

# Mythical Beings and Becoming: Emerging Identities of Art Educators in India

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## ABSTRACT

This essay layers the theoretical concepts of myth (Barthes, 1972) and becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) to examine how we might productively read the identity of contemporary Indian art educators<sup>2</sup> in order to understand the landscape of art education in India in a nuanced manner. Interpreting narratives of Indian art educators through the mythical concept of *Laxmana-rekha*, the concepts of myth and becoming are applied to make visible connections between Indian art educators' choice of profession as influenced by social constructions of gender. The concept is also used to understand ways in which we receive and perceive the lessons of cultural mythologies in contemporary contexts of perceiving and constructing perceptions of art education.

## Myth and Becoming in the Context of Indian Art Educator Identity

Vedanta, a school of Hindu philosophy, is often presented in narrative forms that greatly influence Indian ontology throughout history within and beyond Hinduism. These narratives, including those forming culturally significant texts such as the *Upanishads*, *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana*, are read on multiple levels in India, namely philosophical, mythical, and historical. As such, they embody originary stories that often form and influence many of contemporary India's value systems and biases in social roles (Chaube, 1992; Embree, 1988). In this paper, I layer the theoretical concepts of myth (Barthes, 1972) and becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) to examine how we might read the identity of contemporary Indian art educators<sup>3</sup> productively in order to understand the landscape of art education in India in a nuanced

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2 The terms Indian art education and Indian art educators are used in this paper in the context of being in India, not as they are used in North America

3 The terms Indian art education and Indian art educators are used in this paper in context of being in India.

manner. Specifically, I layer these concepts of myth and becoming to make visible some connections between Indian art educators' choice of profession as influenced by social constructions of gender, and the ways in which we receive and perceive the lessons of cultural mythologies in contemporary contexts.

Research and scholarship about Indian art education are mostly focused on fine art history, studio-centered pedagogy (Kantawala, 2007, 2012), and policy perspectives focused on social development, iterations of Indian aesthetics, and revitalization of traditional crafts (Vatsyayan & Chattopadhyaya, 2009; Maira, 2005; Sudhir, 2005; Vatsyayan, 1972, 1999). These avenues of inquiry have been traveled so regularly that they have almost become originary stories of Indian art education. Existing research presents stories of learning for Indian art educators working in K-12 and other educational settings, as well as stories about art education practice and inquiry in India. However, such research is rarely written from the point of view of the practicing art educator in India. There are stories about what these art educators do or should do, but tell little about who they are, or why they do what they do. I argue that these overlooked perspectives are significant to understand as a just representation of the voices of those in whose interests such research is conducted, and to better understand:

- \* how people have come to practice in the field, in order to recruit dedicated art educators more effectively in the future, and
- \* how we might think more critically and sensitively about professional development and support systems needed by these practitioners.

To synopsise: in this paper I layer my understanding of the theoretical ideas of myth (Barthes, 1972) and becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) with an examination of how mythical ideas become social action in Indian philosophical and social systems. I do this with a view to unsettle originary stories of being or practice that have become

naturalized. My references to Indian social systems rely on my lived experience and insider understanding of enacted social hierarchies of gender, caste, and economic class that I interpret as myth becoming social action. I provide a brief literature review of how an example of the writing of gender roles in Indian mythology is still being examined. I juxtapose this layering with narratives emerging from interviews with research participants in a case study I conducted in urban India, bringing focus to how social mores arising from originary stories affect professional choices in the participants' lives. I conclude the paper with an analysis of possible impact of such readings on recruitment, and recommendations for how this analysis might be used by researchers and teachers within art education in, and beyond, an Indian context.

### **Mythical Beings and Originary Stories**

Roland Barthes explained myth as a system of communication, not defined by its object lesson, but by the "way it utters its message" (Barthes, 1972, p. 109), a reflection of social usage of ideas. Thus, understanding myth as a value rather than a truth, Barthes posited that myth is "a double system...its point of departure...constituted by the arrival of its meaning" (1972, p. 123). This means that social value systems cannot be read as static histories that are neutral and completed, nor as what Barthes called "frozen speech," (1972, p. 124) pretending to be neutral even as the systems they represent are renewed and restored across their original time and place. One of Barthes' motivations in studying the concept of myth was to examine the ways in which it was received, to see how it transforms ideas into what we come to understand as being natural, preternatural or obvious. As such, we might understand a motivation to semiotically analyze myths as a desire to trace and deconstruct relationships between form and meaning, between two forms of myth, and so on. Scholars in art and visual culture education have effectively employed the study of myths and mythology through methodologies such as semiotic analysis and feminist readings, and to explore the relationships between origins of form and their meanings, and the naturalization of values

in society and in the field of art education (Bowers, 1990; Garber, 1992; Keifer-Boyd & Smith-Shank, 2006; Metcalf & Smith-Shank, 2001; Smith-Shank, 2001; Smith-Shank & Schwiebert, 2000).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in articulating the concept of becoming, address a concern similar to Barthes's about the way meaning and identity are understood as being a function of the past, and as being completed rather than a constant process of re-evaluation and confirmation. While Barthes (1972) invites us to revisit assumptions of the obvious in cultural mores and meanings, Deleuze and Guattari (1987), with the idea of becoming, encourage us to recognize how we reframe and re-interpret that which is considered obvious and naturalized through recognizing our own changing selves. Reciprocally, Deleuze and Guattari also invite us to explore how our re-framing and re-interpretation of what we deem obvious and natural can help us perceive ourselves not as beings – fixed cultural identities – but as evolving personifications of cultural value systems that are, productively, always in process. In explaining the concept of becoming as intrinsic change, Deleuze and Guattari carefully distinguish the concept of becoming from resemblance and imitation, from an evolution of one thing into something else, and from a reductive expression of relationship between things. Instead, they clarify that becoming concerns alliance rather than filiation: “a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also...it has no term, since its term exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first” (p. 238). Furthermore, they caution that,

It is always possible to try to explain these blocks of becoming by a correspondence between two relations, but to do so certainly impoverishes the phenomenon under study. Must it not be admitted that myth, as a frame of classification, is quite incapable of registering these becomings, which are more like fragments of tales? (p. 238)

Taking up this contention of Deleuze and Guattari, I examine how Indian myths might be read not only semiotically to analyze the myths themselves as historical philosophical systems, and as one form seen

in relation to another, but also in how they relate to the ways that art educators in India come to consolidate their personal and professional experiences and influences into professional belief systems; in other words, the becomings of Indian culture and identity of art educators.

## **Gendered Explorations of *Laxmana-rekha*, Myth and Becoming**

Here I explore the mythological idea of *Laxmana-rekha* as a lens through which to read gendered aspects of an Indian art educator's identity. First, I will describe the myth and its importance in contemporary Indian value-systems.

### **Myth: The *Laxmana-rekha* in the *Ramayana***

The *Ramayana*, along with the *Mahabharata*, is an important mythological text shaping and guiding popular beliefs and practices of Hindu culture, as these texts describe and explain the philosophical beliefs, and code of conduct that Hindus should follow by laying out abstract philosophical concepts and rituals in context of lived human experience. The *Ramayana* is read by different readers as historical account as well as fable and allegory, not unlike religious literature in many cultures. Consequently, its stories have helped form the cultural beliefs of India over time irrespective of religious affiliation. One of the concepts received from this text into the Indian imaginary is that of the *Laxmana-rekha*: literally, a line or boundary drawn by Laxmana, brother to the exiled king Rama. Philosophically, the *Ramayana* is a treatise on moral duty and action, and outlines the ancient Hindu worldview of social organization and function. It is symbolic of human ideals in thought and action. From some perspectives, it is interpreted as a record of historical characters and events narrated in fictive form so that history has become myth; for others the inverse is true (Arni, 2011; Doniger, 2004; Pattanaik, 2003). At a basic level, the *Ramayana* is a sophisticated fairy tale poem of good versus evil. It is a narrative of the life of King Rama, his wife Sita, their families, and their exemplary lives fulfilling social roles and meeting moral challenges that they eventually triumph over, even to their own personal loss.

In the course of the story, Rama, Sita and Rama's devoted younger brother Laxmana were exiled to fourteen years in the wilderness. One day, Sita saw a golden deer frolicking in the jungle near their hut, and seeing its beauty desired to have it as her own. On her request, Rama left to find the magical deer. In his absence, Rama left Sita under the protective care of his brother Laxmana. Time passed but Rama did not return; then Sita heard a distant cry for help. Alarmed and concerned for his safety, Sita commanded Laxmana to go find and aid his brother. Laxmana staunchly refused since he had promised his brother he would not leave Sita alone and unprotected. Her considerable distress finally persuaded him to go investigate the matter but to keep his promise, Laxmana drew a magical boundary line forming a protective circle around their hut. This protective boundary is called the *Laxmana-rekha*. He warned Sita that so long as she stayed inside this marked boundary she would be safe because anyone trying to step inside to reach her would be instantly consumed by fire. However, if she voluntarily stepped outside of that line, she would no longer be protected, ergo safe. Soon after Laxmana's departure it came about that Sita was lured out beyond that line by her good intentions to give alms to an ascetic. This ascetic however was really a demon king in disguise, and he had conjured the golden deer as a ruse to lure Rama and Laxmana away from Sita because he desired her. As soon as she stepped beyond her marked boundary, the demon king kidnapped her and imprisoned her in his island kingdom. This transgression led to all kinds of trouble including a great war of good against evil where good, personified by Rama, ultimately won though at a heavy price. This price included Sita's purity and faithfulness to Rama being questioned, and her subsequent abandonment by Rama since she was no longer trusted by the people to whom he owed first allegiance as their king. The justification for his abandonment of her was that his duty as a ruler superseded his personal desires and allegiance as a husband.

Sita serves as a personification of perfect Indian womanhood – a devoted, obedient, and self-sacrificing daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, and mother; while Rama is a personification of the perfect Indian

man despite his failure to defend and stand-up for his wife in the face of accusations against her faithfulness to him. These idealizations are deeply contested in contemporary Indian culture, especially in literature and visual culture (Arni, 2011; Malani, 2004; Mani Rathnam, 2010; Paley, 2009). Such contestation of gendered roles and expectations in theory match the reality that in India, expectations of social behaviors of men and women often coincide with the idea of the *Laxmana-rekha* as a set boundary of "good" actions and behaviors, and the belief that rules and limits set for what women can and cannot do are in their own interest and for their protection. The intellectual separation of myth and scholarship might be quite explicit in contemporary India's consumption of the *Ramayana* and its lessons (Arni, 2011; Malani, 2004; Paley, 2009; Patel, 2010). However, the archetype of Sita continues to influence the social mores of desirable and noble Indian womanhood, and the archetype of Rama, that of a desirable and noble Indian male. They influence the roles that men and women continue to play towards being good sons and daughters and husbands and wives, and in their choosing of who they are, consciously and unconsciously

The idea of the *Laxmana-rekha*, and the role of Sita in the *Ramayana* in context of gendered morality has been scrutinized across disciplines. For example, Nina Paley's film *Sita Sings the Blues* (Paley, 2009) explores Sita's viewpoint of the *Ramayana* in parallel with Paley's own husband's ending of their relationship. The film, set entirely to jazz and blues music, revisits an episode in the *Ramayana* from the contemporary perspective of a woman of the Indian diaspora and calls for justice and equal treatment of the women in the myth and in real life. Arni (2011) writes an illustrated book telling the story from her perspective, making the story not so much about morality and duty and character of men and women, but more about the fallout of war, the need for compassion and justice for women and children, and a call to revisit the grounds upon which the characteristics of integrity are defined. The *Laxmana-rekha* itself has been written about at length in feminist and women's studies (Joshi, 2001; Kohli, 2012; Mathur, 2006; Puniyani, 2013). The idea of marked lines of permission, acceptance,

and legitimacy in contexts of art and craft have been explored, though not in specific reference to *Laxmana-rekha*, in literature on Indian artistic traditions ( Vatsyayan & Chattopadhyaya, 2009; Maira, 2005, 2006; Vatsyayan, 1999).

Several scholars including Jauhola (2010), Grace (2013), and Brodbeck (2009) have written about the idea of becoming (something else) in the context of gender specifically using references of mythology in Asian and South Asian cultures. Myth and becoming as theoretical concepts have been skillfully employed in art education literature including towards suggesting best practices in museum education (Garoian, 2001), in understanding creativity in early childhood (Fulkova & Tipton, 2011; McClure, 2011), and in defense of social justice in art education research (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013).

In the next section, I explore the influence of the *Laxmana-rekha*, and the *Ramayana* as an aspect of identity for Indian art educators in my analysis of the language several of my participants used in describing their own locations in the profession.

### **Tales of Origin: Being Indian as Daughters, Wives, Sons, Husbands, and Art Educators**

Over the course of two years, I interviewed seventeen educators teaching art classes in studio, history and theory, and teacher preparation across various educational settings including K-12, higher education, and museum and community settings in two metropolitan cities in India. The interviews were based on voluntary participation in the study. Through them, I examined the motivations and circumstances of entry into the profession, pedagogical practices and teaching philosophies, and the motivations and challenges encountered that affected participants' presence and practice in the field. Statistically, the ratio of men to women employed in the institutions I visited was biased in favor of women in at least two locations out of five. Although the gender ratio was not quite so imbalanced in these institutions as it was in my study, only three of the seventeen voluntary participants in the study were men. This skewed gender ratio is reflected in the

presentation of my analysis, and I make this clear in the interest of transparency.

The stories that participants Aarti, Gauri, Meera, Ayesha, Dana, Prita, Annie, Vijay, Adil and John<sup>4</sup> shared about how and why they entered the field indicate the presence of spoken and unspoken influence of filial and spousal duty. For example, Aarti sketched an abridged trajectory of her life from her childhood to marriage in Southern India to several years lived in Northern India before returning to her city of origin to teach in an institution of higher education for women only. As she spoke, I realized that although she quit her studio practice to move north with her husband for his job as a university professor, she conflated the move for his job as her own. "*I was posted in three different places [emphasis added] but I taught in three different colleges,*" she shared. She reminisced with a smile: "I was quite happy painting at home. It was purely a twist of fate that led to me to get my PhD; maybe I was destined to come back here and teach someday." She added, " If not for my husband's encouragement to go ahead and pursue my desire to do research and teach, I don't think I would have been doing this." Ayesha and Gauri, Meera, Pritha, Annie, and Dana echo the "permission" they received from their fathers in entering the field of art. Each of them used the terms "allowed" and "he let me" to describe parental blessing—specifically patriarchal blessing—in following a career in the arts. While Ayesha, Riya, Meera, and Gauri mentioned their mothers having a role in influencing their interest in the arts, mostly through art lessons with private tutors and traditional crafts learned at home, Riya was the only participant who mentioned receiving "encouragement," rather than permission, from her mother to pursue art as a career; later in the interview I learned that Riya came from a single parent home.

Going on to speak of the college students she currently teaches, Aarti said,

we don't see many artists emerging out of here; for the past ten years I've been struggling against this...you can count about five

<sup>4</sup> All names have been changed to protect participant identities.

to six students who are practicing artists no more. We are a little stronger in design; there are quite a few of us in the workforce there. It pays more, so girls get permission to work in design . . . . Once they [fine art students] leave college they need a studio space or a place where they can paint or practice, and that is a problem....Over a period of time I find that even very talented students drop out on the way and only five or six are able to sustain any kind of practice even if they are attached to it. Then if they begin to sell work perhaps they can continue to make work...you know it's very hard to ask fathers and husbands to support you for a long time in that.

I emphasize here that it is not just the financial support of a professional practice that I bring focus upon, since this might be a matter of economic reality; rather it is the necessity for adult women to obtain patriarchal permission not only to work but to maintain their creative practice professionally. I perceive this to be a socio-cultural stagnation, an echo of the myth of the *Laxmana-rekha* as a marker of appropriate gender roles. Mathur (2006) echoes this idea as she notes that for the Indian woman, the home is a threshold, the crossing outside of which is a transgression that results in some loss of respectability in a patriarchal world (p. 86).

My own story included negotiating and receiving patriarchal permission to pursue a fine arts degree in college, although I was not allowed to join a painting program since there were doubts about the moral and economic payoffs in the latter as a socially respectable profession. As I sat opposite Aarti in her office, looking outside the window at "those girls" who lived by a series of permissions, I felt, as an Indian woman, a dividing conflict between guilt, relief, and vague embarrassment at having gotten permission from my own father to pursue my dreams and was reminded of my freedom from any husband whose permission I needed to seek.

Gauri also shared that although she is trying to find balance in juggling her roles as wife, mother, artist, and teacher, she is mostly the one compromising to spend enough time at home "because my hus-

band is in advertising and his hours are uncompromising." For her, it is not a question of who earns more, though he certainly does that. "It's just easier all around if I do it," she said, "though it's difficult and one can't find balance [between work and home] all the time; when it works it's wonderful." Aarti described making time each night to paint from 10:00 pm till about 1:00 am because she can't imagine not being able to paint. Every single one of these female participants acknowledged (without being asked) their luck in having fathers, husbands, in-laws, and other patriarchal figures who allow them to be who they need to be, and to do what they need to do. Pritha and Annie (both single women in their mid-twenties) confirmed, upon questioning, that they teach at a co-educational institution because their fathers "allowed it" since "the way they see it, teaching is a lot more respectable and trustworthy as a profession than working in advertising or in the art world." However, they both felt that their male peers within that institution do not take them seriously as professionals, "because we're girls [sic], and young ones on top of that. They treat us like we're still students, sometimes, although we've both been teaching here for three years now—same as two of our male colleagues." Annie added, "Even they treat us like we're their juniors." She shook her head, "It's quite frustrating because these are good people and I don't know if they realize they are undermining us in this way."

The stories shared with me revealed that socially imposed limitations about the consideration of art and art education as appropriate professions and choice of career apply to men as well as women. Gauri, for example, shared that her father worked as a photographer in his youth but had to get "a proper engineering job" and take up photography as a hobby in order to "properly" support his family. Vijay, Adil, and John, the three male participants in my study, all teaching in higher education programs, shared stories that included frustrated dreams of pursuing careers as studio artists. These limitations arose from family obligations where they, as males, "were expected to" provide for and support their families. "As a man, one has to prove that one is stable and able to provide" said Adil, "so I got into teaching. I came to love it later, but initially I was quite bitter at having to settle."

He laughed, "It really affected how I taught and treated myself for the first few years." John's story held similar tones, as he explained, "I found teaching was the most safe job since as the son I have to support my parents. I come from a middle class family [and got] good grades . . . [my] taking up arts was shocking to them.... Luckily I was able to do my master's and get a university job so now there is more respect." I found these reports interesting since, as Mathur (2006) notes, in contrast to women, traditionally when men have chosen to transgress the threshold of expected norms of behavior they have been praised and honored. Mathur gives the cases of Siddharta, Mahavira, and Tulsidas as examples, who went on to found Buddhism, Jainism, and write the *Ramayana* respectively (p. 86). However, the halting speech, the sometimes embarrassed, sometimes resentful sharing of the personal choices of Adil and John negate this myth that the experience of men is more privileged over that of women in all things, and that their choices are, by default, less problematic. In this case at least, it did not seem so.

Vijay, a Jesuit priest teaching in a visual communication program at a parochial college, was the only one of the three men whose family had an art and education background. He shared that he came from a family of artists and teachers, that this was his heritage, although his father taught "English and history . . . and proper subjects" (emphasis added). Vijay's tone held pleasure while telling this story. He was clearly proud of the heritage of artistry in his family that had been recognized by the local royalty. Even though he mentioned that female members of his family were also artists, he did not mention that they were also recognized as being a part of this heritage by the community in the same way that the men were. Talking about his own educational journey that brought him to his current position, Vijay recounted,

Since I joined the Jesuit order, I *did not have the place to think* [emphasis added] that I would like to be an artist or anything . . . I guess I did know that I felt I must do something in this line: but since it was in my blood and I was doing other things—it never

could . . . well. . . . there was not too much opportunity . . . but I tried . . . well . . . meanwhile . . .

His speech faltered; after a few minutes he continued in a firmer tone,

There were other responsibilities that didn't allow me to continue with that, so I continued with English, Communication, etc. And then, later, since they [the institution] needed someone to teach art and work in the communication department, I *could* come back and do this.

Both Vijay and John expressed that they had chosen bachelorhood, in some part, because they did not feel they could adequately support a family without "forcing" their spouses to have to work. "There is no status nor money in this line," John laughed, "and how many women will be looking for that in a prospective husband, yes?"

### Mythical Boundaries as Consciously Encountered Thresholds

The men and women I interviewed are intelligent, accomplished, learned, and dedicated art educators. Ten out of seventeen participants had significant tales of regret and compromise as their origin stories in becoming art education professionals. These ordinary stories embody confused remixes of multiple mythologies enshrined and advocated as traditional Indian culture struggling with more modern social values. For example, Vedanta values the teacher as an embodiment of the divine, a representation of the highest caste in the Hinduverse—the Brahmin—whereas a postcolonial, corporate-friendly culture claims that those who cannot do, teach. This particular dilemma of the role of the teacher clashes with the role of the artist and craftsman, who is valued and admired for skill but is designated as a caste of tradespersons—the Vaishyas—the third in a hierarchy of four castes. While the caste system is not rigidly adhered to in contemporary India, its associated stigmas and honors linger in perceptions of professions till today in common practice. For instance, in the postcolonial society with the remnants of Victorian values that characterizes India today, artists are often perceived as being morally

ambiguous and lacking the traditional value and application of art and craft in the design and ritual of everyday life ( Vatsyayan & Chatopadhyaya, 2009; Eck, 1998; Maira, 2006).

India is a postcolonial society re-imagining definitions of the traditions and contemporaneity of its multiple cultures. Reading the originary stories of my research participants shared above in juxtaposition with clashing traditional and colonial perceptions of the artist and of the teacher in society reveals that perceptions of art education as a desirable and noble profession are quite confused. This is especially true because art education lies as a borderland between the more fully formed professional identities of artist and teacher, at least from the perspective of social understanding. Layer onto this gendered social expectations, both traditional and modern: The interview excerpts shared in this essay reveal that the men are expected to be protectors, the primary providers and decision makers, self-sacrificing in the interests of the family, such as in Adil's case and in the case of Gauri's father, and in Vijay's expression that he did not have the space to think of being an artist, primarily. Yet, according to what Gauri, Aarthi, John, and Vijay shared, they are expected to be in control of the women and children they are responsible for. According to mythical descriptions such as those of Sita's character, women are expected to be nurturers, revered as embodiments of goddess power—in theory they are extolled as creators and caretakers of family and society, and therefore powerful. This is evident in everyday life and rhetoric in India on a familial level, as well as in popular and visual culture including television and film characters. According to their own experiences that Aarthi, Priitha, and Annie describe above, however, it might be understood that in reality women's prioritization of the home is often interpreted as subservience or a lack of true commitment to their work even as they venture out into professional workspaces.

### **Mythical Boundary Becoming Social Action**

The data I share in this essay illustrates that intellectual understandings in relation to internalized practices of gendered, classed, and

philosophical expectations of social roles form a significant source of conflict in modern and contemporary Indian culture. For example, viewing the gender roles described by the participants through a western or contemporary globalized Indian feminist reading that privileges the equality of an individual (man or woman) leads to reading with skeptical criticism the "permissions" sought and granted by the women. However, a reading through an interpretative lens of Vedanta traditions would value self-sacrifice and denial of the ego in deference to elders and other family structures, since the distinctions of the self from the universal are understood to be illusory or temporal, and individual desire secondary to the communal (Deutsch & Dalvi, 2004; Vivekananda, 2010). In such conflict, Indian culture in contemporary contexts can be understood as a becoming such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe it—a negotiation of internalized acceptance of individual desire as secondary to community desire (such as family) and a contemporary ambition to push personal goals and privilege individual skill and desire. To explore authenticity of culture and Indian-ness, dismissing the *Laxmana-rekha* based on a feminist construction of gender equality based on westernized ideals could be construed as a colonizing act, a rejection of "tradition"; to accept it unquestioningly would be a stagnation of thought and ideology and thus equally inauthentic, and conflicting. With this understanding, the myth of the *Laxmana-rekha* can be reconsidered as a cautionary boundary, the crossing of which leads to a break with social expectations and traditions. By focusing on the decision to cross the boundary, the structure of the boundary itself—and the actions, motivations, and character of that which awaits the crossing of the *Laxmana-rekha*—can be understood as a becoming of teacher identity in terms of how decisions about professional aspirations and practice are taken. With this view one can challenge the static myth that to cross a traditionally defined threshold (such as the gender assigned roles described by the participants) is a transgression that takes away from the dignity and respect due the transgressor. One can also reject the frozen speech type of myth (Barthes, 1972, p 124) that, ideologically speaking, bestows respect to teachers while not equitably respect-

ing artisans and artists as teachers. As such, I interpret that these iterations of, and tentative transgressions from, artist and teacher identity in India have become mythical in nature.

Earlier in this essay I said that with the idea of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) encourage us to recognize how we reframe and re-interpret that which is considered obvious and naturalized through recognizing our own changing selves. In reading such teacher identity as mythical and refocusing on what it is becoming, one can go beyond binaries of the way things were versus what is valued now, and instead pay attention to what is happening in the now and what it might mean to the individual and to the profession. I suggest that this is a mythical becoming. Not only would this be a more holistic approach, but also, such a critical reading enables a respectful consideration of traditional cultural ideas in dialogue with contemporary ones by unseating the neutrality and naturalization of the teachers' narratives.

### **Becoming Indian Art Educators**

Authors writing on multicultural art education and policy researchers looking to build training and professional development programs in India might find the idea of mythical becoming useful as they seek to understand the socio-cultural factors that influence Indian art educators, and to consider what kinds of support and advocacy might be needed to make the field more attractive to professionals and retention of teachers more enthusiastic. As I explained at the end of the previous section, the idea of mythical becoming refers to a reframing of naturalized beliefs and actions in order to analyze our changing selves and the aspirations, actions, and beliefs of these changing selves – a critical scrutiny of the relationship between the beliefs we inherit, what we aspire to do in current contexts, and the actual actions we perform in practice. Employing this idea of revising the identity of Indian artists and art teachers as mythical beings –static, frozen identities connected to static, frozen ideas of what they should be – to more dynamic becomings of teacher identity, might

also allow a new way to consider how traditional and contemporary art of India and South Asia might be taught more critically. In India and abroad, rather than teach about Indian art in artificial divisions of past tradition and contemporary modernity, or of art and craft, a mythical becoming might allow a fresh perspective on continuity, and a reciprocity of voice in an east-west conversation, where cultures juxtapose their ways of thinking and doing in discussion and debate, rather than learn “facts” about one another as givens, as comparisons and contrasts.

Another context I look to in considering the application of this idea involves the nationalized curriculum in India that calls for teaching traditional histories and practices of Indian arts and crafts in an overall context of westernized classrooms and curricula. Policy and curriculum directives in India today instruct art educators to value traditional arts and crafts (NCERT, n.d.), even as artisans and art teachers remain undervalued as professionals in society. These conditions may be identified as a *Laxmana-rekha* that can be studied and debated as mythical, to examine how change might result in a becoming for artisans and craftspersons as art educators, and reciprocally, for art teachers becoming artists and craftspersons. As art educators, in India and abroad, we can purposefully ponder the challenges we encounter and the weight and consequences of the decisions we make to meet them from the perspective of identifying the mythical preconceptions that define curriculum and policy. Doing so can help us discuss and strategically act upon what these definitions and decisions mean to who we are becoming—as actors within specific national, cultural, and geographical fields—and as disciplined professionals, and to explore how we want to expand these boundaries. This might help us to critically question balances of power in professional development choice, opportunity, and motivation.

### **In Conclusion**

Without a consideration of the location, identity, motivations, and struggles of practicing art educators, art education policy and pro-

gramming in India today would appear to be at cross purposes with its own goals,= and sense of social belonging. Policy and programming offer a variety of services with end goals (outcomes) and end users (students) in mind, but without a considered understanding of those who actually provide the service (art educators). In other words, policy and programming at institutional levels in India have created an admirable array of opportunities for the professional development of artists and craftspeople wishing to teach their skills, as well as for teachers wishing to utilize the power of the arts in their repertoire. However, more research is needed on critical engagements with and by art teachers in India, both in K-12, higher education, and other educational settings. Such research is needed in order to gauge the identity and form of the profession and its value in contemporary Indian education, as well as on its role in redefining what is taught about Indian culture and its traditions. These considerations might be used to good effect to recruit dedicated and critical art educators from art, education, and social work programs. They can also be used in liberal arts and general education courses, to better educate the next generation about how to rethink static and placid understandings of Indian culture and its expressions in art and crafts. Importantly, it can serve as an argument for the importance of studying critical art education in schools, and promoting a mindset that perceives the teaching of arts and craft not only as a respectable, but also a desirable and valued profession.

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