If IPTA prepared the ground for women’s agency to be staged in the newly imagined nation-state that was India, then Manjusri Chaki Sircar (1934–2000) openly waged her resistance to patriarchal nationalism and aesthetic Eurocentrism through her fiercely political feminist choreography. Chaki Sircar’s was a significant voice in the choric dissension of Indian feminist choreographers against what they believed to be the representation of women as meek, submissive and dolled-up bodies on the Indian classical dance stage. Some other vociferous dance-makers, such as Chandralekha (1928–2006) and Mallika Sarabhai, have been the subjects of a number of in-depth scholarly studies; Bharucha (1995) and Chatterjea (2004a) have offered excellent analyses of Chandralekha’s resistive choreographies; while Chatterjea (2004b) and Grau (2007) have each focused their attention on the activism of Mallika Sarabhai’s dance. Curiously, apart from Kothari (2003) important narratives on modern and contemporary dance from India, including that of Ketu Katrak (2011), have left out Chaki Sircar’s choreographic works.¹ This chapter considers possible reasons for this neglect and discusses how Chaki Sircar’s dance repertoire might offer performance scholars an invaluable source of knowledge on embodied feminism of South Asian origin.

Chaki Sircar’s family were among the millions displaced in the mass migration that followed the Partition of India during its year of independence in 1947. The chapter traces Chaki Sircar’s movements across the Bengal divide and examines the ways in which this forced migration informed her politics as well as her early experiences of dance during the 1950s. It moves on to a consideration of Chaki Sircar’s
international journeys and lived experiences in Africa and North America, noticing how her body consciously negotiated and processed various cultural forms of embodiment and specifically the shifting polarities of US modernism and postmodernism in the 1960s and 1970s. The chapter then travels back with Chaki Sircar to 1980s India, a period that witnessed the upsurge of women's rights movements on the one hand and the rise of right wing anti-feminist politics on the other. Against this backdrop, Chaki Sircar's Navanritiya or New Dance became a significant form of representational practice that challenged and critiqued patriarchal frameworks governing the production of dance for the Indian stage. Acknowledging the scholarship of Aishika Chakraborty (2010) and Esha Niyogi De (2011), the chapter concludes with a further analysis of Chaki Sircar's dismantling of patriarchy in her seminal dance work Tomari Matir Kanya (Daughter of the Earth, 1985). It also notes her interest in collective agency in Aranya Amrita (1989) and her reworking of mythology through environmental concerns in Krauncha Katha (1993). In her feminist ideology driven rebuttal of institutionalised dance praxis, Chaki Sircar produced local critiques of nationalism in and through the dancing body. Ultimately, this chapter discusses the ways in which Chaki Sircar's new dance, shaped by a simultaneous eschewal and espousal of Indian cultural legacy, offers a complex picture of negotiation, one in which dialectical relationships between culture and the bodies that are situated within it are seen to produce new versions of modernity.

From displacement to cosmopolitanism: dance in post-partition Calcutta

Manjusri Chaki Sircar was born on 28 August 1934 in Baharampur in the Murshidabad district of Bengal to Nanigopal and Charubala Chaki, but her childhood was mostly spent in Pabna (now a district in Bangladesh) where she was brought up along with her brothers and sisters in an atmosphere of much poetry reading, music and dance; as she writes in her autobiography Nritya Rashe Chitta Mamo (2000), she could not remember a time when she did not dance. Manjusri's father Nanigopal Chaki was an educated, cultured and liberal-minded government official and the Chakis' fifteen-roomed joint-family residence in Pabna would, on almost every full-moon night, be the venue for an open-air performance where people would