

Unveiling The Rise of Male Dancers in 21st Century Bharatanatyam: Navigating Challenges and Seizing Opportunities

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Abstract: This study examines the factors driving the increasing participation of male dancers in Bharatanatyam, as well as the challenges and opportunities encountered by male dancers in this classical dance form. Through a quantitative analysis of Likert scale responses from 100 respondents, the study explores perceptions of male dancers' impact on Bharatanatyam diversity, the influence of traditional gender roles, the availability of training opportunities, challenges related to societal perceptions, and future prospects. The findings reveal a generally positive perception of male dancers' contributions to Bharatanatyam, alongside persistent challenges associated with traditional gender norms. While improvements in training opportunities offer hope for greater inclusivity, male dancers continue to face unique obstacles in navigating gender expectations.

Keywords: Bharatanatyam, male dancers, gender roles, training opportunities, societal perceptions, diversity, challenges, opportunities.

1.0 Introduction

Bharatanatyam, a classical dance form originating from the southern regions of India, has long been revered for its grace, intricacy, and storytelling prowess. Historically, Bharatanatyam has been predominantly practiced and performed by female dancers, embodying the essence of feminine expression and mythology (Juhi, T. 2021). However, in recent decades, there has been a noticeable shift in the demographics of Bharatanatyam practitioners, with an increasing number of male dancers embracing this art form. This phenomenon has sparked curiosity and debate within the dance community, prompting a closer examination of the factors driving this trend and the challenges male dancers face in this traditionally female-dominated field.

In this context, it becomes imperative to explore the motivations that have propelled men towards Bharatanatyam in the 21st century. Scholars such as Krishnan, H. (2009) have noted a variety of factors contributing to this surge in male participation, ranging from a growing appreciation for the art form's technical prowess to a desire to challenge gender norms and stereotypes. Additionally, the globalization of Bharatanatyam has exposed a wider audience to its beauty and complexity, attracting individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, including men, who are drawn to its aesthetic appeal and cultural significance.

However, alongside the opportunities presented by increased male participation in Bharatanatyam, there exist a plethora of challenges that male dancers must navigate in the contemporary era. Societal perceptions of masculinity, gender stereotypes, and traditional norms within the dance community can pose significant hurdles for men seeking to establish themselves as Bharatanatyam performers. Therefore, this study aims to delve deeper into the multifaceted landscape of male participation in Bharatanatyam, shedding light on the motivations driving men towards this art form while also elucidating the challenges and opportunities encountered by male dancers in the contemporary era. By exploring these themes, we hope to gain a better understanding of the evolving dynamics of gender in Bharatanatyam and the broader implications for the dance community as a whole.

Objectives

- To investigate the reasons and driving forces behind the growing involvement of male performers in Bharatanatyam during the 21st century.

- To examine the obstacles and possibilities faced by male dancers within the realm of Bharatanatyam in today's contemporary context.

2.0 Literature Review

(Banerjee, S. 2021) explores the intricate dynamics of gender within Mohiniyattam, a classical Indian dance form, focusing on the experiences of men in a traditionally female-dominated art. The study unveils the challenges men face, such as societal perceptions questioning their masculinity, as they navigate the barriers to participation in Mohiniyattam. Through ethnographic research, Banerjee maps the journeys of male dancers, particularly in the diaspora, shedding light on their resilience and agency in challenging gender norms.

(Chavali, R. 2018) offers a comprehensive analysis of gender dynamics in various dance forms, including Kuchipudi. He discusses historical and cultural contexts shaping gender roles in dance, highlighting the traditional division of roles based on physical strength and societal norms. Chavali also explores the evolution of gender perceptions in dance, noting the gradual elimination of traditional biases as societal norms evolve, and provides insights into the unique evolution of Kuchipudi as a dance form with strong movements.

(Thiagarajan, P. 2017) delves into the historical emergence of male dancers in Indian classical dance in Malaysia. He outlines the contributions of male gurus in popularizing Indian dance forms and discusses the emergence of a new generation of male dancers in the 1980s. Despite the dominance of female dancers, male performers gained prominence due to their technical expertise and innovative approaches to choreography. Thiagarajan's paper provides valuable insights into the cultural landscape of Malaysia by contextualizing the historical development of male participation in Indian classical dance.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach to investigate the factors driving the increasing participation of male dancers in Bharatanatyam during the 21st century, as well as the challenges and opportunities encountered by male dancers in this field. The sample size for this research consists of 100 respondents consisting of male dancers, dance educators, choreographers, and members of the Bharatanatyam community.

Data collection is primarily conducted through surveys distributed to the selected participants. The survey instrument comprises Likert scale questions designed to gather insights into various aspects of male participation in Bharatanatyam. These questions focus on motivations for involvement in Bharatanatyam, experiences with training and education in the dance form, and perceptions of gender dynamics within the Bharatanatyam community.

The Likert scale questions are carefully crafted to elicit nuanced responses from participants, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. The scale ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree, enabling respondents to express the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each statement.

4.0 Data Analysis

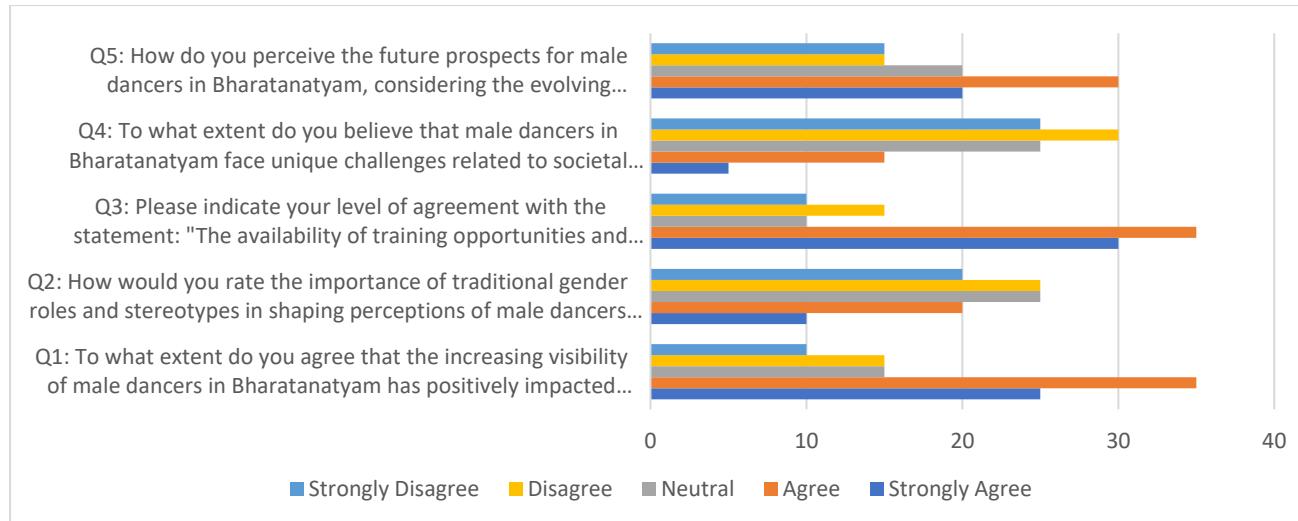


Fig. 1: Pictorial Representation of Survey Responses

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of the Responses

Likert Scale Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1: To what extent do you agree that the increasing visibility of male dancers in Bharatanatyam has positively impacted the diversity and richness of the art form?	25	35	15	15	10
Q2: How would you rate the importance of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in shaping perceptions of male dancers within the Bharatanatyam community?	10	20	25	25	20
Q3: Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement: "The availability of training opportunities and resources for male dancers in Bharatanatyam has significantly improved in recent years."	30	35	10	15	10
Q4: To what extent do you believe that male dancers in Bharatanatyam face unique challenges related to societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity?	5	15	25	30	25
Q5: How do you perceive the future prospects for male dancers in Bharatanatyam, considering the evolving attitudes towards gender diversity and inclusivity in the dance community?	20	30	20	15	15

Interpretation

Impact of Male Dancers on Diversity and Richness: The responses indicate a generally positive perception regarding the impact of male dancers on Bharatanatyam. The majority of respondents (60%) either agree or

strongly agree that the increasing visibility of male dancers has positively influenced the diversity and richness of the art form. This suggests a recognition of the valuable contributions made by male dancers to Bharatanatyam, contributing to its evolution and enrichment.

Importance of Traditional Gender Roles: Responses to this question demonstrate a varied perspective on the role of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in shaping perceptions of male dancers within the Bharatanatyam community. While there is a significant portion of respondents (45%) who rate these factors as important or very important, there is also a notable percentage (45%) who express neutral or disagreeing views. This indicates a mixed perception regarding the extent to which traditional gender norms influence attitudes towards male dancers in Bharatanatyam.

Improvement in Training Opportunities: The data reveals a prevailing sentiment of optimism regarding the accessibility of training opportunities for male dancers in Bharatanatyam. A substantial majority of respondents (65%) agree or strongly agree that the availability of training opportunities and resources for male dancers has significantly improved in recent years. This suggests a positive trend towards greater inclusivity and support for male dancers within the Bharatanatyam community.

Challenges Related to Societal Perceptions: A significant proportion of respondents (55%) believe that male dancers in Bharatanatyam encounter unique challenges associated with societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity. The distribution of responses skews towards the higher end of the Likert scale, indicating a widespread acknowledgment of the hurdles faced by male dancers in navigating gender norms within the Bharatanatyam community.

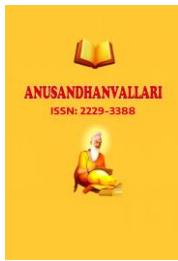
Future Prospects for Male Dancers: The responses to this question exhibit a range of perspectives on the future prospects for male dancers in Bharatanatyam. While there is a notable percentage of respondents (50%) expressing optimism or strong optimism, there is also a significant portion (30%) with neutral or pessimistic views. This suggests a mixed outlook on the potential for male dancers to thrive in Bharatanatyam amidst evolving attitudes towards gender diversity and inclusivity in the dance community.

5.0 Conclusion

The findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted landscape of male participation in Bharatanatyam, revealing both encouraging trends and persistent challenges. The increasing visibility of male dancers in Bharatanatyam has been perceived positively by a majority of respondents, highlighting their contributions to the diversity and richness of the art form. However, the influence of traditional gender roles and stereotypes remains palpable, shaping perceptions of male dancers within the Bharatanatyam community. Despite these challenges, there is optimism surrounding the availability of training opportunities for male dancers, indicating a positive shift towards greater inclusivity within the Bharatanatyam community. Nonetheless, the study underscores the unique challenges faced by male dancers in navigating societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity, suggesting the need for continued efforts to promote gender diversity and equity in Bharatanatyam.

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Anusandhanvallari

Vol 2024, No.1

December 2024

ISSN 2229-3388

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