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RECEPTION OF SOCIAL ADVOCACY AMONG THE INDIAN DANCING COMMUNITY: THE CHOREOGRAPHIC INNOVATIONS OF THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to analyse the practice of Dance/Choreography towards the reformation of the genre in the context of Indian society, which has gone through several transformations over the past one hundred years. The study focuses on two renowned classical dancers, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Shovana Narayan, who were persuaded to start a new style by adopting contemporary social issues in the late 1960s in their choreography. And also, this study explores how the Indian dancing community receives the reformation ideas in this novel dance choreography. This study also investigates the attitudes of dancers towards the betterment of Indian society. The paper carries a mixed method, discourse analysis and quantitative methods. This is mainly an empirical study, with a questionnaire as a tool. The sample size is 228, and all are dance students from the dancing community in India. The results of this study show that the enduring contributions of classical dances have shaped the perceptions and practices of the present dancers positively. The findings suggest that, like other media, adopting themes of contemporary issues in dance/choreography can make society aware of these issues and make it more inclusive.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary Issues, Choreography, Dance, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Reformation, Shovana Narayan, Social Advocacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Classical dance in India has its roots in different traditions, epics and mythology. The dance tradition has undergone several transformations in the past one hundred years. The evolution of dance took shape from temple dance to stage concerts, later to competitions and commercial practice in contemporary times. These developments in dance and the forms, ideas, and practices also underwent many alterations according to the requirements. From the early twentieth century to the present century, many people practised the art of dance in various genres. Rukmini Devi Arundale had a predominant role in institutionalising 'Sadir' to 'Bharathanatyam' [1]. Balasaraswathi introduced new traditional techniques in Bharatanatyam. Ragini Devi, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Yamini Krishnamurti, Padma Subramanyam, Leela Samson, Kumudini Lakhia, Shovana Narayan, Kanaka Rele, etc., brought further modifications to dance through practice and discourse on dance [2]. Later, dancers adopted newer techniques in their dances, with the changing needs of time and space. Steadily, due to modernisation, other forms of dance came to the limelight. 'Choreography' and 'Contemporary dance' are also the result of the above-mentioned changes in dance. The term "Choreography" first appeared in French as "chorégraphie", referring to the *notation* of existing dances in the late 17th century. "Choreography" has also been used to refer to the *creation* of dance from the late 18th century. The English term "choreography" appeared only in the 1950s [3]. Choreography has several interpretations. Here, I consider it a 'process, product or profession' [3] to foreground dance as a performing art. Considering the Indian context, Mrinalini Sarabhai was the first classical dancer to begin choreography using traditional dance techniques to project social issues. Shovana Narayan is another important dancer who adopted a similar contemporary dance practice with abstract themes. Mrinalini was mainly the proponent of Bharatanatyam. Shovana practised Kathak.

This paper focuses on the dance reformation of these two dancers who were persuaded to start a new style of dance by adopting contemporary issues in their choreography. The primary aspect of this paper focuses on the background information of these two dancers. Grounded with their reformative ideas in dance choreography, the paper elaborates on the empirical study. The empirical study explores the perception of the Indian dancing community on social advocacy in dance choreography propagated by the two dancers.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Indian Classical Dance: From The Traditional to the Modern

Indian Classical Dance is rooted in tradition. Kathak was a classical Indian dance form performed only by men until the 1930s. Occasionally, though, male Kathak dancers would teach women from lower castes some of the moves in their dance, and the ladies would then perform for the male audience. Devadasis (temple dancers) in Southern India followed the Bharatanatyam style. There was a dramatic shift in the Bharata Natyam style from the dancing of the Devadasis to that of learned Brahmin women. In the 1930s, as interest in Indian dance traditions grew, several trailblazers and visionaries established dance training institutions. These included the poets Tagore (1861–1941) from Bengal, Vallathol (1878–1957) from Kerala, theosophist Rukmini Devi (1904–1986) in Madras, Madame Menaka (1899–1947), a dancer and musician from Khandala, a hill station near Mumbai in Western India, and Uday Shankar (1900–1977) in Almora, in the Himalayan region. Dance was thereby institutionalised. Being modernists, these pioneers understood that innovative artistic methods would instil a sense of pride in Indian nationalism among their people. Indian classical dances had gained significant traction by the time of India's independence. Uday Shankar had a distinct, imaginative style that became recognised as modern. Many people view him as the father of Modern Indian Dance [4].

Even though noticeable changes occurred in classical dance in India, the stigmaⁱ attached to this dance has not been completely removed. The government established three academies under the cultural policy for literature, plastic arts and dance, drama and music, which boosted the literature, plastic arts, and performing arts. The Sangeet Natak Akademi was established for performing arts in 1952 [5]. The first All India Dance Seminar and festival was held in 1958 in Delhi, which brought two additional dance forms to the fore, Odissi and Kuchipudi, as classical dances. Further, eight dance forms, including Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Manipuri, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi and Sattriya, were considered official classical dances.

While the majority of classical Indian dance-dramas focus solely on Hindu theology and philosophy, the expressive element usually centres on the heroine, or 'nayika', who longs to be united with the hero, or 'nayaka'. The heroine represents the

devotee's soul, while the hero represents the Lord, the super-soul that the soul longs to merge with. There was a shift in the class origins of dancers, with the newly educated middle class replacing the hereditary classes. The classical dance forms were criticised as museum pieces due to an unprecedented increase in the number of dancers. Besides, the assembly line production of dancers, rampant commercialisation, also affected standards and quality. This change significantly impacted dancers' attempts to reconsider and explore new avenues for Indian dance. Dancers with creativity and the capacity to contemplate contemporary matters, such as two global wars, have departed from the conventional style (for example, Alarippu to Tillana Repertory of Bharatanatyam) [4]. The active years of artists were characterised by numerous reforms, transitions, and challenges. These changes occurred in conjunction with the social and political transformations taking place in Indian society. The rise of industrial civilisation, technological innovation, and the invention of the printing press gave rise to powerful influences encompassing social, political, national, and artistic awareness. However, the modifications of dance forms took place, and the themes of the performances were also restructured. Scholars like Kapila Vatsyayan called them 'neo-classical' [6] instead of 'classical' [7]. Politics, gender, identity, social issues, environmental issues, etc., became themes of classical performances. Mrinalini Sarabhai and Shovana Narayan were deeply influenced by these contemporary issues. They implemented such themes in their choreography to bring awareness among the people. Mrinalini felt communication of such issues was very important, and she used 'dance' as a tool of communication for social change. According to Judith Lynne Hanna:

Dance is a whole complex of communication symbols, a vehicle of conceptualization. It may be a paralanguage, a semiotic system, like articulate speech made up of signifiers that refer to things other than themselves. Substantively, information necessary to maintain a society's or group's cultural patterns, to help it attain its goals, to adapt to its environment, to become integrated, or to change may be communicated [8].

2.2. Mrinalini Sarabhai And the Reformation of Dance

Mrinalini constantly prompted herself to choreograph fresh items reflecting contemporary issues and conflicts. As Mrinalini says, '[o]ur civilization has a basic philosophy. Yet none of us

artists can escape our century and its implications. The dancer's tool or medium of expression is her body, which expresses what the intellect contemplates, and for that, every part of the body has to be perfectly trained and disciplined' (quoted in [2]).

Mrinalini established a dance school in 1949 in Ahmedabad and called it 'Darpana'. She choreographed a dance drama, 'Chandalika,' in Shantiniketan. This choreography tries to convey the social implications of untouchability and an inner individual awareness of rejection and isolation [9]. This item became part of the regular repertoire at her dance school. Mrinalini learnt Western dance techniques from the Dalcroze school in Switzerland, which helped her to create new movements in her classical dance. She also learnt the Kathakali mode of dance. 'Manushya' (1949) was the first dance drama where Mrinalini broke away from the classical tradition. She used Western dance and Kathakali to express the themes of a man's life.

Mrinalini was socially aware from her early days. She learnt about dowry deaths in local Gujarati newspapers almost on a daily basis in the 1960s. The newly married bride was forced to commit suicide, or was burned or harassed by husbands and greedy in-laws. So, she had a compelling thought of voicing this issue through dance. She created *Memory*, a dance drama about these hapless brides. In Mrinalini's words,

[i]t was the first time that Bharathanatyam spoke of a social problem. I did not change the technique but used it very differently... The dance drama, perhaps the first choreographic experiment in classical technique, had tremendous repercussions everywhere. Nobody had ever used Bharathanatyam in this way nor in this mood. It was appreciated more than condemned. Leading newspapers wrote for the first time dance spoke of contemporary problems [9].

Not only did she focus on social problems, but she also included environmental issues in her dance and choreography. *The Silent Valley* and *Ganga* cry out their emotions towards the environment. Deforestation and pollution of the river Ganga are the themes of these dances, respectively.

Mallika, Mrinalini's daughter, produced a piece of choreography in the 1980s. The production was titled *Unsunni* (Unheard Voices). It was based on a book by Harsh Mander, an activist. *Unsunni* came about with the help of Mrinalini. They used the Bollywood dance genre to express social justice in this performance. Interviewing Mrinalini, Geetha Chandran asks her about this dance piece and the pertinence of the Bollywood genre in this. Mrinalini responds, 'I think everyone needs something

contemporary, something that speaks their lives' [10]. She thought Bollywood had touched the hearts and minds of millions of Indian audiences, and through this form, it was possible to catch the imagination of the Indian aesthetes. Mrinalini also created *Creatures of Prometheus* and *Ahimsa* with a theme of non-violence by using classical arts of the East and the West. Darpana, her dance academy, focused on human problems through dance and drama. Thus, Mrinalini's dance and choreography speak about the contemporary issues that bring awareness to Indian society.

2.3. Shovana Narayan And Her Dance Reformations

Shovana Narayan is another contemporary choreographer and Kathak dancer who combines artistry with keen observation and humanism. Her dance and choreography are an instance that is rooted in tradition and open to a myriad of cultures. If Mrinalini's works projected the 1950s, 60s, and contemporary issues therein, Shovana's dance reflected humanity, harmony, feminism, issues of identity, and concern for global peace, beginning in the 1950s. Shovana deployed revolutionary ideas in her dance. Most Indian dances (classical dances) employ ankle bells. She was the first dancer to start dancing without ankle bells. She used English lines and long skirts in Indian classical dance. It portrayed Shovana's practice as a modern venture into classical dance. "Classical" Indian dance is modern, as it was included in India's modernizing project' [11]. Shovana was the first person to work on philosophical themes and the lives of contemporary thinkers and sages - Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Francis of Assisi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Mahatma Gandhi, which created a new era of dance reformation. She also redefined the ethos and vocabulary of Kathak dance. She choreographed a soliloquy for *Shakuntala* (a long poem by Maithili Sharan Gupt [1888-1964], produced in 1996), rejuvenating the narrative tradition of the North-Indian dance form. She adapted Western drama techniques to Indian traditional dance. Thus, such a form of modernity in dance has been referred to as a cultural cocktail.

Shovana also focused on social issues in her choreography. 'Toota yeh Vishwas Kyon' (Why Did This Trust Collapse, 1996) is a piece of art based on incest, which she presented through traditional Kathak dance. She was fearless in projecting this on the stage. This was based on a reported incident where a father from an educated urban background molested his daughter. However, he escaped the

judicial process and was scot-free. Shovana was enraged with the incident, and she says, 'I became fearless enough to stage the trauma of the poor mother and the helpless daughter who were the victims in this game. This game had become sensational for newspapers and society without gauging its adverse effects on the victims' [12]. She also focused on gender discrimination and female foeticide in Indian society in the 1950s. She presented the performance 'Mujhe bhi to Jeene do' (Let Me Live Too, 1998) on this issue through contemporary dance.

Shovana restructured Indian mythologies in her choreography. She projected maternal feelings with female protagonists through 'Mamtha.' For instance, she used Kaikeyi from the Ramayana. Considering Kaikeyi, her intense ambition towards her son, Bharata, led Shovana to think of the negative aspects of maternal feelings. This made her explore various shades of maternal feelings. Another protagonist, Draupadi from the Mahabharata, is a forgiving and understanding wife. The theme of Draupadi enamoured her from the perspective of a man-woman relationship, especially that between Draupadi and her first husband, Yudhishtira. In the Mahabharata, Arjuna and Bhima had other wives, but not Yudhishtira. Nevertheless, he ventured to gamble on her, catching Shovana's attention. This theme was dealt with by an author, Pavan Varma, in his work 'Yudhishtar and Draupadi' (1997). Shovana was attracted by this and used it in her performance.

Besides social issues, she also used other pressing issues in her choreography. 'Muktilekha' (1987) is an instance of work on human rights. 'Moonlight Impressionism' was a Kathak performance, which the audience experienced as a piece of Western ballet [12]. She also took humanitarian operations into account in her art. She presented a dance on the Kargil War (The war between India and Pakistan from May to July 1999 in the Kargil District of Jammu and Kashmir) to help the families affected by the war. She responded to the call for introspection and presented 'Sound of Emptiness and Harmony' on World Trade Tower episodes in 2001ⁱⁱ. She mentions the reason for taking such themes in her dance: 'The ego clashes within mankind have always resulted in so much violence and bloodshed, rifts and actions which can never be undone. This theme interested me and led to many productions.' [12]

In the 1970s and '80s, art underwent tremendous changes in India. Art has become the medium of expression, so 'choreographers and performers extend the traditional vocabulary with modern-dance techniques, innovations and topical themes' [12]. She also adopted contemporary and abstract

themes in her choreography. Her works focused on patriarchal issues from the devadasi to the twenty-first-century dancing traditions. One more critical project of Shovana's was 'Dance of the Temples' (1999), a dance film in English based on Khajurahoⁱⁱⁱ that presses on the feminine identity. These temples are known to have erotic sculptures and images that represent female beauty and fertility. It also describes the Devadasi tradition and dance. She successfully captured the essence of each different dance form, fusing them into a single, harmonic language, and worked with renowned dancers of diverse Indian classical dance styles. Shovana is a multi-faceted artist. Biographer Smitha Reddy says, 'Shovana Narayan is a classic example of a true Kathak, multi-faceted and dynamic, and presents a challenge to today's spectator. Her life and her works have made her a role model and peer for millions of girls of the younger generation of today' [13]. Hence, Shovana's dance innovation in her choreography is an example of the fusion of art and the actions of the present world.

Choreography and contemporary Indian dance are a new language for prominent dancers. They adopt innovative techniques and signature styles, which make them unique from other artists. Mrinalini and Shovana used such language and techniques in their dance to address the pressing issues of Indian society, which can be considered a step in the evolution of Indian dance. Post-independence, several movements took place to reform Indian society. Both the dancers concerned restructured the traditional dance. Their modifications and innovations of the genre for reformatory purposes can be placed as a phase of social movement in the Indian dance trajectory. Thus, the traditional dance took the contemporary dance form in these two dancers.

Considering the modifications brought about in the traditional dance form by the above two dancers, this project looked into the reception of such advocacy experiments by the Indian classical dancers, including teachers and students. Both Mrinalini and Shovana were convinced that the new choreography they were experimenting with would positively impact Indian audiences. To support this, Neelambari Prasad, an Odissi dancer, states, 'Let our art educate us on how to interpret new realities. That is how we might make an impact' [14]. They had a firm conviction that they could bring about a difference in the lives of individuals through the practice of this modified choreography with novel themes. We try to assess this with the help of a survey among the teachers and students of Indian classical

dance.

3. METHOD

The primary objective of this paper was to understand the impact of these two legendary dancers and their style on the dancing community. To address these issues, the study's objective, an empirical quantitative research design, was selected, and a questionnaire was developed. Five-point Likert scale questions have been framed, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), to test the perceptions of the dancing community in the context of choreographies by Shovana Narayan and Mrinalini Sarabhai. The questionnaire contains two sections: The first section deals with the 'demographic details' of the respondents. The second section deals with variables such as 'Personal influence on dance (PID)' with 7 items, 'Awareness and knowledge of choreography (AKC)' with 6 items, 'Advocacy of gender (social) issues (AGSI)' with 13 items, and 'Socio-Environmental consciousness in dance (SECD)' with 4 items, considered based on the content of the chosen self-narratives. Since both Shovana Narayan and Mrinalini Sarabhai are renowned for their unique contributions to their respective dance forms, Personal Influence on Dance (PID) was measured based on how each of these renowned dancers' work influences an individual dancer's personal growth and style. Understanding their impact on dancers can reveal how these dancers inspire and shape individual artistic journeys. Moreover, dance's emotional and psychological influence was also included in this variable. The next variable, which deals with the Awareness and Knowledge of Choreography (AKC), is known to significantly affect the performance quality as a deeper understanding of dance allows for more nuanced and authentic representation[15]. Awareness, fundamental to appreciating and critiquing the contributions of Shovana Narayan and Mrinalini Sarabhai to Indian classical dance, was measured. Both these legendary dancers have used dance to address social issues, particularly gender-related social issues, and thus, can be considered cultural commentators. The next variable, Advocacy of Gender (social) Issues (AGSI), assesses how effectively their work advocates for social change and raises awareness about gender issues through the medium of dance [16]. Along with this, the role of dance in encouraging critical thinking and fostering a sense of responsibility towards societal issues was also established. Finally, the last variable, Socio-Environmental Consciousness in Dance (SECD), evaluates the extent to which dancing

inspired the audiences to engage with and advocate for socio-environmental causes, thus extending the influence of dance beyond the stage [17]. The themes of environmental consciousness and sustainability were incorporated, reflecting the growing importance of these issues in contemporary art. The inclusion of these variables lets us comprehensively assess the multifaceted impact of the dances of Shovana Narayan and Mrinalini Sarabhai on the perception of Indian classical dancers. Each variable addresses a distinct aspect of their influence, covering personal artistic development and emotional outcomes, performance-related awareness, social and gender advocacy, and environmental consciousness. This holistic approach ensures a thorough understanding of how their work shapes the perspectives and practices of contemporary dancers. The questionnaire meets the threshold of reliability and validity. The most commonly used internal consistency measure is Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. It is viewed as the most appropriate measure of reliability when using the Likert scale [18]. The questionnaire was distributed to the classical dance schools in India, and 228 responses were collected from classical dance teachers and students. The age groups considered for

the study ranged from teenagers to people above 60 years. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is used to analyse the data.

4. RESULTS

The dancing community's responses are categorised based on age, gender, and full-time (professional)/hobbyist dancers for demographic details. Data produced robust initial findings with the help of demographic details and the factors mentioned earlier. The validation and reliability of the questions were initially tested using Cronbach's Alpha. Table 1 presents the internal consistency of four dance-related factors, measured using Cronbach's Alpha. It suggests that the value should be greater than 0.6 for the variables to be acceptable [19]. Cronbach's Alpha values for all the factors, including 'Personal Influence on Dance' (7 items; 0.622), 'Awareness and Knowledge of Choreography' (6 items; 0.658), 'Advocacy of Gender (Social) Issues' (13 items; 0.825) and 'Socio-Environmental Consciousness in Dance' (4 items; 0.931) were more than 0.6. Therefore, the questionnaire items were reliable for the purposes of this study (see Table 1).

Table 1: Reliability Analysis Of Factors.

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Personal influence on dance	0.622	7
Awareness and knowledge of Choreography	0.658	6
Advocacy of gender (social) issues	0.825	13
Socio-Environmental Consciousness in Dance	0.931	4

Source: Data Analysis

For the present study, only age, gender and full-time/hobbyist dancers are considered in demographic details and other vast research details are not considered. Out of 228 respondents, the majority belonged to the age group of 18-30 years

(60.5%), followed by the age group of 31-45 years (25.0%) (see Table 2). A recent report by Forbes also suggested that most dance performers' careers end by age 35 [20]. However, this research considers all age groups.

Table 2: Age.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18 years	12	5.3
18-30 years	138	60.5
31-45 years	57	25.0
46-60 years	18	7.9
60 and above	3	1.3
Total	228	100.0

Source: Survey Data

According to the data, most respondents are female (89.5%), while male respondents represent only 10.5% (see Table 3). Most of the dancers in the present study (60.5%) took dancing as a hobby.

Dancers who pursue dancing as a full-time profession represent only 39.5% of the total (see Table 4).

Table 3: Gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	204	89.5

Male	24	10.5
Total	228	100.0

Source: Survey Data

Table Error! No text of specified style in document.: Dancing as a Profession.

Full-time (Professional) Dancer	Frequency	Percentage
Hobbyist dancer	138	60.5
Full-time dancer	90	39.5
Total	228	100.0

Source: Survey Data

4.1. Views Of the Dancing Community

The data collected from the dancing community gives detailed information on the views of the dancers on the reformative ideas of dance and choreography, which Mrinalini and Shovana practised. Descriptive analysis is done based on the respondents' opinions on questions about different factors. This shows how much they have agreed to adopt such reformative ideas in their dance practice to bring awareness to society.

4.1.1. Personal Influence on Dance

Regarding the personal influence on dance, the respondents strongly agreed that dancing is *their* personal decision (Mean = 4.46, Standard Deviation (SD) = 1.008) and it provides mental peace (Mean = 4.49, SD = 0.917) and pleasure (Mean = 4.47, SD = 0.862). However, the dancers were neutral in stating the cause of dancing to be a family influence (mean = 3.16, SD = 1.229), media impact (mean = 3.05, SD = 1.354), and income generation (mean = 2.71, SD = 1.156) (see Table 5)

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis of Personal Influence on Dance.

Personal Influence on Dance	Mean	Std. Deviation
Dancing is my own choice	4.46	1.008
I started dancing as per the wish of my parents/relatives	3.16	1.229
I started dancing after watching other dancers' programs in visual media	3.05	1.354
I got influenced after reading about other dancers	3.15	1.362
I dance because it gives me mental peace	4.49	0.917
I dance because it gives me pleasure	4.47	0.862
I dance because it gets me income	2.71	1.156

Source: Data Analysis

4.1.2. Awareness And Knowledge of Choreography

Table 6 shows a descriptive analysis of choreographic awareness and knowledge. Respondents have a moderate to high level of understanding and appreciation for choreography. Mean ratings show high knowledge of choreography

(mean = 4.01, SD = 1.004) and recognition of its potential societal influence (mean = 4.21, SD = 0.798). However, there is significantly less agreement on the historical background (mean = 3.68, SD = 1.142) and the importance of adopting non-traditional forms (mean = 3.39, SD = 1.334). Despite this, respondents have a positive attitude towards novel choreographic conceptions (mean = 4.08, SD = 0.735) (see Table 6).

Table 6: Descriptive Analysis of Awareness and Knowledge of Choreography.

Awareness and Knowledge of Choreography	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am aware of choreography	4.01	1.004
Choreography is part of Classical dance in the second half of the 20th century	3.68	1.142
I came to know about 'Choreography' by the works of earlier dancers	3.75	0.918
I think we should not follow only traditional forms of choreography in dance	3.39	1.334
Adopting revolutionary ideas in dance choreography is a good practice	4.08	0.735
By adopting revolutionary ideas in dance choreography, we can bring awareness to society	4.21	0.798

Source: Data Analysis

4.1.3. Advocacy Of Gender (Social) Issues

The descriptive study of gender (social) advocacy reveals respondents' perspectives on gender-related issues in dance. High mean scores indicate widespread disapproval of social issues such as the

dowry system (mean = 4.36, SD = 0.922), female infanticide (mean = 4.25, SD = 0.972), and child abuse and neglect (mean = 4.39, SD = 0.856). Also, those who responded placed a high value on gender equality, with an average of 4.49, SD of 0.842, and an average of 4.66, SD of 2.742. While some respondents

are aware of domestic violence (mean = 4.01, SD = 1.157), fewer claim direct experience with it (mean = 3.31, SD = 1.254). There is still recognition of dance's

ability to increase awareness about these issues, but at different levels (mean range: 3.91-4.18, SD range: 0.821-0.901) (see Table 7).

Table 7: Descriptive Analysis of Advocacy of Gender (Social) Issues.

Advocacy of Gender (Social) Issues	Mean	Std. Deviation
I think the dowry system is evil to society	4.36	0.922
Presenting dance, including the concept of the dowry system, brings awareness to the audience	4.11	0.849
Women should get respect as men do	4.66	2.742
Women and men should get equal opportunities in all fields	4.49	0.842
Dance/choreography, including the concept of gender equality, makes the audience gender sensitive	4.13	0.855
I know about female infanticide	4.25	0.972
Female infanticide is not good for a healthy society	4.31	0.968
The concept of female infanticide in dance/choreography can create awareness among the audience	4.09	0.835
Child abuse is a dangerous act that affects the society	4.39	0.856
The concept of child abuse in dance/choreography can make the audience sensitive regarding the issue	4.18	0.821
I am aware of domestic violence	4.01	1.157
I have seen domestic violence	3.31	1.254
Dance/choreography, which includes the concept of domestic violence, can bring awareness among the audience about the issue	3.91	0.901

Source: Data Analysis

4.1.4. Socio-Environmental Consciousness in Dance

Table 9 provides a descriptive analysis of socio-environmental consciousness in dance. Respondents express strong inclinations towards integrating environmental and social issues into their dance practices. Mean scores indicate a high desire to dance

and choreograph on such themes (Mean = 4.24, SD = 0.965; Mean = 4.23, SD = 0.958) and a belief in the importance of using dance as a platform for societal awareness (Mean = 4.29, SD = 0.942). Furthermore, respondents perceive dance not just as an aesthetic practice but also as a revolutionary one (Mean = 4.46, SD = 0.836), underscoring its potential for social change (see Table 8).

Table 8: Descriptive Analysis of Socio-Environmental Consciousness in Dance.

Socio-Environmental Consciousness in Dance	Mean	Std. Deviation
I like to dance, including such (environmental and social) issues	4.24	0.965
I wish to choreograph based on such (environmental and social) issues	4.23	0.958
More and more choreography should be done on contemporary issues to bring awareness to the society	4.29	0.942
Dance is not only an aesthetic practice but also a revolutionary practice	4.46	0.836

Source: Data Analysis

4.2. Differences In Dancing Factors Based on Demographic Details

To identify the differences in opinions among the respondents, an independent t-test^{iv} was used to compare the various factors. The hypothesis is proposed to test the differences in the demographic variables. For this study, three hypotheses are framed. They are H1: There is a significant difference between the genders in the opinion of reformative dancing ideas. H2: There is a significant difference between full-time and hobbyist dancers regarding reformative dancing ideas. H3: There is a significant difference between the age groups of dancers in the

opinion of reformative dancing ideas.

4.2.1. Differences In Dancing Factors Based on the Gender of the Respondents

An Independent t-test was used to compare various factors between genders in the context of dance. There were no significant differences in personal influence on dance ($t = 0.028$, $p > 0.05$), awareness and knowledge of choreography ($t = -0.601$, $p > 0.05$), advocacy of gender (social) issues ($t = 0.978$, $p > 0.05$) and socio-environmental consciousness in dance ($t = -0.807$, $p > 0.05$) based on the gender of the respondents (see Table 9).

Table 9: Comparison Of Factors Between Genders.

Factors	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t- value	P-value
PID	Female	3.641	0.637	0.028	0.978
	Male	3.637	0.597		
AKC	Female	3.844	0.624	0.601	0.548

Source: Data Analysis

	Male	3.924	0.515		
AGSI	Female	4.184	0.689	0.978	0.329
	Male	4.042	0.513		
SECD	Female	4.290	0.857	-0.807	0.420

Conducting a t-test of the data of both females and males suggests that both support adopting reformative ideas in classical dance and choreography to bring societal awareness. According to this test, H1 is not considered true for the factors: PID, AKC, AGSI and SECD. Instead, the H0 null hypothesis proves no difference in the opinions of females and males.

4.2.2. Differences In Dancing Factors Based on Professionalism Towards the Dance of the Respondents

The independent t-test analysis compared various factors between full-time professional and hobbyist dancers. There is no significant difference in personal influence on dance ($t = -0.507$, $p > 0.05$), advocacy of gender (social) issues ($t = 0.594$, $p > 0.05$), and socio-environmental consciousness in dance ($t = 1.577$, $p > 0.05$) based on the type of dancers. However, there are significant differences regarding awareness and knowledge of choreography ($t = 2.278$, $p < 0.05$), where hobbyist dancers were more aware and knowledgeable of choreography than professional dancers (see Table 10).

Table 10: Comparison Of Factors Between Full-Time Professional Dancers and Hobbyist Dancers.

Factors	Dancing Profession	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	P-value
PID	Hobbyist dancer	3.623	0.604	-0.507	0.613
	Full-time dancer	3.667	0.675		
AKC	Hobbyist dancer	3.926	0.613	2.278	0.024
	Full-time dancer	3.739	0.599		
AGSI	Hobbyist dancer	4.190	0.686	0.594	0.553
	Full-time dancer	4.136	0.654		
SECD	Hobbyist dancer	4.377	0.742	1.577	0.116
	Full-time dancer	4.197	0.973		

Source: Data Analysis

By analysing data, we can show that both full-time and hobbyist dancers agree to bring awareness by adopting reformative ideas in dance and choreography. However, Hobbyist dancers are more aware of Choreography than full-time dancers. Here, H2 is considered true for the factor AKC. This fact throws light on the reality that full-time dancers focus more on the dance form as a legacy from their teachers and tradition. They mostly continue with the borrowed forms and styles without much experimentation. On the other hand, hobbyists explore, experiment, and look for new styles and forms that gel with contemporary expressions. However, PID, AGSI, and SECD prove the null hypothesis H0: no significant difference exists between full-time and Hobbyist dancers regarding opinions.

4.2.3. Differences In Dancing Factors Based on the Age of the Respondents

The analysis of variance (ANOVA)^v results revealed significant differences in mean scores across

ages for various dance-related factors. Differences in dancing factors are based on the age of the respondents. Table 12 shows the impact of age on personal influence in dance, awareness and knowledge of choreography, and socio-environmental consciousness in dance. For personal influence on dance, the mean scores vary significantly across age groups ($F = 7.653$, $p < 0.05$), with the highest mean found in the 18-30 years group (3.814) and the lowest in the 60 and above group (3.048). Awareness and knowledge of choreography also show significant differences among age groups ($F = 3.094$, $p < 0.05$), with the highest mean score in the 18-30 years group (3.959) and the lowest in the 46-60 years group (3.602). Similarly, socio-environmental consciousness in dance varies significantly across age groups ($F = 6.360$, $p < 0.05$), with the highest mean in the 18-30 years group (4.52) and the lowest in the 31-45 years group (3.934). However, no significant differences were found in advocacy of gender (social) issues ($F = 0.817$, $p > 0.05$) (see Table 11).

Table 11: ANOVA For the Difference in Age on Various Factors in Dance.

Factors	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
PID	Below 18 years	3.357	0.373	7.653	0.000
	18-30 years	3.814	0.544		
	31-45 years	3.411	0.782		
	46-60 years	3.325	0.443		

	60 and above	3.048	0.218		
AKC	Below 18 years	3.847	0.539	3.094	0.017
	18-30 years	3.959	0.544		
	31-45 years	3.675	0.761		
	46-60 years	3.602	0.515		
	60 and above	3.833	0.289		
AGSI	Below 18 years	4.301	0.401	0.817	0.515
	18-30 years	4.208	0.640		
	31-45 years	4.034	0.853		
	46-60 years	4.201	0.383		
	60 and above	4.205	0.320		
SECD	Below 18 years	4.104	0.652	6.360	0.000
	18-30 years	4.520	0.667		
	31-45 years	3.934	1.077		
	46-60 years	3.986	0.885		
	60 and above	4.250	0.750		

Source: Data Analysis

The ANOVA results show the difference in opinions among different age groups. Maybe a generation gap raises different attitudes towards the reformative ideas of different factors, such as dance and choreography. However, all the age groups agreed to adopt gender and social issues in their dance to raise societal awareness. Thus, H3 has been proven true for PID, AKC and SECD. However, for AGSI H0, the null hypothesis proved no significant difference in opinions between the age groups.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that the respondents have a positive perspective on social advocacy in dance choreography. The study also demonstrates differences in personal opinions on dance. At the personal level, dance has provided them with inner peace and immense pleasure. Moreover, dance provided them with artistic development and emotional support. The level of awareness and knowledge ranged from moderate to high levels, emphasizing its potential societal impact. Due to the skill and knowledge enrichment, there is an increased level of appreciation for the technical and philosophical aspects of dances. Moreover, empowerment in contemporary social and gender issues and socio-environmental consciousness was observed, indicating progressive thinking and stronger advocacy in this aspect. Overall, the dancer's positive response to arriving at a progressive Indian society was found to be impressive. The comparison of factors based on demographics, such as gender, showed that the opinions of female and male dancers in Indian society did not vary in any of the aspects. Full-time and hobbyist dancers' attitudes towards reformative dance practices differed significantly only in terms of awareness and knowledge. Moreover, opinions on the practice of reformative dance, other than the advocacy of gender and social issues, also varied

significantly with age. According to Alfred P., Fengler and Vivan Wood, attitudes vary on contemporary issues due to the generational gap [21].

This is a novel study to adapt empirical analysis on the social advocacy among the dancing community in India. As there is no contemporary or existing study to compare the results of this study's objective, we support our study with the theoretical aspect. This study provides an insight into 'Philosophical Aesthetic theory' [22] of Michel Fokine, a Russian dancer and choreographer who introduced the philosophy of dance reformation. And also, this idea of reformation is closely related to Isadora Duncan's beliefs about dance, which gave rise to a new type of dance called 'interpretive dancing', [22] which is based on societal issues. As the study is grounded in this theoretical aspect, the research findings validate the dancers' initiation towards Indian societal changes.

6. CONCLUSION

The study analyses how dancers like Mrinalini and Shovana have paved the way for the next generation to think about societal well-being. Their practice of traditional classical dance, including modern techniques and contemporary issues, has been followed by many dancers. Many dance organisations play a significant role in changing and improving dance techniques. It is evident from the findings of this study that the enduring contributions of classical dances have shaped the perceptions and practices of the present dancers positively. The findings suggest that, like other media, adopting themes of contemporary issues in dance/choreography can make society aware of these issues and make Indian society better. While the study provides valuable insights into the impact of Shovana Narayan and Mrinalini Sarabhai's choreography on the perception of Indian classical dancers, it is important to acknowledge its

limitations. This study was restricted by the limited sample size of dancers, which may not fully represent the broader population of Indian classical dancers, the subjective nature of art, variability in interpretation based on personal experiences, non-

inclusion of other legendary dancers and cultural and regional bias. Since this study focuses only on gender and social issues along with environmental issues in India, future studies may continue with the other issues of contemporary India and the world.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because classical dancers voluntarily gave their responses to the research questionnaire.

Informed Consent Statement: The consent statement is not required for this study because no patient or humans is described in the study.

Data sharing policy: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to [restrictions, e.g. their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants].

Notes

1 The dance was practised by devadasis, female artists dedicated to worship and service of deities in temples. However, during the colonial period, the British government equated them to prostitutes. Implemented various measures to control their activities, including dance. They believe the devadasi tradition puts underage girls into prostitution and sex slavery after their dedication to the deity. The misconception of spreading venereal diseases from them made the British government stop this tradition. Some of the writers and foreign officials mentioned it has Human trafficking in India. So, society considers their dance evil [23], [24].

2 Terrorist attacks carried out by al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001, commonly known as 9/11, involved 19 terrorists hijacking four commercial aeroplanes, and two crashed into the World Trade Centre Complex's North and South Towers in New York City. Many lives were put to death [25].

3 Khajuraho temples were built between the 10th and 14th centuries by the Chandela Empire in central India (presently Chhatarpur district, Madhya Pradesh) [26].

4 The independent samples t-test (the unpaired samples t-test) is the most common form of the T-test. It helps you to compare the means of two sets of data. For example, you could run a t-test to see if the average test scores of males and females differ [27].

5 ANOVA is a useful tool in economics, biology, education, psychology, sociology, business/ industry and in the research of several other disciplines. This technique is used when multiple sample cases are involved [28], [29]. ANOVA tests the null hypothesis that the means of several independent populations are equal; the test statistic is the *F* ratio used when we need *K*-independent sample tests [30]

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