus allowing the real face of the dance tour to emerge. Today, we have a clearer view of the outlines of the local modernity that provided the context in which Leila Sokhey created her Indian ballet.

A first glance at some exemplary items in the Menaka archive reveals the often-surprising order of global interconnections:

- In a cupboard, among other personal documents in Irfan Muhammad Khan's family home in Kolkata, are mementoes from the *sarod* virtuoso, Sakhawat Hussain Khan's (1875–1955) career. For three years, Sakhawat Khan had performed what he considered to be India's national cultural heritage on stages in Nazi Germany. His repertoire was that of the Muslim musicians cultivated in the Moghul courts of northern India in the eighteenth century. The story of these Muslim musicians, however, was never fully absorbed into the vast nation-building project of India's cultural transformation. Sakhawat Khan's memoirs of his travels through Germany keep alive a remnant of the Indian musician's self-image as embedded in the transformation of the cultural landscape that seized Germany from 1933 onwards.
- Almost every local newspaper archive pertaining to the Menaka ballet contains announcements, preliminary reports, and often detailed reviews of the Indian ballet's performances. These scattered pieces of text are in a special way representative of the fragmented nature of the Menaka sources. Only a few of the holdings in the German newspaper archives have been digitized (unlike those of many neighbouring countries), so research on the other texts had to be carried out in a detective-like and painstaking manner. Other archive holdings were lost in the war, such as the estate of the Mannheimer Konzertdirektion, the agency that organized the Menaka tour in Germany from 1937

onwards and whose records were destroyed in a bombing raid. Those newspaper scraps that could be located and have been carefully added to the Menaka Archive database provide valuable information on performance venues and dates and make it possible to mark the Menaka ballet tour and its cross-references on a map of the world. The newly digitized edition of *The Bombay Chronicle* allowed for even more interesting findings such as the performances in North India at the beginning of Menaka's career, as well as interesting comparative data on other artists related to Menaka in India.

These texts cover a range of discourses, some loosely connected, some not. Renowned art critics paid detailed attention to Leila Sokhey's choreography and incorporated it into the discourse of modern dance, in the process irritatingly blurring the semantics of aesthetic, political and ethnographic knowledge. The spectators and writers seem obsessed with the beauty of the dancers—their flexible bodies, slender silhouettes, bronze skin, the intricate play of their hands and fingers, and their always noble faces that are never disfigured by too much emotion.

Such remarks are, however, never simply neutral observations of what is seen on stage, but, on the contrary, reconnect to a broader discourse that connects the notion of India to a hierarchically structured framework of separate races of people. Thus, in 1936, a debate continued in the shadow of national socialist cultural policy that had been in vogue since before the First World War but had remained unanswered by the avant-garde. It now gained new impetus in the context of the *völkisch* (racialized) reorganization of the German cultural landscape and raised many questions about the nature of the modern artwork that the progressive avant-garde had also put forward. Unintentionally, the Indian artists provided ample illustrative material for an ongoing quest of German society from the perspective of 're-rooting' the national culture in Germany based on *völkisch* and racist principles (see Schlaffke and Schwaderer 2021).

- In the theatre archive of the Allard Pierson collection in Amsterdam, we come across the estate of the German impresario Ernst Krauss (1887–1958), who helped shape cultural life in the Dutch capital in the 1920s and 1930s. Krauss used his extensive network in the German theatrical world to create a space for the avant-garde of European expressive dance and modernist folklore from India and Southeast Asia. Despite being forced to conform to Ministry of

Propaganda guidelines, Krauss continued to organize performance after performance of the Menaka ballet—whether in provincial health resorts or on the grand stage of international dance at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

The German impresario's work still resonates in romantic nineteenth-century Amsterdam. Krauss belonged to the generation born around 1880 that grew up in the full pathos of the romantic image of the artist—Ernst Krauss had dreamt of being an artist (Schlaffke 2020) and abandoned his merchant education to become a poet. Although he did not achieve a breakthrough as a writer, he wrote poems throughout his life, sensitive little observations about nature and emotional stirrings irritatingly published between the *völkisch* propaganda articles of a German newspaper during the war and the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. They remind us of how art interferes with the gears of political power. As in the case of the Munich–Gladbach doctor Felix Gotthelf, who around 1900 gave up his medical practice to write an opera of the future (see Schlaffke, Chap. 6, and Schwaderer, Chap. 5 in this volume), in Ernst Krauss, we are dealing with one of those modern individuals who put their bourgeois existence on the line for the sake of an artistic self-invention. Moreover, everywhere, the threads of the non-European world weave into the rupture of such lives. Today, Ernst Krauss's romantic poems about nature languish in archive folders alongside a black-and-white photographic portrait of Sokhey, alias 'Madame Menaka'.

- From London, the British collector Ian Sawyer sends documents from Adolf Hitler's (1889–1945) private office to the Menaka Archive. It is an exchange of letters between Madame Menaka and Hitler's secretariat. It contains an invitation personally written by Leila Sokhey to the German chancellor of the Reich to attend a performance of her Indian ballet in Berlin. A translation of the invitation from English to German and a polite refusal by Hitler's secretary is enclosed with the documents (Schwaderer 2022).
- An orange and gold skirt from Sokhey's collection of costumes, which many German newspapers had mentioned as a shining requisite of Menaka's dance of Usha, the goddess of dawn, surprisingly appears in Vancouver, Canada. It is in the possession of the dancer/historian Karen McKinlay Kurnaedy (see McKinlay Kurnaedy 2021), who is the keeper of the Hanova sisters' estate. Gertrud (1903–2002) and Magda (1905–92) Hanova (their German name was Hahn, but

they adopted the Czech form for professional purposes), were two German-Jewish dancers from what is now Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad). They studied dance in Europe and ran a successful school in their hometown. In the 1930s, they fled from Europe to Bombay just in time to escape the Holocaust. They continued teaching dance there and for several years worked with Leila Sokhey. Their joint programmes show that Menaka's Indian ballet extended well beyond the boundaries of the national Indian dance renaissance and that she had always kept a foot in the international world of modern dance. Menaka and the Hanova sisters' shared vision ended with Menaka's death in 1947, for that was the year that brought India both independence from colonization and partition, along with its bloody conflicts. The Hanova sisters left India for England and later Canada, where they opened a dance school that flourished for decades. The costume Menaka wore for her tour in Germany, which the Hanova sisters brought with them when they moved to Canada, is one of the few artefacts to have survived from among the dancer's personal possessions (Schwaderer 2021). Here, we find a trace of materiality, a medium of the archive's ideological interconnections (Fig. 12.2).

SCHOLARLY APPROACHES AND FOCUS OF RESEARCH

Artistic Research

In his dissertation on modernism in dance in Kolkata, Mumbai and Berlin, Markus Schlaffke (2022) realized that the findings from the Menaka tour of 1936–38 could only be examined as constituents of an entangled archive that could not be systematized but at best navigated from different directions. The aim of the study was to bring substantial and inconsequential traces into contact with each other. These, for example, would include recordings, texts, sounds, memories of fleeting performances, oral traditions and how they are still reflected today in gestures, habitus, ways of speaking, and archival orders. Various documentary methods and experimental layouts of artistic research practices were at this moment used. The intention was to consider the history of Indian ballet not only as a historical case but also as an active cultural field in which situated knowledge and embodied memories continue to affect the present. For example, the Khan family archive in Kolkata represents such a transversal memory to national historiography. Material from sixteen generations of professional musical

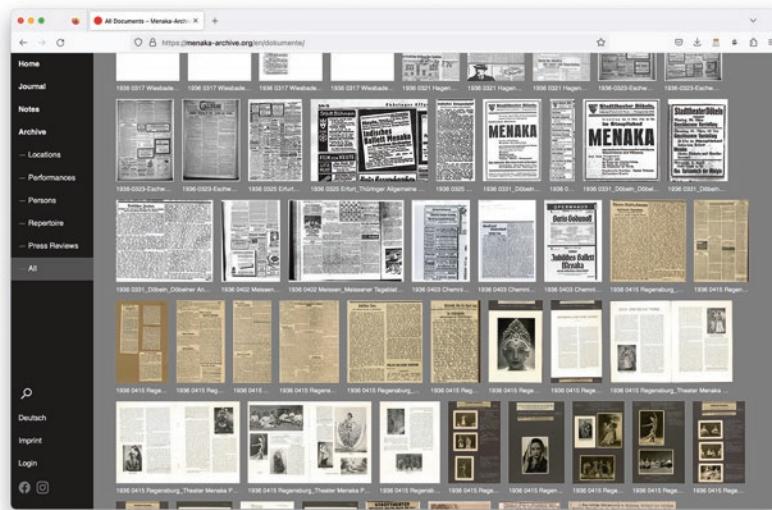


Fig. 12.2 Paper clippings from German dailies, www.menaka-archive.org, © Markus Schlaffke

activity is collected there by the descendants of a significant Indian musical family (Lucknow–Shahjahanpur–Gharana). The biographies of the *gharana* musicians reflect all the major political transformations of modern India. These musicians not only passed on their repertoire and artistic self-representation in an unbroken genealogy of oral tradition but also documented them in their writings. This family memory is still active, for example, in the person of Irfan Khan, who embodies the repertoire and the *gharana* style—and who constitutes a counternarrative of Indian musical history (Katz 2017).

During research on the Menaka Archive, Schlaffke (2016) made a documentary film of Irfan Khan retracing the stages of his grandfather Sakhawat Hussain Khan's travels with the Menaka ballet in Germany. The film also documents Irfan's concert performances at selected stops along the route of the tour, which act as productive memory triggers. Such documentary techniques make it possible to address the archive from the perspective of its present agency. In the documentary film's format, a complex interplay of memory is situated, for example, in a scene that records how

Irfan Khan accidentally discovers some shellac discs in the German Broadcasting Archive that contained sound recordings of the Menaka ensemble. These recordings, made in 1937 during a performance at the Volksoper in Hamburg, and in which Irfan can identify his grandfather's input, are the only surviving sound recordings of the Menaka ensemble. By relistening to the audio document, the contingency and structural continuity of history merge and resonate in Irfan's musical memory.

This again illustrates how the power of archives and the juxtaposition of different memory media constitute history. It is evident wherever a retrospective collection of documents for the Menaka Archive turns up in surprising localities. Sophisticated reviews of the Indian ballet in the German feuilleton, German news propaganda in which we subsequently see the steps towards the Second World War, as well as advertisements for washing powder, sausages and hair pomade create an unchangeable coexistence in which something of that 'historical simultaneity' appears, which historian Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2003), for example, is only able to reconstruct as *hypertext* in his description of the year 1926.

The findings of the Menaka archive also form such a hypertext, which can be read from the edges, the gaps, but above all from its mediality, which the only known film recordings of the Menaka ballet vividly illustrate. These were made in 1938 for the German feature film *Der Tiger von Eschnapur*, directed by Richard Eichberg (1938). The Menaka ballet can be seen in a short sequence, performing part of the repertoire that was also performed in German theatres. *The Tiger of Eschnapur*, on the other hand, is an important document of German cinema history. The material is deeply rooted in the popular exoticism of the German imagination of India and goes back to the beginnings of the German film industry. Based on the novel *The Indian Tomb* by Thea von Harbou (1918), the material was filmed a total of three times—in 1921 by Joe May, a pioneer of German monumental cinema, in 1938 by Richard Eichberg, and in 1959 by Fritz Lang, who had already created *Metropolis*, one of the icons of modern cinema.

The film series thus forms a dense historical sediment of cinematographic history. As in a drill core, the layers of time shortly after the First World War, shortly before the Second World War and in the German post-war period reveal how current ideological questions are negotiated and continued in the subject of Indian dance. Here, the medium of the film creates one of the irritatingly vibrating neighbourhoods where colonial

exoticist curiosity and the elitist discourse on the nature of modern artwork unfold in the ever-refracted gaze of the spectator (Schlaffke 2020).

Aryan Bodies on Stage

The digital archive collection has, for the first time, made the broad discursive reception of Indian ballet in Europe accessible for reading in context. In Indian art history, Menaka's work is acknowledged as a contribution to revitalizing the north Indian *Kathak* dance. Meanwhile, in Europe, the idea of a national resurgence through art and culture, prominently featured by Menaka's Indian ballet, was compatible with social-revolutionary discourses and aesthetic utopias. Especially in Germany, the Indian ballet provided a special 'platform in projecting modern longings for a return to one's origins' (Baxmann 2008: 42). Particularly in the 1930s, dance performances from Asia met with widespread interest because they 'seemed to refer to bodily knowledge that had been lost in Europe' (Baxmann 2008: 42). Such considerations about cultures and origins were a pan-European phenomenon, but the blending of folklore and racial ideology in Germany was almost inevitable (Schlaffke and Schwaderer 2021).

Hundreds of newspaper articles meticulously collected from local newspaper archives at the German venues of the tour, show how very specific German cultural issues were addressed in relation to the Indian dancers. Isabella Schwaderer is working on a critical analysis of underlying discourses in the data with a view to establishing which elements of knowledge and what stereotypes (for example, Orientalist, racist-ethnic, ideological) emerge from the articles, and how the various groups involved in writing and reading them contribute to their existence. This includes a linguistic analysis of selected articles on what role the performances played in actualizing specific knowledge about India. This specific knowledge was based on, first an assumed consanguinity of Indo-German peoples, and second a vision of history as a realization of a cultural utopia that could manifest in the appropriate orientation of artistic production. A reconstruction of the semiotic sphere connected to notions of the 'self' and the 'other' shows how an Indian theatrical event served to consolidate a *völkisch*/racialized perception of art in general, above all of music (Schwaderer 2023).

The omnipresence of the Aryan in German descriptions of the Indian artists constitutes a field of research in itself. In what ways do the texts reveal an Aryan focus, or ideas about Aryan origins? What do the texts say

about the performers' visible features—their bodies, postures, movements and skin shade? Contrasting these with descriptions from the Netherlands and other European countries shows similarities and differences in perceptions of Indian dance (see Kanhai, Chap. 8 in this volume).

From this perspective, the theatre reviews not only reveal something about how the Menaka ballet was perceived in Germany but they also shed light on the broader cultural knowledge of India in German-speaking Europe. Among other things, the reviews show how closely the public discourse matched political attempts to create a master narrative of a racially homogeneous and spiritually oriented social utopia: what happened on stage on a particular evening was only to a lesser extent documented. More to the point, the German theatre critics, compared with those from other European nations, helped to construct a specifically German identity.

Overviewing the data in the Menaka archive, it becomes clear how blurred and imprecise public ideas about the kinship of peoples and the racially motivated ideologies that developed from them must have been, at least at the time when Menaka's ballet was performing in Germany. Overall, the reviews offer a diverse picture of how themes on India, academic knowledge, and race theories were addressed. Nevertheless, a racist view of cultures was constantly present in the background in the form of exoticism and racism on the one hand, and ideas of kinship, closeness and foreignness, on the other.

Debate on the 'Revival' of Indian Classical Dance

The 1930s saw crucial developments in what was later labelled classical Indian dance styles. In this volume, Schlage (Chap. 7) describes how national circumstances caused a shift in the relationship between non-hereditary artists and the traditional communities in which the Southeast Indian classical dance tradition known as *Bharatanātyam* had evolved. What is still missing is an in-depth description of similar shifts in North Indian *Kathak*. The developments in music have been studied through a close collaboration with the descendants of Sakhawat Khan (Katz 2017). With the digitization of Indian newspapers like *The Bombay Chronicle*, completely new insights into performance culture and art criticism are now possible. One example might be Sokhey's collaboration with *The Bombay Chronicle*'s art critic Kanaiyalal Hardevram Vakil (1890/1–1937) (see Kanhai, Chap. 8 in this volume). Other South Asian and South East

Asian newspaper archives, such as the Singapore Newspaper Archive (<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/>) could provide further insights into the performances of dancers and musicians in Asia. Articles from the years 1933–35 and 1938–47 reveal how Sokhey responded to contemporary debates and developments in classical dance and how audiences in India and beyond received her work.

Digital data collected for the Menaka Archive prompted more traditional archival research by Parveen Kanhai. For example, an analysis of newspaper advertisements revealed that, in 1932, Krauss had acted as an impresario for Sokhey and that Uday Shankar's performances at an exhibition in France the previous year had been well received. Again, in 1936, although their paths never crossed, both artists performed separately in various cities in the Netherlands and Germany. On this tour, Hugo Helm (Salomon Hugo Hellmann, 1884–1943) acted as Shankar's impresario, which suggests some coordination between different impresarios, though the available sources cannot verify this. Furthermore, Helm's involvement with Shankar was previously unknown. This connection acted as a catalyst for further research into the Jewish Czech impresario, whose name is forgotten, but an attempt is being made to build a comprehensive overview of his career and life in the Netherlands (1924–40). Sources for this include programmes from his theatre in The Hague as well as digitized data from the Arolsen Archives (<https://arolsen-archives.org>), the world's largest archive on the victims and survivors of the Nazi regime, and the war archives of the Netherlands Red Cross. The latter can be accessed only on request at the Dutch national archive.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the Menaka Archive collection and research work. The project uses the new potential of digital collecting and networking to map, link and research historical documents on the artistic work of Leila Sokhey, aka Madame Menaka. The open, collaborative nature of the digital archive offers some new methodological approaches to historiographical research and casts a fresh light on some of the topics presented in this volume.

The Menaka Archive collection focuses on data from the broader context of the Menaka ballet's European tour of 1936–38. Documents on the Indian ballet's performances just before the start of the Second World War reveal a wide range of ideological, political and material links. The

anti-colonial cultural reforms in India, the political landscape in Germany shifting towards national socialism and the discourse of aesthetic modernism in Europe that goes a long way back, all played their part in determining the shape of the dance performances from India.

The particular shape of the collaborative digital collection opens up different perspectives on an interwoven global history: on the one hand, it underlines the fragmentary character of the objects it contains. Interconnections thus become visible precisely where random findings seem at first glance to be lying unconnected next to each other. Various documentary and artistic research methods are engaged in describing this aspect of the Menaka collection as the productivity of the archive and as bringing different aspects of memory into play with each other.

The focus on the temporally circumscribed framework of the Menaka tour in Europe from 1936 to 1938 offers the possibility of a pointed analysis of broader cultural discourses of the period. In the many German press reviews of the Indian ballet's performances, we can see how the discussion of Indian dance deals with a still open question about the essence of modern German artwork. This is the question of the eventual reconnection of cult and culture, or art as a potential response to alienation in the modern world. Such considerations already appear throughout Richard Wagner's operatic work, all the way to his imitators such as Felix Gotthelf, who, even during the First World War, thought of demonstrating to modern humanity the reconciliation of knowledge and faith employing the 'Indian renaissance' (Gotthelf 1917; Schlaffke, Chap. 6 and Schwaderer, Chap. 5 in this volume). In the whole range of reviews, a specific discourse of the body can gradually be deciphered that runs between the coordinates of exoticizing racism, determination of the 'self' and 'other' and latent anti-Semitism.

One approach we have taken in previous attempts to unlock the archival material has been to bundle diverse voices into small, incomplete stories. The work with contradictory resources is devoted more to illustrating small but coherent narratives than to providing a blanket explanation. Looking, for example, at the variety of religious allusions in the texts, it is difficult to avoid assigning a spiritual dimension to Indian culture in general, yet at the same time associate dance with a new spiritual anchoring of the human being. Rather, what seems to be common to all is that religion functions as a repository of knowledge and ideas; it is where individuals develop their sense of belonging and meaning, shape their sphere of action, interact with each other and become creative.

When we speak of global or entangled history, we are acknowledging that the narratives of national historiographies still need to be settled. The concept of entangled history emphasizes that history is made at the margins, at the contact zones, in ambiguity, where genealogies blur, and where power is not only perpetuated but also reconfigured. 'Entangled history' points beyond the narrow horizon of Eurocentric colonial narratives. It promises to bring the periphery of shared experiences into view. At the same time, it carries the deceptive promise that the entanglement of the archive could be unravelled if only all memories, pieces of the collection and traces were first identified and then transferred to their rightful places.

With respect to the Menaka archive, we face a tableau of scattered fragments and entangled memories that can hardly ever be moved to their rightful places but are only available in the guise of another memory. This suggests that they might be able to fill some gaps in the established narratives of modernity. For example, the history of modern dance would be complete if it contained narratives on the special ways in which modern locals thought about and shaped the world, but the Menaka Archive complicates such narratives. The potential of the digital collection thus lies in the points of contact between the objects, which cannot seamlessly be laid out end to end. It is where local history truly condenses into global history.

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