

Practising cultural identities: British Indians' use of Indian classical dance

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Abstract

The Indian diaspora has faced many obstacles including the challenge of navigating their dual identities, in order to belong in the UK. Music and dance are popular ways of practising cultural identities, which could mean that British Indians (BIs) use Indian Classical Dance (ICD) for maintaining cultural continuity and establishing a strong cultural identity. This qualitative study explores the reasons behind ICD practice, the relationship between ICD practice and the cultural identities of BIs, and the role served by themes of cultural continuity in their talk about identity. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 UK-based, Indian classical dance artists and analysed them using Thematic Analysis to identify the following themes: (1) Dual-Identity Struggle (Sub-themes: Confusion and Isolation and Racism and Stereotypes), (2) Parental Influence, (3) Embracing Dual-Identity (Sub-themes: Growth with Age and Impact of a Diverse Community), (4) Benefits of ICD (Sub-themes: Education & Connection to Indian religion and history and Expressing & Understanding Identity) and (5) ICD: Authenticity versus Modernity (Sub-themes: Authentic ICD in UK and Modernising ICD). The results from this piece of exploratory research have generated further data that improves our understanding of how BIs maintain a sense of

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collective continuity, and how they practise their Indian identity in daily life. Limitations of this study include the lack of balance between participants of different genders and dance styles. Therefore, further research can be developed including large-scale studies on the role of ICD between genders, nationalities or generations.

KEYWORDS

British Indian, cultural identity, Indian classical dance, national identity

1 | INTRODUCTION

Modern Britain is a multicultural society, with 9.6% of the population identifying as Asian or Asian British in 2021 (ONS, 2022). Despite battling racism and social exclusion through the years, many British Indians (BIs) continue to value their cultural and religious traditions and place high importance on their ancestry (Castles, 2009). However, as generations of BI immigrants integrate further into British society, a new social dynamic emerges involving their feelings of connectedness with previous generations of Indians (what Sani et al., 2007 have termed 'perceived collective continuity'). Many second- and third-generation BIs may feel pressure to adapt to the British accent, language, celebrations, and social norms. However, little engagement with one's ancestral heritage and cultural practices may result in a disconnected cultural identity, which can negatively influence one's self-respect, confidence and sense of self (Dey, Balmer, Pandit, Saren, & Binsardi, 2017). This internal conflict can lead to a dual-identity crisis as BIs juggle different personas in society and at home.

Cultural identities can be formulated by one's own beliefs and values, the cultural practices of one's birthplace, or the host society's social norms (Friedman, 1994). This sense of self is integral for a person's social, political, and religious decision-making as it shapes their social behaviour. Identity can also be viewed as something that is routinely practised or performed, instead of just a set of ideas one has about oneself (Dovchin, 2011). In this way, by engaging in different practices, people can develop a better sense of their identity and, conversely, the study of identity performance in daily life should be a focus of social identity research (Hargreaves, 2011).

Some social psychologists (e.g., Sani, Bowe, & Herrera, 2008) have treated 'perceived collective continuity' as a measurable and quantifiable cognitive phenomenon, the product of individual perception. Quantitative research appears to show that people prefer to belong to highly continuous (and thus seemingly more secure) groups, leading to better mental health and less alienation. Contrastingly, rhetorical social psychologists view collective continuity as something that is talked about and used to achieve specific social aims (Ullah, 1990). Therefore, depending on the social context, individuals may rhetorically construct collective continuity or discontinuity, and such constructions may serve different situational purposes. This has implications for BIs who may want to be perceived as part of the British nation, and therefore be motivated to downplay their links to Indian culture and minimise collective continuity. The study of immigrants' social practices as a way of performing identity in daily life can thus be seen as an extension of this rhetorical (or discursive) approach that views identity construction as active, flexible, and purposive. The fluidity of identity development through social practices in migrant groups is commonly discussed in the literature, such as a study of Sri Lankan migrants and their use of cricket as a cultural practice (Cassim, Hodgetts, & Stolte, 2019).

Music and dance are popular ways of expressing and practising cultural identities. Research across a variety of cultures and ethnicities has reflected this theme, with Traditional Irish music strengthening Irish communities in Coventry and Liverpool (Leonard, 2005), as well as emotionally charged Scottish musical performances positively

influencing people's 'Scottishness' as a lived experience (Wood, 2012). This phenomenon may be a reason why Indian Classical Dance (ICD) styles, such as Bharatanatyam and Kathak, which are deeply rooted in the traditions and history of India, now have a prominent position in British society. These are the most commonly practised art forms in the UK under the ICD umbrella (including Odissi, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Sattriya, Mohiniyattam and Manipuri) and therefore are a big reference for ICD in this paper. David's (2007) qualitative research highlights the value of Bharatanatyam, as young girls view ICD as 'a marker of Indian culture and religious identity' and utilise it as a 'vehicle for achieving and expressing the Hindu identity'. In interviews, teenage girls stated dance helped them learn more about their 'lost' religion, reiterating the clarity ICD provides for those navigating their dual identities.

The value of ICD is evident through its successful integration into British society, as reported by Prickett (2004). Bharatanatyam and Kathak are included in the syllabus of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, which tests students in a systematic Western examination format. Organisations such as Akademi employ young BIs in initiatives that nurture the economic value of ICD in Britain. A nationally broadcasted documentary by ITV News on ICD for South Asian Heritage Month, A South Asian Dance & Music Mapping Study (2022) by the funding body Arts Council England, and a South Asian category in the BBC Young Dancer competition highlights how ICD and the Indian diaspora is being shown importance in the UK (Gorringer, 2019). This showcases the emerging generation of BIs who utilise ICD to explore the deep complexity and hybridity in their cultural identities.

Past research has established how ICD is valuable to BIs, encouraging cultural continuity and allowing them to practise their cultural identities in British society. This exploratory study will provide further insight into the way BIs navigate their cultural identities and how they construct continuity and discontinuity in their speech. This study highlights how some BIs manage their belonging to the UK by downplaying the continuity of the Indian diaspora as well. Awareness and understanding of ICD is growing in the UK and this study highlights its importance and value for BIs. This study's specific research questions are:

1. What reasons do BIs give for practising ICD?
2. What is the relationship between Indian classical dance and the cultural identity of BI performing artists?
3. What role, if any, is served by themes of cultural continuity and discontinuity in their rhetoric?

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants

Ten UK-based, Indian classical dance artists were recruited for this study (7 Female, 3 Male, mean age: 28.7, age range: 18–45) using opportunity sampling. A recruitment advertisement was posted on social media, and prominent and active performers from the ICD community were approached directly and asked to participate and circulate the call for participants. The sample comprised dancers from a variety of Indian Classical styles: Bharatanatyam (7), Mohiniyattam (1) and Kathak (2), including both professional dancers (7) and senior students (3). All participants were fluent in English. We did not pose restrictions on participants' proficiency in the art form, gender or age as we aim to understand the collective experience of BIs. However, only second- or third-generation BIs were recruited as we reasoned that Indians raised abroad would need to make a more conscious and concerted effort to practise their Indian identity and to construct a degree of continuity with India.

2.2 | Design and procedure

Volunteers reached out to the lead researcher to register their interest in the study. Those who met the inclusion criteria were briefed and took part in individual, half-an-hour to one-hour long, semi-structured interviews. This

format included 10 interview questions to guide the discussion but allowed participants to go into topics they deemed important and felt at ease to share. The topic of the questions ranged from national and cultural identity (e.g., ‘How would you describe your national identity?’, ‘What was your family’s relationship to Indian culture?’) to their relationship to ICD (‘Does the antiquity and history of ICD impact your practice and the way it is taught and learnt in the UK?’). The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and were recorded and automatically transcribed. The online format of this study allowed participants to join from the comfortable environment of their homes which added an aspect of informality, allowing them to relax and open up in discussions. This study received ethical approval from the departmental ethics committee at UCL.

2.3 | Analysis

The interview transcripts were first proofread and checked against the audio recordings to ensure accurate transcription. They were then anonymised and imported to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to code the data and formulate descriptive themes. First, the researcher familiarised themselves with the text and established a coherent understanding of the participant’s experiences. Then line-by-line semantic coding was conducted, where common ideas expressed in the text were grouped together. Initial codes of the text included clusters of ideas, this allowed us to understand and organise the data in a realistic and expressive way (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Sets of codes that expressed similar ideas, showed a high frequency, or were important in answering the research question were grouped together to create Sub-themes. These were further analysed in context to the broader tones and patterns across participants to create a concise set of five themes.

3 | RESULTS

The thematic analysis of the interview data produced five themes:

3.1 | Theme 1: A struggle with dual identity

3.1.1 | Confusion and isolation

All participants, when asked to describe their national identity, labelled themselves as BIs. Upon explaining what this represented in their lives, a theme of confusion and division emerged due to their dual identity in an Indian home and Western community: ‘I kind of felt like *Hannah Montana*, living two lives’ (P10).

Participants expressed an inability to explain their daily Indian traditions or meals to others: ‘How do I explain this to someone so that they understand it or how do I?’ (P1). Many highlighted a fear of being unable to express themselves without having to change or ‘dilute’ (P1) the way they describe their practices.

Through their childhood, many felt a sense of isolation and exclusion, being unable to belong fully to any community. Participant 4 expressed the difficulty in ‘tuning in my Asian Indian side and also fitting in here’ emphasising a struggle to balance their dual identities. The incompatibility of the British and Indian identities is framed here in geographic terms—Britain is represented deictically as ‘here’, and belonging in Britain is understood to be in conflict with the participant’s ‘Asian side’, which apparently does not belong ‘here’. Other participants similarly constructed belonging in spatial terms, feeling out of place, unsure of who they belong with due to almost living two separate lives, ‘not fitting here or there’ (P2). This is a common experience for individuals with multiple identities, as different sides of their personalities or mannerisms are activated in accordance with their social context (Cohen, 2000). This

emphasises the struggle of managing their personal or familial connection to Indian culture which is disconnected from their everyday British life.

Similar themes have been explored in other studies where British South Asians who grew up in a strict background reported a fear of being accused of abandoning their parents' culture, being called a 'coconut' (fake Indian) or trying to act 'white' (Vadher & Barrett, 2009). This emphasises the fear of criticism BIs experience when trying to freely enjoy membership to two cultural groups.

3.1.2 | Racism and stereotyping

Discrimination in the form of racism and stereotyping resulted in many negative and traumatic experiences for our participants. This damaged their ability to navigate their dual identities, as it led them to believe they had to suppress and hide their Indian background to remain part of British society. Some have accepted this state of affairs: '*Racism still exists. Suppression still exists.*' (P6). Some participants witnessed acts of violence against their loved ones that made them afraid of being hurt: '*I saw my father beaten up in front of my eyes at the age of four*' (P2).

Less extreme, subtle forms of discrimination are experienced by the majority of BIs and are often regular occurrences for first-generation Indian migrants (Jaspal, 2015). Subtle comments in personal conversations or clear derogatory statements led to many feeling frustrated and misunderstood. This resulted in their British identity being associated with feelings of threat and 'outsiderness', as supported by Bhambra (2021). One participant highlighted the way ICD is compared to more mainstream forms of Indian dance such as Bollywood, and the ridiculing comments often directed towards Indian dance.

'South Asians would talk about their dance in a very comical way. They've lost the significance of this beautiful art form and they think the only way for their own identity to be accepted is that we almost laugh about it. So, therefore, it loses its intelligence, its seriousness.' (P6).

Gender stereotypes regarding the sexuality of male dancers are an important example of the stereotypes ICD practitioners faced. In India, men are praised for the strength, power and energy they bring to classical dance, and ICD institutions often have male teachers and choreographers (Chavali, 2018). However, the stigmas that dismiss men in dance are based on patriarchal gender stereotypes limiting a man's emotional expression, use of his body and possible homosexuality (Bassetti, 2013). This highlights the limitations of stereotypical views on masculinity derived from a patriarchal society, present in both East and West cultures.

'I hid the fact that I did Indian classical dance...People saw pictures of it, and I was teased for it because we have to dress a certain way.' (P8).

3.2 | Theme 2: Parental influence

Many British Asian children feel obligations and responsibilities towards their parents to continue traditions (Bhambra, 2021). Participant 1, in particular, came from a family of artists and felt it was their duty to continue that legacy.

Due to the importance of looking up to one's elders in Indian cultures, a person can naturally adopt a shared work ethic and mannerisms. Participants highlighted their approach to classical arts and the importance given to it was determined by their parents. '*if your parents treat traditions as a tick box exercise, you're probably going to do the same.*' (P9).

The majority of participants (8/10) said the root of their connection to India in their childhood was due to their parents being '*very proud of being Indian*' giving them '*a stronger tie to India*' (P2). Some parents made a conscious

effort to expose their children to the Indian heritage and activities that support their connection to traditions. This facilitated their later connections to India being strengthened, as they could ‘draw a connection’ (P9) between their activities and identity. One participant used a metaphor about the rootedness and seed dispersal of plants to reconcile the contradiction between continuity and discontinuity:

‘My dad had a saying actually, he used to say that we’re like little plants that were planted in foreign soil. So, we take the best goodness from the soil that we were planted in but not forgetting our roots where they’re actually from’ (P2).

Contrastingly, one participant highlighted the obsessive nature with which some parents attempt to force their children to follow traditions. The effect of strict and controlling Indian parents causing adverse experiences for their BI children has been discussed at length (Jandu, 2015).

‘I have friends whose parents were like so crazy strict and would really push them to do things and now they’ve gone completely the other way and saying I don’t want to be associated or be part of that culture, which to me is really sad,’ (P10).

3.3 | Theme 3: Embracing dual identity

3.3.1 | Growth with age

Many participants expressed that they became comfortable and confident with their dual identities as they grew older. Despite this being a natural pattern for individuals in all cultures, this theme is particularly interesting as BIs highlighted the ways they grew up differently than their monocultural peers. For our participants, resolving the apparent conflict posed by their dual identity was not a purely cognitive exercise—maintaining their ‘Asian side’ involves ‘practising’ that identity in daily life, with ICD providing one outlet for that.

‘I got more comfortable growing up, realising that [my identity] didn’t have to be two separate things and it was what I made of those two different cultures. I think now being British Indian is what I make it, so I can be comfortable in my own skin’ (P10).

Some participants expressed they naturally embraced their Indian identity more than their British one, which affected their acceptance and choices in ICD practice. This clarity that is gained through enjoying specific people’s company helps solidify one’s identity and allows one to make conscious choices about one’s hobbies, interests, and social interactions (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2018).

‘Part of it just comes naturally when you mature and when you get older and when you figure out what’s important to you. Dance just became more and more important to me. So then I would be surrounded by people like me and people who had something to do with Indian culture.’ (P8).

3.3.2 | Cultural diversity and its roots in imperial history

Five participants highlighted living in an ‘urban environment’ allowed them to understand the ‘concept of hybridity’ (P9). It gave them the opportunity to balance an Indian core with belonging to a community of different ethnicities, as many other individuals were in a similar situation. An example includes London’s ‘Multicultural nature, where you

know you can express who you are' (P6). Most young people can therefore create a middle ground, to belong to British communities in day-to-day life but also access cultural richness at the same time (Jandu, 2015).

Another point that was mentioned frequently in discussions about diversity in Britain is the British Empire's history of colonisation. Some participants expressed their frustration and anger over the actions of the British, just as BIs have often reported feeling excluded from the culturally dominant achievements of Britain's history (Vadher & Barrett, 2009). Furthermore, some participants explicitly used this history of dispossession to defend their right to be part of British society:

'Because the whole idea of being British is the fact that it's all these different, diverse cultures. You know Britain colonised all these countries and India is such a special one because they took so much from India, you know? So, I feel like we have every right to be here.' (P5).

This rhetorical strategy involves a reformulation of both British and Indian identities around the shared history of the British Empire. The participant frames Britishness as characterised by diversity, and thus as compatible with Indian identity. Moreover, the participant can claim a stake in British society through the historical debt of colonialism; their family's migration to the UK is thus cast not so much as a disruption of their connection to India, but as the fulfilment of Britain's historical obligation to India.

Other participants also stressed the importance of remembering and acknowledging the part their ancestors played in building the British Empire and settling in the country through many hardships. This may be explained by the idea that British identification is based on historical bonds, and a common history is necessary to build a strong national identity. It also aids the connection with parts of British society that may not accept BIs (Vadher & Barrett, 2009).

'I'm learning much more about colonisation. I've become quite angry. The injustice of it, we were all told the British won the war and all of that, and then there was an Indian author who wrote [that], actually, it was the British Empire that won the war. The impact it has on you as an identity, saying that we have much more to be proud of being who we are.' (P6).

These first three themes can be understood through BIs finding a place in the UK through practising ICD, where they can express themselves in their own way, despite the racism and political limitations of being BI.

3.4 | Theme 4: Benefits of ICD for Indian identity

3.4.1 | Education and connection to Indian religion and history

A popular benefit of ICD was its ability to connect a BI living in the UK to India's culture, history and traditions. ICD acts as a '*connected home*' making one feel '*internally like you are home*' (P5).

Recent studies of South Asian dance emphasise that expressive cultural forms are central to the articulation of ethnic identity (Hyder, 2004). '*It was art, music, dance. That's what formed my connection*' (P7). As it allows one to practise one's cultural identity in a physical and expressive way, ICD can be the tool to unpack the crisis of identity many diaspora groups face.

For many it is a form of worship, and connection to the Hindu religion, as many ICD pieces enact stories about Hindu Gods and Mythology: '*When I'm dancing, I'm praying*' (P4); '*A lot of Indian culture will be lost without dance. Dance puts a lot of these ancient texts into visual terms, without it I think a lot of people wouldn't necessarily pass it down*' (P4). The medium of dancing has successfully been used to gain religious and cultural identity by diasporic groups worldwide (Cunningham, 2001).

The history of one Indian classical art form, Bharatanatyam, originated from temple dancers that gave their life to celebrating the Hindu religion through dance, known as the Devadasis (Soneji, 2019). The art form then migrated into the King's courts and public sectors; however under British rule the Devadasi system was abolished. The Devadasis were pushed to become outsiders in society and their practices equated with courtesans, resulting in their reputation being tarnished (Patil, 1975). Participants explicitly referred to this episode in the history of Indian dance: 'Where did they go to? What did they do? How do they maintain, you know, as a way of not just the art form, but as human survival.' (P6). Practising these art forms resulted in BIs questioning the history of their Indian ancestors and learning more about injustices in Indian history.

Participants emphasised the significant role BIs hold to 'nurture and foster something that's so profound and gives meaning' (P7) as ICD has been 'imparted by generations before us as they wanted to preserve it' (P6). This sense of duty and importance that has been given to BIs builds their connection with their ancestors in India. This has been reported as a primary reason ICD classes are organised in the UK, allowing BIs to be resistant to internal and external pressures to make compromises of their identity (David, 2007).

3.4.2 | Expressing & understanding identity

When discussing ICD and its value to BIs in the UK, a popular theme regarding its ability to strengthen one's bond with their Indian identity emerged. It was expressed as a 'tool for exploration' to understand their cultural background and a way to 'express and hold on to my identity' (P2). ICD allows BIs to become open to sharing their culture with people around them and 'be as loud as I want' (PP3), highlighting the ICD's role in giving people a voice and increasing confidence.

For some, ICD allowed them to be 'more comfortable in myself [and] navigate around my cultural identity' (P7), and to be 'as authentic to myself as I can' (P3) by teaching them about individuality and accepting change. For others, it helps to overcome rigid thinking about identity: 'dance keeps my mind open to so many different interpretations... my thinking has completely opened.' (P4). It has also taught some to be 'very decisive and very detailed' (P8) and brought discipline in their lives.

Some participants who struggled with mental health expressed the therapeutic value of ICD. Dance movement therapy has been linked to improved quality of life, well-being, body image and interpersonal competence (Koch et al., 2014). However, even without formal therapy, dance was described as grounding and centring tool to regain confidence in oneself: 'On a personal level, I've been quite challenged by my mental health. And coming back to dance has been quite empowering and strengthening, to get myself back to me' (P6).

3.5 | Theme 5: ICD: Modernity versus authenticity

3.5.1 | Authentic ICD in the UK

When discussing the presence and role ICD plays in British society, many participants discussed the lack of 'authenticity' and 'true' traditional practice being continued in the UK. This often referred to the rigorous three-times-a-week ICD training that takes place in many institutions in India, where technique and a high-performance standard are greatly emphasised. This is often not the normative standard of training in the UK. Participants discussed the way dance styles such as Bharatanatyam and Kathak have been integrated into the Grade system for extracurricular activities under the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing. David (2007) highlights the importance of studying ICD in the same format as other Western dance styles, as it ensures equality and a sense of community in the UK. However, a negative side effect for some participants is that ICD can become 'very focused around the grade exam as a tick box exercise' that people do for 'CV building' (P1) instead of focusing on its philosophical and spiritual value.

Some participants described the standard of ICD in the UK as *'not worthy of a traditional level'* (P5) due to a lack of rigour and discipline, and also discussed the lack of recognition for the skill required in ICD due to the low-quality presentations by uneducated BIs. A reason for this may be the widespread association of ICD with religion and conservatism, as younger generations are focusing more on their personal curiosity and creative expression (David, 2007).

Many participants expressed worry that the classical traditions would be diluted due to a lack of funding and support. Participants emphasised the role of *'responsibility when you say you are a dancer of a particular style'* (P5), reflecting the importance of ICD in showing the diversity of UK culture and providing hope for other young BIs who wish to practise their culture with purity in British society.

3.5.2 | Modernising ICD

Contrasting to the worries of losing the traditional aspects of ICD, many participants highlighted their enthusiasm and passion for disseminating Indian culture into British society. Most participants expressed the need to expose British society to ICD in any way possible, whilst still being aware of their traditional values. Participants highlighted the importance to see growth in ICD and are fascinated to *'break free of costume-bound dancing'* (P1). They emphasised that classical art forms *'are not supposed to be restricting. It's something that can open itself out and evolve'* (P3). This highlights how ICD is used to practise one's dual identity in an active and creative way.

Some saw change not as a loss of purity but as the natural evolution of the dance form. This view was popular among the younger generation of dancers who may not be so attached to the traditions yet have extreme pride and passion for practising ICD in the UK in any way.

However, words such as being *'accountable'*, *'aware'* and *'accepting'* of the past were also popular throughout these discussions, reflecting a sense of duty that many of them were balancing with their own desires for exploration:

'Why are you going down more of an explorative, contemporary route? Is it because you're scared or ashamed or don't feel enough support or appreciation for the traditional? I think it's important to be conscious and about intention.' (P10).

The younger generation's view of Indian identity was also highlighted as a part of a *'global youth culture'*, instead of the requirement of older generations who wish to be fixed and connected strongly to one place (Saldanha, 2002). This reiterates the dynamic ideas of cultural identity that are constantly changing for each BI individual, which are also practised in a fluid way across dance styles.

'I think tradition is very important, but we're not tied to one place anymore, as a global community that's constantly changing and evolving things.' (P9).

4 | DISCUSSION

This exploratory study improves our understanding of how cultural continuity is maintained for BIs, and how they practise their Indian identity in daily life. It has emphasised how all BIs have struggled with their dual identity at some point in their lives, due to a lack of belonging in their British community, a common finding across the literature (Bhambra, 2021). This is a prominent theme, as second-generation South Asians minimising their ethnic identities to be more accepted as British, has been heavily reported in young BIs (Modood et al., 1997). Furthermore, they identify with aspects of British identity but reject the idea of *'being British'*, reflecting a complex sense of self. The

realisation that BIs must take ownership of their identity label, choices, and the company they choose, led to many participants learning to explore and balance their dual identity. The use of labels has also been explored in a study by Modood et al. (1997), who found the broadening of ethnic labels such as 'British Indian' or 'British South Asian' is beneficial in adopting hybrid identities. This is a highly individualistic process, which is compatible with other theories that state people with dual identities manage both minority and majority identities simultaneously, and in different ways (Berry, 1997).

Our results supported wider research on the Indian diaspora that emphasised the majority of BIs endure negative experiences of discrimination and racism, which is common among first-generation BIs (Jaspal, 2015). However, many grow to understand and embrace their dual identities, through how their parents influence their upbringing and the values passed down to them through their families (David, 2007). Collectivist Indian cultures have a strong influence on many people's community and familial traditions, a cultural norm that is present in BIs in the UK (Jaspal, 2015). Our results support recent studies that prove how valuable ICD is to strengthening their link to Indian heritage, as it allows BIs to express their cultural identity in a practical way (Hall, 1994), and have a direct connection to Indian religion and history (Hyder, 2004). Ballard (1994) emphasises that just like bilingual individuals use 'code switching' that allows fluent movement between languages, similar mechanisms are used for cultural expression. ICD acts as a platform and channel for the expression of one's Indian identity and allows one to strengthen their sense of cultural continuity.

The use of historical narratives of colonialism and the British Empire in the construction of identity was another important topic that revealed the presence of external influences on identity formation, a theme reported by Vadher and Barrett (2009). In our participants' rhetoric, the plundering of India is treated less as a crime to be avenged, and more as a contribution towards the building of modern Britain. The British conquest and command of India resulted in the loss of Indian jewels, wealth, religious practices, and traditional customs (Tharoor, 2016). In essence, some BIs are using these historical events to argue that they (through their ancestors) have 'paid into' British society and therefore, deserve full recognition as its members. The complexity of Indian history and the way it is interpreted by modern BIs reflects how social practices such as ICD can also be viewed from a Theoretical lens and explored further in different populations (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). This reveals how individuals can use historical narratives strategically and creatively to claim a right to belong in the UK—their Indian identity and continuity with the Indian population of the British Empire becomes a rhetorical resource that paradoxically, can be mobilised to strengthen their British identity as well.

This study has also provided insight into the topic of collective continuity. Most publications on PCC have treated it as a quantifiable construct and have only sought to measure how continuous a group is perceived to be by its members; in contrast, the present study adds to a relatively small body of research that explores the concrete strategies that people use to establish a sense of continuity with their historical community. The flexibility of these strategies is illustrated by the fact that participants used metaphors (plants and seed dispersal) and historical knowledge (colonialism) to make sense of their collective continuity and discontinuity simultaneously. Contrary to our expectations, we did not discover explicit arguments against continuity in our sample; however, it is likely that such rhetoric could still be used in a different discursive context if participants are made to feel that their connection to India is undesirable.

We found two distinct approaches that BIs took in making sense of their engagement with ICD. The first was to preserve an 'authentic' version of ICD the way it was 'meant' to be practised in India. This is an essentialist approach that emphasises the cultural and religious essence of ICD is what must be preserved. Participants who followed this essentialist approach based their social identity on the Indian culture and traditions, which they held on to, despite living in the UK. The other approach was more open and embraced change, as some people saw ICD as an evolving cultural form. From this social-constructivist perspective, Indian dance was viewed as a social practice that is used for self-expression, rather than being a goal unto itself. Emerging themes such as 'unstructured religion, private spirituality, and private spiritual fulfilment' in research on BI youth culture reveal changes in the use of ICD

(David, 2007). This approach deviates from traditions but can be hugely beneficial in one's ability to navigate their dual identity in a format suitable to them. Similar negotiations of cultural identities through South Asian dance have been reported in previous research (Grau, 2002), which highlights the British experience of South Asian dance as a unique facet of Indian traditions (Iyer, 1997). Therefore, these participants' hybrid social identities were being actively translated into practising a mixture of traditional Indian and modern British dance.

5 | EVALUATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size and a lack of balance between participants of different genders and dance styles. Further research can explore the role of ICD between genders, between people of different nationalities or between generations, as seen in earlier research by David (2007).

Future research could also focus on the training, funding and structure given to young BIs to gain skills and train in ICD professionally. This can include interviewing educators and managers of dance schools and funding organisations. This will allow us to understand their stance in creating structure and a pathway for ICD to be recognised and valued in British society. Due to the extensive literature proving its benefits for mental and emotional health, research into effective community initiatives that encourage ICD practice within the youth can be explored.

6 | CONCLUSION

ICD has been an extremely powerful tool to strengthen BIs' dual identities, as it allows them to practise their cultural identities and preserve cultural continuity in the UK. Our results allowed us to understand the different approaches some BIs take to establish their social identity (essentialist or social-constructivist); that some BIs' rhetoric for practising ICD is a result of internal navigation and external social influences and the development of BIs' feelings of belonging in the UK is substantially impacted by their India's history and politics. Furthermore, a new emerging generation of BIs is translating their hybrid identities into a dance genre that fuses together contemporary and classical dance and allows them more freedom to practise their cultural identities, highlighting the growth of ICD in the UK.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared due to confidentiality purposes.

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How to cite this article: Varma, P., & Siromahov, M. (2023). Practising cultural identities: British Indians' use of Indian classical dance. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2703>