



Evolving Expression: exploring Kathak through Modernist and Psychological Lens

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamic evolution and contemporary significance of Kathak, a prominent Indian classical dance form, through an integrated framework encompassing Modernist, Psychological, and Resilience perspectives. By tracing historical transformations and analysing the shifting depiction of narratives and characters, the research investigates how Kathak adapts to socio-cultural changes while retaining its traditional roots. A particular focus is placed on the reinterpretation of the Ashta-Nayikas, the eight archetypal heroines, through the lens of modern psychology, revealing new dimensions of feminine identity and emotional expression. Employing qualitative methodologies such as media analysis and in-depth interviews with practitioners, the study uncovers how Kathak artists navigate modernization, negotiate tradition, and foster resilience in the face of changing societal expectations. Ultimately, this research highlights the intricate interplay between socio-cultural psychology, mental health, and resilience, offering valuable insights into the enduring relevance of Indian classical dance in contemporary society.

Keywords: Resilience, Tradition, Modernity, Kathak, Ashta-Nayika, Socio-cultural psychology

INTRODUCTION

India's rich tradition of classical dance is deeply rooted in ancient texts like the *Natyasastra* by Bharata Muni. It encompasses various styles, including Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, and Sattriya. Dance, divided into *Natya* and *Nritta*, expresses cultural narratives, emotions, and spirituality, evolving through centuries as a vibrant symbol of India's cultural heritage.

The Kathak dance form originated from the Kathak community of North India and was initially associated with storytelling within Hindu temples, depicting tales from Hindu scriptures like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. During the Mughal rule, Kathak gained

popularity and transitioned from temples to royal courts, losing its religious connotations. It flourished as a favorite pastime in the courts under Mughal influence.

However, during the British colonial era, Kathak and other regional dance styles were lumped together as "nautch" and associated with low culture and immorality, leading to stigma and social reform movements against these dance forms. The dancers, once esteemed in royal courts, were marginalized and stigmatized as prostitutes, which contributed to the decline in the status of classical dance and tarnished the reputation of women associated with these art forms.

The post-independence revival of classical dance in India led to the establishment of national cultural Akademies in 1953, notably the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi. This institution promoted the traditional gurukul system, dominated by male Kathak masters like Shambhu, Acchan, and Birju Maharaj, often overshadowing female pioneers. Kathak adheres closely to Bharath Muni's rules in the "Natyashastra," but modernist and feminist perspectives, seen in Aditi Mangaldas's fusion of Kathak with contemporary dance, challenge traditional norms. Similarly, Mrinalini Sarabhai's Darpana Academy addressed societal issues through innovative productions like "Forbidden" and "Manushya," advocating for women's empowerment and social justice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foster's research delves into the intricate relationship between dance and gender roles, highlighting how different forms of dance can either reinforce traditional gender stereotypes or provide opportunities for challenging and expressing feminist ideals.

In many classical dance forms, such as ballet, there is often a strong emphasis on gender-specific roles and movements. Female dancers are typically portrayed as delicate and graceful, while male dancers are often expected to be strong and authoritative. These gendered expectations can perpetuate traditional notions of femininity and masculinity, reinforcing societal norms that may limit individual expression and agency.

However, modern dance forms have increasingly provided a platform for artists to subvert these traditional gender roles and explore alternative expressions of identity. Choreographers and performers are pushing boundaries by incorporating elements of gender ambiguity, fluidity, and non-conformity into their work. Through innovative choreography and movement vocabulary, they challenge the notion that dance must adhere to rigid gender binaries. Moreover, dance can be a powerful tool for feminist discourse and empowerment. By showcasing diverse bodies and experiences on stage, dancers can challenge dominant narratives and highlight issues such as body positivity, consent, and gender equality. Through their performances, they not only entertain but also provoke thought and inspire action, contributing to larger conversations about gender justice and social change.

Ultimately, Foster's research underscores the dual nature of dance: while it can perpetuate conventional gender norms, it also has the potential to serve as a powerful vehicle for feminist expression and empowerment. By acknowledging this complexity and embracing the transformative potential of dance, we can continue to push boundaries and create more inclusive and equitable spaces within the dance community and beyond. (Foster, S. 1997).

The article navigates the intriguing fusion of modernity with Kathak, a classical Indian dance form, within the context of India's shifting cultural landscape. It moves away from a Western-centric lens to embrace a more global perspective, acknowledging the intersection of traditional art forms with contemporary influences. Central to the discussion is India's emergence in the public sphere, particularly in the wake of anti-colonial movements and the subsequent waves of globalization. These socio-political shifts have not only redefined India's position on the world stage but have also influenced the evolution of its cultural expressions. Within this framework, the evolution of Kathak is explored, tracing its journey through changing patronage structures and the complexities of postcolonial identity. Kathak, once confined to royal courts and elite circles, has adapted to new audiences and contexts, reflecting broader societal changes. A key concept introduced is "public modernity" by Arjun Appadurai, which encapsulates the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation within the public sphere. This notion emphasizes the cultural contestation that arises as traditional forms encounter the forces of globalization and identity politics Chakraborty, P. (2006).

This paper explores the dynamic shifts within the realm of Kathak dance, a classical Indian dance form, against the backdrop of globalization and evolving audience tastes. It aims to scrutinize how Kathak has navigated through changing landscapes, both in terms of market demands and artistic expression. At its core, the paper raises critical inquiries regarding the nature of innovation within Kathak choreography. It contemplates whether the emergence of novel choreographic styles signifies a departure towards individualistic expressions, influenced by global trends and personal narratives. Additionally, it probes whether these innovations seek to redefine the notion of "Indianness" within the context of Kathak or rather contribute to a broader narrative of cultural pluralism and transnationalism.

Central to the discussion is the exploration of genre hybridity within Kathak performances. This phenomenon reflects the multifaceted identities of the performers, as they navigate through diverse cultural influences and artistic traditions. By examining the fusion of Kathak with other dance forms or artistic disciplines, the paper seeks to unravel the complexities of identity formation and cultural negotiation within the contemporary Kathak landscape. Through a multidimensional analysis, the paper aims to shed light on the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity, individualism and cultural heritage, and globalization and local identity within Kathak dance. Ultimately, it endeavors to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Kathak continues to evolve as a vibrant and dynamic art form in the face of globalization and cultural transformation. Chakraborty, P. (2006)

Future exploration in the intersection of dance and sexual expression should focus on nuanced understandings of power dynamics, the impact of societal constructs on individual and collective sexual identities in dance, and the potential for transformative or liberating experiences. Interdisciplinary approaches and diverse methodologies will continue to enrich this complex field of study. Hana, J.

Aditi Mangaldas, a trailblazer in the world of Kathak, ingeniously melds tradition with innovation. In her latest work, "Forbidden," she courageously explores the intricate layers of female sexuality and cultural taboos. Through the language of Kathak, Mangaldas unveils a captivating narrative that challenges societal norms and empowers women's voices. Her choreography breathes new life into classical dance, weaving together mesmerizing movements that evoke both contemplation and awe. "Forbidden" not only

captivates audiences with its mesmerizing performances but also sparks essential conversations about identity, freedom, and the resilience of the human spirit.

The portrayal of diverse female protagonists in Vedic and medieval Indian epics reflects evolving societal perspectives. Contemporary classical dance practitioners and scholars explore gender emancipation within traditional frameworks like *Nayika Bheda*. Eminent characters from mythology are reinterpreted, while depictions of feminine sexual agency prompt nuanced discussions. Twentieth and twenty-first-century dance pieces examine *Gita Govinda's Radha* through varied heroine archetypes Basu, S. (2022).

Feminist scholars like Ananya Chatterjea utilize dance as activism, challenging gender-based violence and inequality. Junidith Hanna's literature review explores dance and sexuality across various contexts, including religion, power dynamics, and social dance. It examines expressions of gender and sexual orientation, addressing issues like awareness, denial, and the conflation of sexuality with promiscuity or nudity. Interdisciplinary approaches, drawing from critical cultural theory, feminism, and post colonialism, analyze dance's role in sexual expression. Methods range from movement analysis to auto ethnography. Future research aims to further explore these intersections and their implications within diverse disciplines. Jennifer Clement, a researcher at the University of South Florida, emphasizes the significance of feminist pedagogical approaches in dance education and performance. She contends that traditional dance training often deprives dancers of essential human experiences and critical thinking skills. The expectations imposed on dancers regarding their body image and lifestyle choices shape both the classroom environment and individual psyches. Professional dancers and aspiring performers alike are compelled to structure their lives around dance, reinforcing a narrow definition of success. Particularly troubling is the pressure on female dancers to conform to a specific body type, typically thin, flexible, and possessing certain aesthetic attributes. This expectation raises concerns about the agency of dancers within the educational and performance spheres. Clément's research highlights the need to reassess dance pedagogy, promoting a more inclusive and empowering approach that prioritizes holistic development over narrow standards of physical appearance and dedication.

OBJECTIVES

- a) Historical shift of this dance from- focusing on understanding the nuances that have emerged over time- This study explores the portrayal of stories, emotions, and individuals throughout history, aligning modernism and psychological theories. It aims to recognize modernist influences on expressive elements in classical dance, particularly Kathak, showcasing its evolution amidst contemporary societal shifts, highlighting tradition's adaptability to changing norms.
- b) Reimagining of *Ashnayika*- Modern reinterpretations of *Ashtanayikas*, the eight primary feminine archetypes in classical Indian dance, transcend traditional boundaries. Contemporary practitioners explore these figures to reflect evolving societal dynamics, offering nuanced portrayals that challenge conventional norms. Through these reinterpretations, they honor the significance of these archetypes while enriching traditional narratives with modern perspectives.

RATIONALE

This research study provides insights into how dance forms contribute to the construction of gender identity and the expression of diverse gender experiences. Analyzing these dance forms through a feminist lens helps understand how they impact body image and self-esteem, particularly for female dancers, and how these factors relate to broader societal beauty standards. By studying dance from this perspective, we can assess its potential as a tool for social change, advocating for gender equality, and challenging harmful practices within dance world. It explores the psychological well-being of Dancers, addressing issues like performance anxiety, body image-related stress, and impact of societal expectations on mental health.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study explores perspectives within classical dance, focusing on the modern reinterpretation of astanayika and gender roles. Key informant interviews provide in-depth insights from experienced dancers in the field. Key informants include Kirti Bhawalkar an artiste with 25 years of experience and Dr. Parimal Phadke, an expert in Bharatanatyam. Secondary data analysis includes a video featuring Kathak dancer Aditi Mangaldas, "Pursuit of Excellence," and Tirath Ram Azad's book. The study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the expertise in classical dance, examining contemporary interpretations and attitudes towards traditional themes and gender roles within the dance community.

Classical dance, rooted in ancient traditions, intertwines storytelling and cultural expression through intricate movements and gestures. Originating with devadasis guided by Brahmin teachers, it evolved as a symbolic form of communication, embodying narratives from epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. Feminist perspectives scrutinize its portrayal of gender roles. This study aims to trace its historical evolution, incorporating modernist influences and psychological concepts. Additionally, it seeks to reinterpret Ashtanayikas, the eight feminine archetypes, reflecting shifting societal dynamics. By exploring contemporary adaptations, it underscores the resilience of tradition amidst evolving norms, enriching classical dance's narrative landscape.

PRIMARY DATA ANALYSIS

Primary data analysis involved the examination and interpretation of data that has been collected first hand, specifically for a particular research study or project.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

A key informant interview is a qualitative research method that involves conducting in-depth interviews with individuals who have specific knowledge or expertise related to the research topic.

- 1) **Kirti Bhawalkar**- She is a kathak exponent, aged, having an experience of almost 25 years in field of classical dance. She owns her kathak dance institute named as “Nrutyanagan” in nashik.
- 2) **Dr. Parimal Phadke**- He is an expert in the field of Bharatnatyam, aged, having an experience of almost. He has been employed at Savitribai Phule Pune University's Department of Performing Arts for thirteen years, and he runs his own performing arts centre.

KIRTI BHWALKAR

The perspective articulated by Kirti Bhawalkar on the relationship between modernity and classical art, particularly within the context of Kathak dance, underscores the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation.

Kirti Bhawalkar embraces the fusion of modernity and tradition in Kathak, demonstrating a profound comprehension of how current notions can be integrated with age-old principles. She champions the amalgamation of traditional roots with innovative ideas, expanding horizons and introducing fresh perspectives while upholding the fundamental ethos of tradition. This methodology entails seamlessly combining contemporary ideologies, advancements, or aesthetics with longstanding customs, fostering an organic development that honors heritage while embracing the contemporary and forthcoming. Kirti Bhawalkar's reinterpretation of Asthanayika highlights its relevance in modern society, addressing gender equality and empowerment. She argues that adapting traditional narratives is essential for navigating contemporary challenges, emphasizing the collective experience of women in love. This evolution challenges stereotypes, showcasing women's adaptability and agency in changing societal norms. Bhawalkar's reimagining fosters a broader transformation of gender perspectives, empowering women to assert their narratives in relationships. Ultimately, the revised Asthanayika reflects a nuanced understanding of tradition's role in shaping modern identities and relationships, contributing to ongoing conversations about gender dynamics and personal empowerment.

Kirti Bhawalkar's narrative highlights the vital link between resilience and mental health in dance. Dancers face both physical and emotional strains, requiring resilience for recovery and adaptation to rigorous training. Mental fortitude is crucial amidst body image scrutiny and intense competition, addressing self-esteem issues and performance anxiety. Building resilience fosters a positive self-image and healthy coping mechanisms. It's essential for enduring setbacks, sustaining motivation, and fostering a supportive dance community. This symbiotic relationship equips dancers to navigate the challenges of their careers, ensuring long-term success and fulfillment in the dance world.

PARIMAL PHADKE-

Dr. Parimal Phadke's groundbreaking approach to Bharatanatyam challenges traditional perceptions by seamlessly integrating modern elements into this classical dance form. His exploration of the Natyashastra reveals a nuanced understanding of tradition, going beyond preservation to actively engage with contemporary dynamics. Phadke's choreography demonstrates a commitment to balancing tradition with modern relevance, fostering a dialogue between the past and present within Indian performing arts.

Dr. Parimal Phadke's methodology is a dedication to cultural sensitivity and societal awareness, extending beyond technical proficiency to encompass broader social discourse. He advocates for a more inclusive and socially conscious approach to classical dance, recognizing its potential impact beyond the stage. Phadke's work prompts a reassessment of Bharatanatyam, presenting it as a dynamic and evolving art form actively participating in societal dialogue. Dr. Parimal Phadke's emphasis on balance between tradition and modernity highlights classical dance form's capacity for cultural exchange and enrichment while remaining rooted in its historical foundations. He broadens the artistic language of Indian

classical dance, making it accessible to diverse audiences and encouraging practitioners to consider its relevance amidst cultural transformations.

Furthermore, Dr. Parimal Phadke's narrative illuminates the challenges faced by classical dancers, emphasizing the importance of resilience and mental well-being in their journey. His advocacy for addressing evolving difficulties and nurturing dancers' holistic needs aligns with a broader shift towards inclusivity and accessibility in Indian classical dance.

a) SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

Secondary data analysis refers to the process of analyzing data that has been collected by someone else for a different purpose.

ADITI MANGALDAS: Analysis based on YouTube interview named as pursuit of excellence Pursuit of excellence is an interview series with classical dance maestros of India in which Aditi Mangaldas is a kathak exponent and choreographer- Exploring dance, especially within traditional Indian styles such as Kathak, reveals a fascinating blend of historical legacies and modern adaptations. Trailblazers like Rukhmini Devi Arundale challenged entrenched societal norms, opening doors for female dancers to assert themselves, express their stories, and find empowerment in a field traditionally dominated by men. Aditi Mangaldas, a contemporary Kathak exponent, embodies this evolution by infusing traditional Kathak with innovative elements, providing a platform for feminine narratives and perspectives. Through works like "Nirbhaya," Mangaldas symbolizes a departure towards inclusivity, allowing for diverse stories and expressions, in line with feminist principles in dance.

The progression of Kathak towards a more fluid and adaptive form reflects a feminist outlook, breaking away from conventional boundaries and questioning gender roles. Mangaldas' fusion of classical themes, such as Ashtanayika, with contemporary movements and storytelling techniques, showcases how dance can bridge the gap between cultural heritage and modern experiences, making traditional concepts relevant and accessible today. This analysis highlights dance's pivotal role in shaping and mirroring societal attitudes towards gender and identity, stressing the significance of self-expression, empowerment, and the ongoing dialogue between tradition and innovation.

KATHAK DARPAN: Kathak Darpan" by Tirath Ram Aazad is a seminal work in Indian classical dance, particularly Kathak, providing a thorough examination of its history, techniques, and the concept of Ashtanayika. The book delves into the psychological and feminist dimensions of Ashtanayika, offering profound insights into these archetypal female characters. Each Ashtanayika represents a spectrum of emotions and experiences, from celebrating autonomy to navigating conflicts in relationships. By portraying women as assertive and emotionally complex beings, the book challenges traditional gender norms. Characters like Svadhinapatika showcase individuality and resilience, transcending societal expectations. Themes of betrayal and separation not only depict emotional pain but also dismantle stereotypes about women's depth of emotion. The intersection of psychological and feminist perspectives enriches our understanding of Ashtanayika, revealing the intricacies of their emotions and relationships and highlighting their cultural and artistic significance in classical Indian arts like kathak and bharatnatyam.

Dancers transcend conventional expression, embodying contemporary relevance through artistry that weaves the tapestry of our lives into their movements. They reinterpret teachings from mentors, infusing authenticity into narratives that resonate deeply in today's world. Achieving equilibrium involves tapping into their inner child for wisdom on balance and emotional expression. While technically adept, the essence lies in experiencing and conveying emotional nuances. This journey of self-discovery merges disciplined training with genuine emotional connection, birthing compelling performances.

The evolution of dance embraces new trends, allowing contemporary influences to shape the art's landscape. Dancers serve as conduits for the zeitgeist, embodying and expressing these influences. Resilience and coping strategies are essential in the unpredictable dance world, demanding both physical prowess and mental fortitude. Training programs must nurture the body and mind, preparing dancers to face adversity with grace.

The mold of the contemporary dancer extends beyond technical proficiency to encompass adaptability, emotional intelligence, and commitment to the transformative power of their craft. They become skilled performers and resilient individuals, capable of navigating the dynamic artistic landscapes.

RESULTS

This study reveals that Indian classical dance, particularly Kathak, is undergoing significant transformation as it navigates the intersection of tradition and modernity. Through in-depth interviews with key informants such as Kathak exponent Kirti Bhawalkar and Bharatanatyam expert Dr. Parimal Phadke, as well as secondary analyses of works by Aditi Mangaldas and Tirath Ram Aazad, several key themes emerge:

1. Integration of Tradition and Innovation:

Practitioners like Kirti Bhawalkar advocate for a harmonious blend of traditional values and contemporary ideas within Kathak. This approach not only preserves the dance's historical essence but also ensures its ongoing relevance. The reinterpretation of the Ashta-Nayika archetypes reflects a shift towards addressing modern issues such as gender equality, empowerment, and the collective experiences of women, challenging established stereotypes and expanding the narrative landscape.

2. Resilience and Mental Health:

Both Bhawalkar and Phadke emphasize the crucial role of resilience in the lives of classical dancers. Dancers face physical and emotional challenges, including body image pressures and performance anxiety. Building resilience is essential for coping with setbacks, maintaining motivation, and nurturing a supportive community, thereby promoting both mental well-being and sustained artistic growth.

3. Evolving Gender Roles and Societal Dialogue:

Contemporary artists like Aditi Mangaldas use Kathak as a platform for feminist expression and social commentary. By integrating innovative choreography and storytelling, they make traditional forms accessible and meaningful in today's context, fostering inclusivity and challenging conventional gender roles.

4. Psychological and Feminist Reinterpretations:

Texts like "Kathak Darpan" highlight the psychological depth and feminist dimensions of classical archetypes, portraying women as autonomous and emotionally complex. This enriches the understanding of Kathak's characters and themes, aligning them with contemporary perspectives on identity and relationships.

5. Adaptability and Emotional Intelligence:

Modern classical dancers are not only technically proficient but also adaptable and emotionally intelligent. Their ability to merge disciplined training with authentic emotional expression enables them to navigate the evolving artistic landscape and remain resilient amidst change

DISCUSSION

The limitation of exclusively interviewing upper-class and caste individuals in historical research creates a gap in understanding diverse perspectives. To address this, historians should explore a wide range of historical texts reflecting various social groups, including marginalized communities. By examining writings from different classes, castes, and marginalized groups, a more nuanced understanding of historical events, societal structures, and cultural dynamics can be achieved. Gender roles within historical contexts also offer a rich avenue for exploration, allowing historians to unravel the complexities of societal expectations and power dynamics. By considering diverse perspectives, historians can construct a more inclusive and accurate understanding of the past.

Inclusivity in sampling is crucial for future studies to ensure diverse perspectives are represented. By casting a wider net, researchers can capture a more accurate picture of societal dynamics, minimizing biases and gaps in knowledge. This approach fosters greater inclusiveness and equity in research outcomes.

Exploring a broader range of historical texts enhances the depth and breadth of understanding. By delving into various sources, researchers can uncover marginalized voices and narratives often overlooked in traditional studies. This comprehensive approach enriches historical analyses, providing a more nuanced understanding of past events and societies.

Interdisciplinary approaches offer valuable insights by integrating perspectives from multiple fields. By combining methodologies and theories from diverse disciplines, researchers can tackle complex issues from various angles, fostering innovation and holistic understanding. This interdisciplinary synergy enriches the study, offering fresh perspectives and solutions to longstanding questions.

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