

**BEYOND THE MOVEMENTS: INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL
EXPRESSION THROUGH CLASSICAL DANCE IN
BUILDING ONE'S SELF**

*A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Kerala in the
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts
Degree Examination in Sociology*

SUBMITTED BY

Name : **DEVIKA NAIR S.B**
Exam Code : 56018405
Candidate Code : 56022115008
Subject Code : SO 245

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

Dr. NISHA JOLLY NELSON



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
LOYOLA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
SREEKARIYAM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
UNIVERSITY OF KERALA**

2022-2024

DECLARATION

I, **DEVIKA NAIR S. B.**, do hereby declare that the Dissertation Titled **BEYOND THE MOVEMENTS: INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION THROUGH CLASSICAL DANCE IN BUILDING ONE'S SELF** is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to the University of Kerala during the year 2022-2024 towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree Examination in Sociology. It has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or other similar title of recognition before any University or anywhere else.

Place: Thiruvananthapuram

Date: 9/09/2024

Ms. DEVIKA NAIR S.B

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **BEYOND THE MOVEMENTS: INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION THROUGH CLASSICAL DANCE IN BUILDING ONE'S SELF** is a record of genuine work done by **MS. DEVIKA NAIR S. B** Fourth semester Master of Sociology student of this college under my supervision and guidance and that it is hereby approved for submission.

Dr. Nisha Jolly Nelson

Research Guide

Department of Sociology

Loyola College of Social Sciences
Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram.

Recommended for forwarding to the University of Kerala

Dr. Nisha Jolly Nelson

Head, Department of Sociology

Loyola College of Social sciences
Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram.

Forwarded to the University of Kerala

Dr. Sabu P Thomas S J

Principal

Loyola College of Social Sciences
Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*I am deeply grateful to **Almighty** for providing me with the strength and perseverance to complete this study. This journey would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement of many individuals to whom I owe my deepest thanks.*

*First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my mentor, **Dr. Nisha Jolly Nelson**, for her invaluable guidance and continuous support throughout this research. Her expertise, insights, and encouragement have been pivotal in shaping this study, and I am immensely thankful for her patience and dedication.*

I am also deeply thankful to all the faculty members who provided their assistance and insights during this research process. Their collective knowledge and support have enriched my work and guided me at every step.

A special thanks goes to Dr. Sunil Kumar, the Librarian, and Mr. George Mathew, the Assistant Librarian, for their unwavering support and assistance in providing the necessary resources and research materials. Their dedication ensured that I had access to all the information I needed to complete this study.

I am profoundly thankful to my parents for their unconditional love and support. They created an environment conducive to my studies and provided me with the emotional and moral support that was essential in completing this research.

I also want to express my gratitude to my family and friends, who stood by me through thick and thin, offering their support and understanding during the difficult times.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to the respondents of this study. Their sincere involvement and willingness to share their experiences were crucial to the success of this research. This study would not have been possible without their contributions.

To all of you, I extend my deepest gratitude. Thank you.

DEVIKA NAIR S.B

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE	PAGE NUMBER
<i>DECLARATION</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>ABSTRACT</i>	<i>vi</i>
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....	1
1.2.1 Spirituality and Human existence.....	3
1.2.2 Dance as a medium to express.....	4
1.2.3 Indian classical dance and self.....	7
1.2.4 Identity.....	8
1.2.5 Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of Habitus.....	9
1.2.6 Erving Goffman’s theory of the presentation of self.....	9
1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	10
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	12
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	14
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	14
2.2 STUDIES ON DANCE AND SPIRITUALITY.....	15
2.3 STUDIES ON PERSONAL GROWTH AND SELF-REALIZATION THROUGH DANCE.....	18
2.4 STUDIES ON DANCE AS A THERAPY.....	19
2.5 RESEARCH GAP.....	20
2.6 CONCLUSION.....	21
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	23
3.1 TITLE OF THE STUDY.....	23
3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	23
3.2.1 GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION.....	23

3.2.2 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	23
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	23
3.4 RESEARCH METHODS.....	24
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS.....	25
3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	25
3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	27
CHAPTER IV CASE PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....	27
4.1 CASE PRESENTATION: INTRODUCTION.....	27
4.1.1 BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT.....	27
4.2 VERBATIM NARRATIVES.....	30
4.2.1 How do individuals experience personal transformation through spiritual engagement in classical dance?	
4.2.2 In what ways does spiritual expression through classical dance influence the formation of identity and self-concept in dancers?	
4.2.3 What are the effects of spiritual practices within classical dance on dancers' mental and emotional well-being?	
4.2.4 How do cultural and social contexts shape and influence spiritual dance practices in classical dance?	
4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....	43
4.3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	43
4.3.2 THEMES.....	43
i. Spiritual feelings.....	43
ii. Personal Growth.....	44
iii. Self-Realisation.....	44
iv. Emotional Feelings.....	45
v. Stress Management.....	46
5.0 CHAPTER V FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION.....	48
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	48
5.1.1 Spiritual Feelings.....	48
5.1.2 Personal Growth.....	49
5.1.3 Self-realisation.....	50
5.1.4 Emotional Feelings.....	50

5.1.5 Stress Management51

5.2 SUGGESTIONS.....52

5.3 CONCLUSION.....53

5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH57

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....59

APPENDIX.....61

INTERVIEW GUIDE.....61

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the sociological implications of spiritual expression through dance, focusing on its role in shaping individual identity and personal development within specific cultural and social frameworks. It examines the ways in which classical dance influences spiritual experiences, self-concept, emotional resilience, and stress management. This research examines the sociological dimensions of classical dance, with a focus on Bharatanatyam, and its role in shaping individual identity and spiritual development. The study positions Bharatanatyam as more than an artistic performance; it is a cultural practice that facilitates personal transformation, self-realization, and emotional expression within a broader social and spiritual context.

Adopting a qualitative descriptive design within the interpretivist paradigm, the research is grounded in six in-depth case studies. Through thematic analysis, the findings reveal that classical dance serves as a form of embodied spirituality, significantly promoting personal transformation, self-realization, and emotional well-being. Ultimately, the study highlights the sociocultural implications of dance as a tool for identity construction and social cohesion.

The findings highlight the ways in which Bharatanatyam reinforces cultural continuity and social cohesion, while also providing a framework for individuals to navigate their inner worlds and societal roles. Dance is thus framed as a social and spiritual practice, deeply embedded in tradition, that shapes not only the individual's sense of self but also their place within a collective spiritual and cultural identity. Moreover, the study reveals that Bharatanatyam acts as a site of socialization where dancers internalize social norms, values, and behaviors, which are then expressed through their movements and performances. In this way, the dance form contributes to social integration by promoting shared ethical and moral codes that resonate across both spiritual and social domains. Through its rituals and disciplined practice, Bharatanatyam instills a sense of duty, respect, and reverence for tradition, while also allowing for individual reflection and self-discovery. This dual role—of reinforcing societal norms while offering space for personal spiritual exploration—highlights the dance's transformative social power. This study contributes to the broader sociological discourse on the intersection of art, spirituality, and identity, offering insights into the transformative social power of classical dance.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Classical dance, an ancient art form deeply rooted in tradition, transcends its physical movements to become a profound spiritual journey for many practitioners. The act of dancing is not merely a display of technical skill or artistic expression but serves as a powerful medium for spiritual connection and personal transformation. In various classical dance forms, particularly within Indian traditions like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and Odissi, the movements, gestures, and expressions are deeply intertwined with spiritual narratives, rituals, and symbolism. These dances often depict stories of gods, goddesses, and mythological events, allowing dancers to connect with the divine and channel spiritual energies through their performances. This spiritual expression through dance fosters a unique path of self-discovery, personal growth, and emotional resilience. As dancers immerse themselves in the sacred rhythms and intricate patterns of classical dance, they often experience a deep sense of fulfillment, self-realization, and inner peace. The process of learning, performing, and teaching these dance forms can lead to a transformative journey that shapes not only the dancer's artistic abilities but also their inner self. This study probes into the influence of spiritual expression through classical dance on building one's self, exploring how this sacred art form serves as a vehicle for spiritual exploration, emotional healing, and personal development. By examining the experiences of classical dancers, this research seeks to uncover the profound ways in which spiritual practices embedded in dance contribute to the holistic development of individuals, extending far beyond the physical movements to touch the core of human existence.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Dance, as a form of cultural expression, holds a significant place within the social fabric of communities across different cultures and historical periods. From a sociological perspective, it serves not only as a creative outlet but also as a deeply embedded social practice that connects individuals to broader spiritual, cultural, and communal identities. Historically, dance has been integral to religious rituals, social ceremonies, and rites of passage, reinforcing collective values, norms, and beliefs within societies. Whether in the sacred dances of indigenous tribes, which embody cosmological understandings and ancestral veneration, or the formalized

structures of classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, dance acts as a medium through which spirituality and social order are articulated and reproduced.

In many cultures, dance operates as a ritualized practice that strengthens social cohesion and transmits cultural heritage from one generation to the next. This transmission is not merely of movement or artistic technique but also of deeply held beliefs, cosmologies, and moral codes. Dance, in this context, becomes a tool for the preservation of tradition, enabling individuals to participate in and perpetuate the collective memory of their community. The spiritual dimensions of dance are often intertwined with its social functions, as rituals and performances connect individuals to sacred time and space, fostering a shared sense of purpose and continuity.

Moreover, dance plays a critical role in shaping and developing individual identity within a sociocultural context. Through participation in dance, individuals internalize and embody the values and norms of their culture, which are communicated through movement, gesture, and the symbolic meanings embedded within the choreography. This embodied knowledge allows dancers to perform and negotiate their identities in relation to their community, faith, and social roles. Dance facilitates self-realization by providing individuals with a medium for exploring their relationship to the divine, society, and themselves, often blurring the boundaries between the sacred and the secular.

From a sociological perspective, dance also provides a lens through which to analyze the intersection of agency and structure in identity formation. While dancers may engage in self-expression and personal transformation, they do so within the constraints of cultural scripts, choreographies, and ritual practices that are socially constructed. The act of dancing, therefore, represents a complex interplay between individual agency and the collective traditions that shape and inform their experiences. In this way, dance serves as both a personal and social act—one that fosters self-discovery while simultaneously reinforcing societal cohesion.

This study specifically examines dance as a form of spiritual expression and its impact on the self within different sociocultural settings. It explores how dance functions as a ritualized practice that not only enables individuals to connect with the divine but also shapes their social identities, emotional experiences, and societal roles. The research highlights the ways in which dance bridges the gap between the individual and the collective, offering insights into how

spiritual practices are embedded within larger social structures and how these practices influence both personal development and social integration.

Ultimately, this sociological exploration of dance emphasizes its dual function as a means of personal transformation and a mechanism of cultural reproduction, underscoring its enduring importance in human societies. By fostering both self-expression and social continuity, dance continues to serve as a vital force in shaping identities, reinforcing community bonds, and expressing the complex interplay between the spiritual and the social dimensions of life.

1.2.1 Spirituality and Human existence

Spirituality is a dimension of human existence that transcends the material and physical aspects of life and often involves a search for meaning, purpose, and connection to something greater than oneself. It often involves introspection, self-reflection, and the exploration of one's inner self. Individuals may seek to understand their own beliefs, values, and nature of existence. Spirituality is a relative term. It is often associated with a quest for meaning and purpose in life. Spiritual practices aim at personal growth and transformation. This can involve developing virtues, cultivating empathy and compassion, and striving for a higher state of consciousness.

Spirituality often emphasizes ethical and moral principles as guiding forces in one's life. These values may influence decision-making and behaviour. Various perspectives can be applied to the broad idea of spirituality. It usually involves a desire for purpose in life and, generally speaking, a feeling of connectedness to something greater than ourselves. It affects everyone, making it a universal human experience. Sacred, exceptional, or simply a deep sensation of aliveness and connectivity are some terms used to characterize spiritual experiences. Some may find that their connection with a church, temple, mosque, or synagogue has a significant impact on their spiritual life. Others may turn to prayer, a close relationship with God, or a higher power for solace. Others look for significance in their relationships with the natural world or the arts. Your personal concept of spirituality may evolve throughout your life in response to your unique experiences and interpersonal connections, much like your sense of purpose.

Puchalski (2014), MD, Director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health, contends that "spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred."

Beauregard, M., & O'Leary, D. (2007), researchers and authors of The Spiritual Brain, "spirituality means any experience that is thought to bring the experiencer into contact with the divine (in other words, not just any experience that feels meaningful)."

Nurses Ruth Beckmann Murray and Judith Proctor Zenter write that "the spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, and strives for answers about the infinite, and comes into focus when the person faces emotional stress, physical illness, or death."

1.2.2 Dance as a medium to express

Dance is a form of embodied expression, allowing individuals to physically manifest their spiritual experiences. Movements, gestures, and postures in dance can symbolize spiritual concepts and facilitate a deeper connection to the divine. Some forms of dance, such as certain styles of contemporary or interpretive dance, are used as a means of meditation and contemplation. Dancers may engage in slow, intentional movements to explore inner spirituality and achieve a state of mindfulness. Certain dance performances tell stories or convey spiritual narratives. The choreography and movements can depict spiritual journeys, mythological tales, or allegorical representations of spiritual concepts. In some spiritual traditions, dance is used as a tool for healing and personal transformation. The rhythmic movements and expressive nature of dance can help individuals connect with their emotions, release stress, and facilitate a sense of spiritual well-being.

The first movements presented by the child since birth, even through reflex movements, demonstrate a utilitarian manifestation that somehow represent the individual's needs for survival, whether through the search for food, locomotion or another form of corporal manifestation. Throughout its growth and development, basic motor skills like sitting, crawling, rolling and jumping are achieved, becoming a support to acquire more elaborate movements that lead to creation actions and the representation of more refined movements. Thus, over time the individual's diverse corporal actions acquire a voluntary quality through which they will demonstrate their feelings, desires and emotions. These voluntary gestures present characteristics acquired from living among people and the environment and can be presented as the identity of a certain group.

Therefore, dance can be understood as a form of elaborate movement that provides elements or representations of people's culture and is considered a manifestation of habits and customs of a certain society.

Corporal movement executed by primitive peoples was their main form of communication and communion. Dance was not merely corporal movement, but also the connection between humans and the gods. They danced for the harvest, fertilization, fun, thanks and most especially for communication and understanding among members of that society. Before taking a stage to perform theatrical artistic dance, the dance movement was first an emotional overflowing, disorderly manifestation of fears, affection, ire and refusal, without any other particular organization, possibly, than an impassioned attraction for rhythm it successively became a magical charm, rite, ceremony, popular celebration, and finally, simply fun (OSSONA, 1988, p.42).

Repetitive movements, tireless gestures, the body taken to ecstasy all highlight this phase of dance's trajectory throughout its existence. At first, there was no concern about performance and body yield to reach high levels of technical quality. However, its presence in the everyday life of people was very close, because the moment of dance was not separated from experienced facts. Everything was very organic and natural in dance and living in society.

As time went by, humanity began to live in isolated groups. And thus diverse societies emerged and each one began to have its own dances with an identification function. (BOURCIER, 1987).

The dances kept improving, people were dancing more and more and every move was transformed into fun and entertainment. Humans began to feel pleasure in dancing and watching dance. People who danced began to dedicate themselves to it, to "rehearse" and transmit their dances to others, which was later called an "audience". Families with fortunes comprised the first audiences and dance was performed at public balls (OSSONA, 1988).

The first dancer on record came from the French court, Louis IV. Teachers and schools of dance emerged with him and they contributed towards the transformation of dance, going from communion with gods to entertainment and professionalism.

Besides that, professionalism, with professional dancers and dance teachers emerged for the first time. This is an important fact: until then, dance was a relatively free corporal expression. After that, it becomes an awareness of possibilities. Of the esthetic expression of the human body of the utility of rules to explore it. Furthermore, no doubt professionalism heads towards a higher technical level dance teachers do not belong to a low social class: they used to be part of the princes immediate circle (BOURCIER, 1987, p. 64).

With the establishment of rules and norms, the steps that today we call classical ballet were codified. Pierre de Beauchamps was responsible for the first codifications of dance and with the creation of the first dance school, ballet became a profession, transforming the bodies of ballerinas into veritable tools for connecting an idea.

After that, dance demanded hours of rehearsal from its interpreters to shape their bodies in a pre-established proposal. They increasingly sought to exceed the limits of their bodies believing they would thus reach perfection in movements and gestures. Many conflicts were created and many ballerinas did not dance for a long time, making it improper to follow the existing rules. In the midst of this scenario, there emerges Isadora Duncan, an American dancer who proposed a completely different dance from academic classical ballet at the time.

According to Navas and Dias (1992), Isadora sought inspiration in movements of nature. A free dance was created without corsets, stockings and point shoes and was presented in barefoot choreographies dressed in silk tunics (inappropriate vestments for classical dancers at the time, who danced with skin-tight stockings and knits).

Isadora contributed much more than simply break paradigms of corporal movement. Her contribution helped establish a new vision of movement that respected the anatomic standards for each dancer, not allowing the professional life of the dancer to be reduced due to wear caused by the execution of repetitive and exhaustive movements. Therefore, dance was given a new concept before society. Dance is not just an activity of the noble French bourgeoisie classes, but also of the common people who only like to move the body as a form of expression.

Modern dance appears as a proposal for movement that is different from what had been seen by classical dancers thus far. Diverse techniques and countless schools emerge, but all exploring the rules and codifications of steps and gestures as a means to seek esthetics in the desired movement. With the improvement of modern dance techniques, other esthetic principles were incorporated into dance. The search for diverse and new movements and the breaking down of academic standards made it possible for theoreticians to begin to think of what was being danced.

The kinesthetics of the body—movements, gestures, postures, jumps, turning, shifting body weight, etc.—are closely linked to dancing. Thus, dance is a manifestation of an amateur or the skilled behaviour of a fully trained player. Emotions are also present in dance as a result of expression and choreography's narration. Additionally, dance is preplanned and created to offer

a variety of styles and techniques. The dancer's body can help them become more emotionally and even spiritually connected. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation is to examine how dance becomes a medium for spirituality

1.2.3 Indian Classical dance and self

Indian classical dance is a holistic art form that integrates the body, mind, and spirit. At the same time, dancers are encouraged to develop a deep understanding of the emotional and spiritual aspects of their performances. This requires introspection, self-reflection, and a connection with one's inner self. Rooted in ancient traditions and philosophy, these dance forms serve as a conduit for spiritual expression, transcending mere physical movements. Whether it's Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, or any other classical dance style, practitioners delve into the depths of spirituality through intricate gestures, facial expressions, and rhythmic footwork. Each movement is imbued with meaning, reflecting the dancer's journey towards self-realization and connection with the divine. The dance becomes a spiritual offering, a form of worship, as dancers strive to embody the essence of sacred texts, myths, and spiritual concepts. In this way, Indian classical dance becomes a powerful medium for spiritual exploration and enlightenment, embodying the timeless wisdom and beauty of the Indian cultural heritage.

India's rich cultural heritage is adorned with a plethora of traditional art forms, and Indian dance stands out as one of its most captivating and vibrant expressions. Indian dance is not just a form of entertainment; it carries within it a deep sense of spirituality, storytelling, and cultural traditions. The evolution of Indian dance spans thousands of years, from ancient rituals to its present-day form on the modern stage. Indian dance is a captivating art form that holds immense significance in Indian culture and history. It is not merely a source of entertainment but serves as a powerful medium for storytelling, spiritual expression, and the preservation of cultural traditions. With a rich and diverse heritage that spans thousands of years, Indian dance has evolved from ancient rituals to its present-day form, enchanting audiences on modern stages worldwide. In this blog post, we delve into the captivating journey of Indian dance, exploring its various styles, influences, notable performers, training programs, and the future it holds in preserving its traditions in a modern world. Indian dance has a long history that dates back to the temple rituals of India, where it was an integral part of religious ceremonies.

The Natyashastra, a 2,000-year-old treatise on dance and theater by sage Bharata Muni, laid the foundation for classical Indian dance forms. It established the principles of movement, gesture, expression, and stagecraft for performers. The Natyashastra influenced many classical dance styles that are still practiced today, such as Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Kathakali, Kathak, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, and Mohiniyattam. These styles reflect the diverse culture of India, portraying its history, mythology, and faith.

Indian Classical dance expresses deep philosophical ideas such as spirituality, devotion, and the joy of life. It communicates complex emotions, stories, and cultural meanings through elegant movements, rhythmic footwork, symbolic hand gestures, and facial expressions. Indian dance is rooted in the ancient temple traditions that fostered artistic expression. The Natyashastra's guidelines shaped the art form and enabled practitioners to create engaging performances.

These ancient traditions continue to inspire and inform Indian dance in modern times, making it a relevant and cherished form of art. Indian dance represents the country's rich heritage, connecting the past and present with its beauty and vitality.

1.2.4 Identity

Identity development is a lifelong process that begins in childhood, starts to solidify in adolescence, and continues through adulthood. Your identity gives you your sense of self. It is a set of traits that distinguishes you from other people, because while you might have some things in common with others, no one else has the exact same combination of traits as you.

Dance serves as a powerful tool for communities to express their heritage, values, and traditions. Through movement, dance allows individuals to connect with their roots and celebrate their cultural diversity.

A "performance" may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion that serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.

I have been using the term "performance" to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers.

So, by 'performance', Goffman(1959) is referring to any activity by an individual in the presence of others which influences those others.

1.2.5 Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital are relevant to understanding how classical dance contributes to building one's self. Habitus refers to the ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals develop through their cultural and social experiences. In classical dance, the disciplined practice and spiritual rituals become part of the dancer's habitus, influencing their sense of self and identity. Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital also applies, as mastery of classical dance can confer social status and spiritual authority, reinforcing the dancer's identity.

In many cultures, dance transcends mere physical movement, functioning as a sacred practice that connects individuals with the divine, the universe, or their inner selves. Practices such as the whirling of Sufi dervishes, the trance dances of African spiritual traditions, and the contemplative movements in certain forms of contemporary dance illustrate how dance can be a profound spiritual experience. These practices often embody deep spiritual narratives, allowing dancers to express and explore their beliefs, emotions, and identities in ways that are not accessible through language alone.

1.2.6 Erving Goffman's theory of the presentation of self

Erving Goffman's theory of the presentation of self in everyday life is useful for understanding how classical dancers manage their identities through performance. Goffman suggested that individuals perform roles in society, presenting themselves in ways that align with their desired self-image. Classical dance can be seen as a stage where dancers perform not just for an audience but for themselves, actively constructing and expressing their spiritual identity through their movements and interactions.

The concept of self, particularly within the context of spiritual development, is multifaceted and dynamic. It involves the integration of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions, which together contribute to a person's overall identity and sense of being. Dance, as an embodied practice, offers a unique avenue for exploring these dimensions. Through movement, individuals can experience and express aspects of themselves that may be difficult to articulate verbally, such as their connection to a higher power, their innermost desires, or their sense of purpose.

Despite the recognized significance of dance in spiritual and personal development, there remains a gap in understanding how exactly spiritual expression through dance influences the construction and evolution of the self. While numerous studies have explored the psychological and emotional benefits of dance, fewer have specifically addressed its spiritual aspects and their impact on identity formation. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how individuals use dance as a form of spiritual expression and how this practice contributes to their sense of self.

In contemporary society, where individuals increasingly seek holistic approaches to personal development, the integration of spiritual practices with physical activities like dance is gaining popularity. This trend is reflected in the rise of dance forms that emphasize mindfulness, meditation, and spiritual exploration, such as ecstatic dance, sacred circle dance, and yoga-inspired dance practices. These movements highlight a growing recognition of the body's role in spiritual development and the potential of dance to facilitate profound personal transformation.

The study aims to explore these themes by investigating the experiences of individuals who engage in dance as a form of spiritual expression. It will consider how dance practices influence their self-concept, identity formation, and overall sense of well-being. By focusing on the lived experiences of dancers, this research will provide valuable insights into the ways in which spiritual expression through dance contributes to the ongoing process of building one's self.

The findings from this study are expected to contribute to broader discussions on the role of the arts in spiritual development and personal growth, the significance of embodied practices in identity formation, and the potential of dance as a tool for personal growth and identifying the self.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In many communities, dance serves as a vital medium for expressing spiritual beliefs, developing identity, and facilitating social cohesion. Dance is not merely a form of aesthetic performance but is deeply intertwined with cultural, religious, and spiritual practices, serving as a channel for individuals to connect with the divine and the transcendent. However, despite its profound significance, the intricate relationship between dance and spirituality remains underexplored within the sociological framework. This lack of academic inquiry into how

spirituality is expressed through dance creates a gap in our understanding of the role dance plays in shaping identity, reinforcing cultural values, and contributing to social integration.

Historically, dance has been an essential component of religious rituals and cultural celebrations in societies across the globe. From indigenous ceremonies to complex religious performances, dance often acts as a form of embodied spirituality, through which individuals and communities engage with the sacred and express their beliefs in a collective, physical, and symbolic manner. Yet, the sociological dimensions of these practices—how dance functions as a mechanism for maintaining cultural continuity, structuring social hierarchies, and shaping individual self-concepts—have not been thoroughly investigated. A deeper understanding of the sociocultural factors that influence the spiritual experience of dance is essential for recognizing its role in the construction of identity, both individual and collective, within different communities.

Indian classical dance, in particular, represents a rich and dynamic tradition where spirituality and cultural heritage are tightly interwoven. Rooted in ancient religious texts, these dances—such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniyattam, and Kathakali—embody spiritual themes and religious narratives. Historically, these dances have been performed in temples and at religious festivals, acting as offerings to deities and as mediums for conveying moral stories and teachings. The choreography, symbolic gestures (mudras), facial expressions (bhavas), and music all contribute to a complex system of spiritual signification, creating a dance that is both a religious act and a performance of cultural identity. Yet, despite this deep cultural and spiritual heritage, there is a lack of comprehensive research that explores how spirituality is expressed through these dance forms and how they shape the dancer's self and societal role.

The challenge, therefore, lies in comprehending how Indian classical dance operates as a sociocultural practice that not only preserves spiritual and cultural traditions but also facilitates personal and social transformation. How do performers and audiences interact with the spiritual and symbolic components of these dances? How do these traditions evolve to remain relevant to contemporary society while maintaining their spiritual significance? Additionally, how does the practice of these spiritual dances contribute to the construction of individual identity and the reinforcement of social structures, such as caste, gender roles, and religious belonging?

From a sociological perspective, dance can be seen as a ritualized form of social communication that reinforces cultural norms, fosters group solidarity, and contributes to the reproduction of social order. Indian classical dance, with its codified movements, symbolic gestures, and religious narratives, is not only an artistic expression but also a means of transmitting values and reinforcing social bonds. For the individual dancer, participation in these traditions allows for an embodied experience of spirituality, providing a framework through which they can explore and construct their identity within a particular social and religious context. The dance becomes a way of enacting and internalizing social roles, while also allowing space for personal expression and spiritual exploration.

However, the ways in which Indian classical dance facilitates this process of identity formation, both for the dancer and for the wider community, remain insufficiently studied. There is a need for research that focuses on how spiritual themes are woven into the technical and narrative elements of dance and how these spiritual practices shape the individual's sense of self. Additionally, there is a need to investigate how these dances adapt to modern audiences and contemporary cultural shifts, while still maintaining their spiritual essence.

This study aims to explore the sociological aspects of how spirituality is expressed through Indian classical dance and its role in shaping individual and collective identities. By examining the ways in which spirituality is embodied in dance, this research seeks to uncover the broader social implications of dance as a form of spiritual practice. This investigation will contribute to the sociology of dance by offering insights into how dance serves as a means of self-construction, cultural continuity, and social cohesion within diverse communities, particularly in the context of Indian classical traditions.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to the sociological understanding of Indian classical dance by investigating its spiritual dimensions within a cultural and social framework. By employing qualitative methodologies, this research provides a nuanced analysis of how spiritual themes are embedded in dance practices and how they shape individual and collective identities. The study advances the academic discourse in the sociology of art, religion, and culture by offering new insights into the ways spirituality and performance intersect to influence self-construction, social roles, and cultural continuity.

For scholars, this study enriches the sociological literature on the role of embodied practices—such as dance—in the production and reproduction of culture and spirituality. It broadens the scope of sociological inquiry into how cultural and religious values are transmitted, sustained, and adapted through artistic expression. By examining the intersection of spirituality, identity, and social life, the research deepens our understanding of how traditional practices like Indian classical dance contribute to social cohesion, cultural preservation, and the transmission of social norms across generations.

For dance educators and practitioners, the study provides a deeper sociological perspective on how the spiritual dimensions of dance are intricately linked to social practices, beliefs, and cultural values. It offers insights into how these spiritual and cultural elements can be effectively incorporated into teaching methodologies and performance approaches, fostering a more holistic understanding of dance as a medium for both personal and social expression.

From a policy perspective, this study offers governments, cultural organizations, and policymakers valuable insights into how Indian classical dance serves as a cultural resource that reinforces social cohesion and spiritual heritage. The findings can inform the development of policies and programs aimed at preserving and promoting these traditional art forms in a way that acknowledges and respects their spiritual and cultural significance. Furthermore, this research can support the integration of dance into broader cultural initiatives, enhancing community engagement and cultural revitalization efforts.

In the realm of therapeutic practices, this study highlights the potential of Indian classical dance as a tool for social and emotional rehabilitation, emphasizing its role in fostering spiritual well-being and personal growth. Dance therapy programs that draw upon the spiritual and cultural aspects of dance can utilize the insights from this research to enhance their approaches, offering individuals a means to reconnect with their spiritual selves and engage in personal healing through culturally grounded practices.

Ultimately, this study sheds light on the ways in which Indian classical dance functions as a medium for spiritual expression and social identity construction. By exploring the relationship between spirituality, dance, and society, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural practices shape individual lives and sustain collective traditions, offering valuable perspectives for both academic inquiry and practical application.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The exploration of the influence of spiritual expression through classical dance in building one's self delves into a rich and multifaceted area of study, intersecting the domains of art, spirituality, psychology, and cultural studies. Classical dance, revered for its intricate movements and deep cultural roots, is not merely an art form but a profound medium through which individuals connect with their inner selves, express their spiritual beliefs, and experience personal transformation. The review of literature on this topic seeks to synthesize existing research, theories, and discussions that highlight the unique role of classical dance as a vehicle for spiritual expression and personal growth.

The concept of spirituality in dance transcends the physicality of movement, encompassing a deeply personal and often transformative experience that connects the dancer to a higher consciousness or divine presence. This spiritual dimension has been a subject of interest among scholars, who have examined how various classical dance traditions, such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and Odissi, serve as conduits for expressing and nurturing spirituality. These traditions, rooted in religious and cultural narratives, offer dancers a structured yet fluid medium to explore and express their spirituality, leading to profound personal insights and growth.

In addition to spiritual expression, classical dance has been studied for its impact on personal development, including the enhancement of discipline, emotional resilience, and self-awareness. The act of embodying different characters and narratives on stage allows dancers to explore various aspects of their identity, facilitating a journey of self-realization and self-discovery. This aspect of classical dance aligns with psychological theories on art as a form of self-expression and personal development, where the creative process becomes a tool for exploring and understanding one's inner world.

Moreover, the review of literature will consider the broader cultural and social contexts within which classical dance operates. It will explore how cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and social norms influence the spiritual and personal dimensions of dance, and how dancers navigate these influences to build their sense of self. The interplay between individual

expression and cultural identity in classical dance offers a rich area of exploration, providing insights into how personal and collective identities are shaped through artistic practices.

This review of literature aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the existing research on the influence of spiritual expression through classical dance in building one's self. By synthesizing key studies, theoretical perspectives, and cultural discussions, it will lay the foundation for a deeper exploration of how classical dance serves as a powerful medium for spiritual and personal transformation. Through this review, the study seeks to contextualize its findings within the broader scholarly discourse, highlighting the significance of classical dance as a unique and impactful form of spiritual and personal expression.

2.2 STUDIES ON DANCE AND SPIRITUALITY

Schuf (2012) delves into the significance of dance within Christian contexts in contemporary Norway, offering a rich exploration of how dance raises spiritual and personal development. Her work emphasizes the integration of embodied knowledge and faith through dance, framing it not merely as a performative act but as a profound spiritual practice. Schuf's study raises critical questions about the intersection of religion and corporeality, challenging traditional Western conceptions of spirituality as something separate from the body. By grounding her analysis in modern Christian practices, she extends the discourse on spirituality beyond textual or cognitive faith expressions, positioning dance as a dynamic form of worship. However, Schuf does not fully address how these practices may differ across social classes or denominations within Norway, leaving room for future research to explore the stratified nature of religious dance in varying socio-economic contexts.

Self Care Flexx (2023) provides a compelling narrative on dance as a vehicle for spiritual expression across different global traditions, from African tribal dances to modern practices like Biodanza and ecstatic dance. The article critically underscores how dance transcends its role as mere entertainment, becoming a "language of the soul" that connects participants to the divine. This perspective challenges reductive views of dance as an ephemeral or decorative art form, positioning it instead as a vital means of spiritual communication. The article's strength lies in its broad cultural analysis, highlighting the universality of dance as a spiritual tool across diverse civilizations. Yet, this universality could be scrutinized further—while the article brings attention to the shared spiritual potential of dance, it lacks a nuanced consideration of how cultural, political, and historical specificities shape the spiritual experience differently in each

tradition. For instance, the communal, performative aspects of African tribal dance contrast sharply with the individualistic focus of contemporary Western therapeutic dance forms, a distinction that could be explored in greater depth to avoid overgeneralization.

Kieft's (2022) research, "Nature and Dance: Gateways to the Mystery," offers a holistic examination of dance as a means of spiritual and ecological expression. By connecting dance to the natural world, Kieft extends the understanding of spirituality to encompass not just personal or religious experiences but also an embodied connection to nature. This broadens the traditional scope of spiritual dance, incorporating eco-spirituality and positioning dance as a conduit for environmental consciousness. Kieft's research is particularly strong in its application of feminist theory, highlighting how dance as a bodily practice challenges patriarchal views that have historically relegated women's spirituality to the margins. However, Kieft's work could benefit from further engagement with intersectionality—while her analysis critiques gender hierarchies, it remains relatively silent on how race, class, and sexuality might intersect with spirituality and dance practices. Incorporating these dimensions would provide a more layered understanding of how dance functions within diverse spiritual ecosystems.

Parkhatskaya (2023) delves into the spiritual dimensions of jazz and West African dance, placing particular emphasis on the integration of physical movement with metaphysical principles such as chakra alignment and cosmic consciousness. Her exploration moves beyond a simplistic view of dance as physical exertion, framing it instead as a pathway to heightened spiritual awareness. By linking dance with energy flow and universal consciousness, Parkhatskaya situates her analysis within a broader spiritual framework that resonates with both Eastern and Western mystical traditions. However, the article's focus on the metaphysical aspects of dance somewhat sidelines the social and political contexts in which these dance forms emerged. For instance, jazz dance, rooted in African American cultural resistance, carries significant socio-political connotations that are not fully addressed in the spiritual framework offered by the author. A more critical engagement with the historical and cultural foundations of jazz and West African dance would provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of how these forms of dance intersect with both spirituality and social identity.

Snowber (2019) provides a deeply personal reflection on the relationship between dance and spirituality, arguing that movement is an essential aspect of what it means to be human. Snowber's work is particularly effective in emphasizing dance as a medium for expressing both joy and grief, and for connecting with the ineffable aspects of life. Her argument that dance is

a universal language echoes sentiments found in many other studies, but she expands on this by advocating for the integration of dance into daily life as a spiritual practice. This everyday spirituality approach is valuable in demystifying dance as something that belongs solely to the sacred or the stage, making it accessible to all as a form of embodied prayer or meditation. However, Snowber's largely autobiographical approach, while rich in personal insight, could be critiqued for its lack of empirical data. While her reflections resonate with readers on an emotional level, a more rigorous methodological framework could enhance the academic legitimacy of her claims, particularly in the context of sociological studies that seek to balance subjective experiences with broader social analysis.

Bhavanani and Bhavanani (2010) offer a scholarly exploration of Bharatanatyam's spiritual significance, framing it as a practice deeply aligned with the principles of yoga. Their study is particularly noteworthy for its detailed examination of how Bharatanatyam not only facilitates the dancer's spiritual union with the Divine but also creates a space for the audience to experience this connection vicariously. The authors emphasize the importance of mudras (hand gestures) and asanas (postures), which are integral to both dance and yoga, illustrating the embodied nature of spirituality in Bharatanatyam. This study contributes significantly to the discourse on the intersection of art, religion, and embodiment, particularly in its focus on the holistic development of the dancer. However, the study could expand further on the socio-political implications of Bharatanatyam's spiritual practice. Historically, Bharatanatyam was closely associated with temple rituals and the Devadasi system, which was both spiritual and exploitative. A more critical historical perspective could examine how contemporary performances navigate the dance's complex legacy, addressing issues of gender, caste, and class that continue to shape its practice today.

Ramaswamy and Deslauriers (2014) explore the convergence of Bharatanatyam and Contact Improvisation, highlighting how these distinct forms of dance generate spiritual experiences for the dancer. Their phenomenological inquiry into the act of dancing identifies a reciprocal relationship between the dancer and the emerging spiritual dimensions, emphasizing the co-creative process of dance as both a personal and collective spiritual practice. The study's comparative approach offers valuable insights into how diverse dance forms, rooted in different cultural traditions, can nonetheless share common spiritual trajectories. However, while the study highlights the spiritual commonalities across these forms, it might be criticized for overlooking the specific historical and cultural contexts that shape each tradition's unique

spiritual expressions. Bharatanatyam, with its deep religious roots, carries a different spiritual weight than Contact Improvisation, which emerged in the countercultural movements of the 20th century. A more nuanced analysis that situates each form within its respective socio-cultural and historical framework would deepen the study's contribution to the sociology of dance.

2.3 STUDIES ON PERSONAL GROWTH AND SELF REALISATION THROUGH DANCE

Braun and Kotera (2021) highlight the significant role of dance in enhancing embodied self-awareness and well-being, particularly within therapeutic contexts. Their review explores how dance facilitates a deeper connection between the body and mind, promoting a holistic sense of self that integrates physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. They suggest that dance interventions effectively improve mental health outcomes, such as reducing anxiety, depression, and stress, while also fostering emotional expression and resilience. The authors emphasize the nonverbal, expressive nature of dance, which allows individuals to communicate and process emotions that may be difficult to articulate through words. This expressive freedom in dance leads to increased self-awareness, helping individuals recognize and address internal conflicts, thus contributing to overall well-being. Furthermore, Braun and Kotera note that the communal aspect of dance, where individuals move and express themselves in a shared space, enhances social connections and support networks, further contributing to psychological and emotional health. Overall, they underscore dance as a powerful tool for fostering self-awareness, emotional expression, and well-being, particularly in therapeutic settings where traditional verbal therapies may fall short.

Acharya and Jain (2016) explore the foundational aim of classical Indian dances and yoga, which has historically been the attainment of union with the divine through physical transcendence, offering pathways to self-discovery over centuries. Their research underscores the efficacy of these practices as therapeutic interventions by emphasizing the integrated nature of mind and body, where changes in one realm manifest in the other. They identify parallels between Indian classical dances and yoga, emphasizing their shared focus on enhancing physical health, rhythmic breathing techniques, chakra activation, emotional release, and achieving a transcendent state or 'enlightenment experience'. The primary objective of their study is to demonstrate the intrinsic unity between yoga and Indian classical dance, both in

promoting overall well-being and in facilitating spiritual exploration, thereby achieving a state of bliss akin to self-realization and divine connection.

Bhattacharya and Lihala (2015) investigate the intersection of Indian classical dance and self-esteem, focusing on how engagement with this art form contributes to psychological well-being. Their review highlights the transformative impact of Indian classical dance on individuals, particularly its role in fostering a sense of identity, self-worth, and confidence. They emphasize the therapeutic potential of dance, noting that it provides a means for emotional expression and coping, which can lead to increased self-esteem. Moreover, they discuss how the discipline, cultural immersion, and physicality involved in practicing Indian classical dance contribute to personal growth and the development of a positive self-image. The rigorous training and performance aspects are seen as essential in helping dancers, especially women and young adults, overcome insecurities and societal pressures, thereby nurturing a resilient and empowered self. Additionally, they touch on the cultural significance of dance in India, noting that classical dance is not only an art form but also a spiritual practice that enhances an individual's connection with their inner self, further reinforcing self-esteem. Through these discussions, Bhattacharya and Lihala suggest that Indian classical dance serves as a powerful tool for enhancing self-esteem, providing both psychological benefits and cultural enrichment.

2.4 STUDIES ON DANCE AS THERAPY

Kieft (2014) presents movement medicine as a form of art-based research focusing on the transformative effects of dance on participants' well-being, personal growth, and spirituality. Her study examines the benefits of movement medicine for mental, emotional, and physical health, while also exploring its impact on spirituality and personal development. Kieft's results indicate positive changes experienced by participants at physical, emotional, and relational levels, illuminating dance's potential as a form of moving spirituality.

Bajekal (2020) explores the intersection of dance and spirituality through the lens of dance/movement therapy (DMT). Her article integrates the foundational principles of Bharata Natyam, an ancient South Indian classical dance form, with DMT theory to propose the concept of embodied transcendence. Central to this theoretical framework is the application of Bharata Natyam's insights into the interconnectedness of mind, body, emotions, and spirit within the therapeutic context of DMT. Bajekal argues that under the guidance of a therapist, clients can

achieve heightened awareness of their experiences, potentially leading to states of transcendence and deeper self-understanding. The article emphasizes the transformative potential of integrating Bharata Natyam's holistic worldview into DMT practices, proposing avenues for future research while acknowledging current limitations. This approach aims to enrich therapeutic outcomes by leveraging the expressive and symbolic dimensions of dance to facilitate profound psychological and spiritual insights.

Capello (2020) provides a comprehensive review of the literature on dance therapy, emphasizing its significant role in promoting psychological and emotional well-being through movement-based therapeutic practices. Dance therapy, which combines the artistic expression of dance with psychological counseling, has been shown to facilitate the processing of emotions, enhance self-awareness, and foster a sense of community among participants. Capello's research indicates that engaging in dance therapy can lead to improvements in mood, reductions in stress, and increased resilience in individuals facing mental health challenges. The non-verbal nature of dance allows participants to express feelings that might be difficult to articulate, making it a powerful tool for those with trauma or communication difficulties. Moreover, dance therapy has been found to support physical health by encouraging movement, which can improve motor skills and physical fitness. Despite its benefits, Capello highlights challenges such as the need for more standardized protocols and culturally sensitive practices, especially when working with diverse populations. She concludes that while dance therapy is recognized for its holistic benefits, further research is needed to fully understand its mechanisms and optimize its application in different therapeutic contexts.

2.5 RESEARCH GAP

The existing literature on classical dance predominantly focuses on its aesthetic, cultural, and physical dimensions, with limited exploration of its spiritual aspects. While studies have acknowledged the role of classical dance in preserving cultural heritage and enhancing physical well-being, there is a significant gap in understanding how spiritual expression through this art form contributes to personal development, particularly in building one's self. Research that delves into the transformative effects of classical dance on individual spirituality, self-realization, and emotional well-being remains scarce. Furthermore, the influence of rituals, prayers, and other spiritual practices integrated with classical dance on the dancers' spiritual growth and self-awareness has not been adequately studied. Finally, while performance aspects are well-documented, the impact of teaching and mentorship in classical dance as a means of

spiritual and personal growth is underexplored. This gap in the literature underscores the need for a more comprehensive qualitative investigation into the spiritual dimensions of classical dance and its role in shaping individuals' inner lives.

2.6 CONCLUSION: CRITICAL REFLECTION

The literature on the topic "Beyond the Movements: Influence of Spiritual Expression Through Classical Dance in Building One's Self" highlights the relationship between spirituality and classical dance. Although numerous studies have delved into the aesthetic, cultural, and physical aspects of classical dance, the spiritual dimension remains largely peripheral. This is significant, given that classical dance, especially within Indian traditions like Bharatanatyam, is deeply intertwined with spiritual practices such as rituals, prayers, and symbolic gestures that have transcendent meanings.

The literature reveals that dance, beyond being a cultural or physical activity, has transformative potential. This potential lies in its ability to foster self-realization, personal growth, and emotional well-being. However, much of the existing research stops short of thoroughly examining how dance serves as a medium for spiritual expression. While scholars acknowledge dance's ability to facilitate a deeper connection to oneself and others, the specific mechanisms by which dance catalyzes spiritual growth remain vague or generalized. For instance, many studies focus on performance and technique, but they do not adequately explore how engaging with the spiritual elements of dance can lead to personal transformation.

Furthermore, the literature points to a need for cross-cultural studies, which would provide a richer understanding of the spiritual aspects of dance across different traditions. While studies have touched on various global practices—such as Sufi whirling or African tribal dances—comparative analyses that examine similarities and differences between these traditions and classical Indian dance, for example, are scarce. Such research could illuminate the universal and culturally specific ways in which dance serves as a spiritual practice, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how spirituality is expressed through movement across cultures.

The role of mentorship and pedagogy in classical dance as a means of fostering spiritual growth is another under-researched area. Dance teachers often serve not only as instructors but also as spiritual guides, yet this dimension of mentorship is seldom critically examined. The lack of research into how teaching and learning processes in classical dance help shape the spiritual

and emotional development of dancers presents a significant gap in understanding the holistic impact of classical dance.

In reflection, it becomes evident that the relationship between classical dance and spirituality demands more focused attention within sociological scholarship. The existing literature, while informative, tends to focus predominantly on external elements—technique, cultural preservation, and physical benefits—while neglecting the inner transformation that dance can inspire. By shifting the focus towards the spiritual aspects of classical dance, future research could provide profound insights into how art serves as a catalyst for personal growth, self-awareness, and emotional healing.

Additionally, exploring the intersection of spirituality and dance offers valuable implications for the broader discourse on human development. As the literature suggests, spiritual practices inherent in classical dance have the potential to transcend individual performance and create a collective experience of transcendence, unity, and emotional expression. Dance, thus, becomes a medium for both individual and communal spiritual journeys. To fully capture the richness of this intersection, more qualitative research—particularly in the form of ethnographies, interviews with practitioners, and cross-cultural studies—is needed.

In conclusion, the literature presents classical dance as a powerful, yet underutilized, tool for spiritual expression and self-building. The holistic development it adopts extends beyond the body to encompass the mind and spirit. Understanding this dimension could enhance not only the practice of dance but also its pedagogical approaches and therapeutic applications. Classical dance, when viewed through a spiritual lens, has the capacity to enrich the personal and spiritual lives of both practitioners and audiences, contributing to a deeper understanding of the self and the human experience.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 TITLE OF THE STUDY

BEYOND THE MOVEMENTS: INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION THROUGH CLASSICAL DANCE IN BUILDING ONE'S SELF

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.2.1 GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION

- How does spiritual expression through classical dance contribute to the development of one's self?

3.2.2 SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do individuals experience personal transformation through spiritual engagement in classical dance?
- In what ways does spiritual expression through classical dance influence the formation of identity and self-concept in dancers?
- What are the effects of spiritual practices within classical dance on dancers' mental and emotional well-being?
- How do cultural and social contexts shape and influence spiritual dance practices in classical dance?

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Bryman (2012), a research design serves as a framework for data collection and analysis, reflecting the researcher's priorities throughout the research process. It shapes the structure of the entire research process, reflecting the researcher's priorities, methodologies, and objectives. In this study, a **case study design** was chosen to gain an understanding of how individuals connect with their spirituality through classical dance in their personal lives.

A case study design offers a deep, contextualized examination of a single social phenomenon, which may involve an individual, group, event, or community. This methodological approach enables the researcher in providing a rich and detailed exploration of its complexities. The

strength of case studies lies in their ability to provide holistic insights, capturing distinctions that may be overlooked by other research methods.

In the context of this study, the case focuses on **classical dancers**, particularly how their spiritual expression through dance contributes to building their self. Classical dance, deeply rooted in spiritual and cultural traditions, provides a unique lens through which to explore the dancers' personal growth, identity formation, and emotional well-being. By focusing on individual dancers, this research aims to capture the subjective experiences that shape their spiritual journeys.

The case study approach is used in this research for several reasons. First, it accommodates the complexity and uniqueness of individual experiences in spiritual expression through dance. Unlike broader surveys or experimental designs, the case study allows for a detailed, qualitative analysis of each dancer's lived experience. Second, the exploratory nature of this study aligns with the strengths of the case study design, which is well-suited for investigating phenomena where little is known or where existing theories need to be contextualized. Third, the depth of inquiry afforded by the case study method enables the researcher to illuminate the specific ways in which dance serves as a vehicle for spiritual connection, emotional expression, and personal transformation.

Thus, the case study design is an ideal choice for this research, as it not only highlights the unique circumstances and backgrounds of classical dancers but also provides a platform to explore the profound interplay between art, spirituality, and identity. Through this focused lens, the study seeks to reveal the transformative power of spiritual expression in classical dance and its significant role in shaping the inner lives of individuals.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

The present research employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically a descriptive approach, to delve into the experiences of Indian Classical Dancers. Qualitative research emphasizes a profound comprehension of the subject matter, highlighting its intricacies and particulars. In this study, the aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding the influence of spiritual expression through dance in building one's self, focusing on their journey from self-realisation to personal transformation. To gather data, a semi-structured interview approach was employed, guided by an interview guide. This approach allows for flexibility while ensuring that key topics are covered. By engaging participants in conversations, the research

seeks to capture their narratives, insights, and perspectives. The sample selection followed a purposive approach, where cases were deliberately chosen based on specific criteria that aligned with the research objectives. A total of six classical dancers were included as participants in the study. In essence, this qualitative descriptive research design provides a platform for the participants to share their stories and experiences in their own words. By employing in-depth interviews and purposeful sampling, the research endeavor to uncover the unique narratives of these classical dancers, shedding light on their spiritual feelings, personal growth, self-realisation, emotional feelings and stress management in their lives.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analysed thematically. Thematic analysis of classical dancers involves systematically examining qualitative data collected from these classical dancers to identify recurring themes, patterns, and meanings within their narratives. Thematic analysis is a flexible method that allows researchers to uncover the rich and complex experiences of Classical dancers. Applying thematic analysis to the narratives of classical dancers provides a structured and systematic approach to finding meaningful insights. It allows researchers to reveal the underlying stories, emotions, and experiences that contribute to a holistic understanding of spiritual feelings, personal growth, self-realisation, emotional feelings, and stress management within these classical dancers.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this research, the use of names and photographs portrayed are included with the full permission of the participants. Informed consent has been obtained from all respondents prior to their involvement, ensuring that they are fully aware of the ways in which their names, images, and personal stories will be utilized within the research.

3.7 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study on the influence of spiritual expression through classical dance in building one's self presents certain limitations. Firstly, the findings are not easily generalizable, as they are specific to a small group of classical dancers, and may not reflect the experiences of dancers in other cultural contexts. Spirituality, being a deeply personal and complex concept, poses challenges in defining and measuring it accurately. Participants often struggled to articulate their spiritual experiences, which may limit the depth and clarity of the data. Additionally, the study faced

time and resource constraints, which restricted the depth of interviews, observations, and data analysis, potentially affecting the comprehensiveness of the findings. Furthermore, the small sample size inherent in qualitative case studies limits the ability to draw broader conclusions, reducing the overall applicability of the study's insights on the influence of spiritual expression through classical dance. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the personal and spiritual impact of classical dance on individual dancers.

CHAPTER IV

CASE PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

CASE PRESENTATION: INTRODUCTION

In this section, the cases will be presented to offer an in-depth examination of how classical dance, particularly through its spiritual and expressive dimensions, influences the personal growth, self-realization, and identity formation of the dancers. The cases have been carefully selected to reflect diverse experiences, ensuring a detailed understanding of the relationship between dance and spirituality. The cases is presented narratively, enriched with direct quotes and personal reflections from the dancers to ensure that their voices and experiences are authentically conveyed. Where applicable, photographs and other visual materials was included to provide additional context, always respecting the ethical guidelines set forth by the study.

4.1.1 BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

CASE 2

Ambili: Professional Bharatanatyam dance teacher – The Lifelong Commitment to Dance and Spiritual Fulfillment Through Bharatanatyam

Ambili, a 42-year-old professional Bharatanatyam dance teacher, embodies a deep spiritual connection to her art, one that has evolved over decades of dedication. Her middle-class upbringing in a family consisting of her husband and son provides a stable backdrop to her life as an artist. Having started her dance journey at the age of 12, Ambili quickly grew passionate about Bharatanatyam, which eventually became more than just a pursuit of technical skill; it turned into her life's calling.



Case 2: Mithra – A Journey of Spiritual Expression and Self-Discovery Through Bharatanatyam

Mithra, a 22-year-old postgraduate student of Psychology, hails from a middle-class family consisting of her father, mother, and brother. Having begun her dance journey at the tender age of three, Mithra's connection to Bharatanatyam has been a constant in her life, shaping not only her artistic abilities but also her personal and spiritual growth.



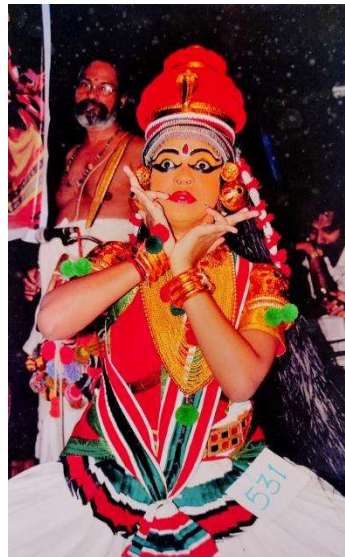
Case 3: Saritha – A Devotion to Dance: Nurturing the Self Through Bharatanatyam and Mohiniyattom

Saritha, a 43-year-old professional dance teacher, has spent nearly three decades immersed in the world of classical Indian dance. Hailing from a middle-class family, Saritha's household comprises her husband, son, and mother, alongside herself. Her journey in dance began at the age of 3, with Bharatanatyam as her primary form of artistic expression. She later embraced Mohiniyattom, another classical dance style, expanding her repertoire. By the age of 15, Saritha was already teaching dance, a role that she has continued for 29 years. Her dedication to dance is deeply intertwined with her sense of identity, spirituality, and self-realization.



Case 4: Jithalekshmi – A Pursuit of Academic Excellence and Spiritual Fulfillment Through Dance

Jithalekshmi, a 25-year-old postgraduate student, hails from a middle-class family consisting of her father, mother, brother, and herself. She embarked on her journey in classical dance at the age of three, initially exploring Bharatanatyam. Over the years, her passion for dance expanded, and she embraced the art forms of Koodiyattom and Kerala Nadanam as well. Now, at a pivotal point in her life, Jithalekshmi is preparing to pursue a PhD in Bharatanatyam, further deepening her academic and spiritual connection to the art. Her academic pursuits are driven by a desire to understand not only the technical and cultural dimensions of dance but also its spiritual significance, particularly in the way it shapes personal identity and contributes to emotional and mental well-being.



Case 5: Margi Usha – A Devotion to Classical Dance and Spiritual Expression



Margi Usha is a professional dance teacher who has dedicated her life to the art forms of Koodiyattom, Bharatanatyam, and Mohiniyattom. Coming from a middle-class family, her family consists of her husband and herself. Usha's introduction to the world of dance began

relatively late, at the age of 15, yet her passion and commitment quickly propelled her into the

classical dance community. She pursued her qualifications in Koodiyattom from Kerala Kalamandalam, one of the most prestigious institutions for performing arts.

Case 6: Priyanka Joseph – Balancing Academic Pursuits and Spiritual Fulfillment Through Dance



Priyanka Joseph, a 24-year-old postgraduate student of Sociology, has seamlessly blended her academic journey with her lifelong passion for classical dance. Born into a middle-class family, which includes her father, mother, sister, and herself, Priyanka's journey in dance began at the tender age of three. Over the years, she has mastered Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattom, and Kerala Natanam, dance forms that are deeply rooted in India's cultural and spiritual traditions.



4.2 VERBATIM NARRATIVES

Verbatim narratives are a powerful qualitative research tool that capture the raw, unfiltered voices of participants in their own words. In this study, verbatim narratives offer an intimate glimpse into the lived experiences of classical dancers, highlighting their personal journeys, challenges, and spiritual growth. By allowing participants to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and reflections, these narratives provide deep insights into how spirituality and classical dance intersect to shape identity, emotional well-being, and personal transformation.

The use of verbatim narratives ensures that the dancers' voices remain central to the research, preserving the authenticity of their stories. These accounts help illustrate the rich diversity of experiences within the world of classical dance, revealing the nuanced ways in which each dancer integrates spiritual expression into their art form and daily life. Through these narratives, the study aims to shed light on the transformative power of dance and its role in fostering self-realization and personal growth.

4.2.1 How do individuals experience personal transformation through spiritual engagement in classical dance?

Mithra's personal transformation is deeply connected to her spiritual experiences in dance. The rituals she follows before dancing—such as praying to the goddess of the earth, bathing, and lighting a lamp—demonstrate a profound respect for the spiritual aspect of dance. These practices help them prepare mentally and spiritually, leading to a heightened sense of self-awareness and connection during performances. The spiritual feelings they experience while performing historical dances like Krishna Leela further illustrate this transformation. The act of merging into the character they portray on stage shows how deeply they internalize the spiritual and emotional aspects of the performance. This connection between dance and spirituality has influenced their personal growth, helping them become more disciplined, organized, and introspective.

“In my perspective, spirituality is an energy residing inside oneself. Nowadays I rarely visit temples, but believe that God is an energy that resides in you, and that energy controls us in many ways. So a balance in control of energy and control of ourselves is equal to spirituality.”

To Ambili, her journey into dance began at the age of 12, influenced by her father, who was likely inspired by the subject's grandmother, a professional Thiruvathira teacher. Although initially choosing literature for her undergraduate studies, later the subject ultimately pursued postgraduate education in dance, marking a pivotal shift in her life path. This decision led to profound personal transformation. The subject describes experiencing a deep sense of divinity and spiritual fulfillment while performing dance. She believes that teaching dance is equivalent to visiting a temple, highlighting the spiritual significance, she is attached to her practice. This spiritual connection has brought peace, joy, and an enhanced sense of purpose to their life. Dance has not only enriched the subject's personal life by fostering self-awareness and financial independence but also brought respect and increased social capital. Her personal and professional life has been transformed through the strong network of students, colleagues, and the wider dance community she have built.

“According to me, spirituality is apart from religion, spirituality means a form of peace inside you. If you can live your life peacefully it means there is a spiritual energy residing inside you. By helping others itself we will feel divinity.”

To Saritha, her dance journey began at the age of 8, initially inspired by her father, and has been teaching dance since they were 15. Over the years, they have developed a profound spiritual connection through dance, especially during performances dedicated to the gods Shiva and Krishna. Through her spiritual expression in dance, the subject has experienced significant personal transformation. This transformation is evident in her deep emotional responses while performing. For example, during the portrayal of Kuchela, the subject cries, indicating a deep empathy and connection with the character. Conversely, when performing as Krishna, their emotions shift to happiness, demonstrating the transformative power of dance in altering their emotional state. This connection to divinity through dance has not only enhanced their spiritual awareness but also led to a stronger, more disciplined lifestyle. The experience of an "invisible energy" while performing certain acts suggests a deepened spiritual connection, further transforming their personal and spiritual life.

“According to me, spirituality means prayer, apart from any religion, which is a guiding force. I have felt an invisible energy inside me while performing certain acts.”

For Jithalekshmi, her dance journey began at the age of 3, and over the years, her connection with dance has deepened, particularly through spiritual practices. This journey has been marked by profound spiritual experiences, where she often feels a sense of divinity during performances. This spiritual connection has influenced her lifestyle choices, such as refraining from consuming non-veg products two days before a performance, which is a reflection of your respect for the sacredness of dance. Her dedication to dance and spirituality has given you a sense of purpose in life. The act of dancing has become more than just a physical activity; it has become a spiritual practice that brings meaning to her existence. Through dance, she experiences a deep connection to the divine, which has shaped her perspective on life and guided her actions.

“According to me, spirituality is a power which brings meaning to my life. Through dancing, I feel like my existence has a purpose.”

Margi Usha began her dance journey at the age of 15, and through years of performance, she have experienced a profound sense of personal transformation. She describes a unique feeling of power derived from her emotions while performing, which is a key aspect of her spiritual expression in dance. Her transformation is rooted in their understanding of spirituality as a process where one reacts to situations appropriately, guided by spiritual energy. This energy, she believes, allows her to transcend physical pain or illness, focusing on the dance rather than

any discomfort. Her approach to dance, which emphasizes acting rather than becoming the character, reflects her disciplined and thoughtful engagement with her art form. This discipline, cultivated from childhood, further reinforces their spiritual growth and transformation.

“Spirituality means a process where we react to situation in it’s apt way. Spirituality is an energy which exhibits our emotions, but through those continuous expression we build reflexive thoughts.”

Priyanka’s journey in dance began at a young age, motivated by her father's desire to showcase her talent. Initially, dance was a routine and not something she chose out of passion. Her early experiences in a strict dance institution felt robotic, lacking personal connection or joy. However, as she matured, particularly after the birth of her sister, she began to appreciate life differently, leading her to re-engage with dance on her terms. It was during a school performance, where she danced with a newfound connection to an energy she couldn't fully explain, that she first experienced a significant spiritual transformation. Despite being a Christian and feeling a disconnect with the Hindu cultural roots of classical dance, Priyanka's performance transcended these boundaries. Her friend even remarked that she embodied the goddess Devi, marking a moment where dance became a vessel for spiritual expression. This experience shifted her perception, making her realize that spirituality in dance was not confined to religious identity but was a universal energy that anyone could tap into.

“According to me, spirituality means it’s a soul which has an energy, which connects with some supernatural force above us. The communication of the soul and the energy is called spirituality.”

4.2.2 In what ways does spiritual expression through classical dance influence the formation of identity and self-concept in dancers?

As a young adult balancing the academic demands of a postgraduate program, Mithra finds in Bharatanatyam a grounding force that has helped shape her identity. Dance is a space where she can transcend the pressures of daily life and the demands of her studies, reconnecting with a core part of herself that is stable and resilient. Growing up with her mother who is a dance teacher, she was exposed to dance from an early age, and the discipline and rituals associated with it became ingrained in her identity. The strict adherence to these rituals, such as not dancing during periods or always bathing before dancing, reflects the user’s deep connection to her cultural and spiritual identity. This practice has also influenced her perspective on life, leading them to develop a systematic approach to tasks and a deep respect for tradition and

discipline. Furthermore, her experience of empathy and understanding for marginalized communities through dance demonstrates how dance has shaped her identity as a compassionate and socially aware individual.

“From my childhood, my mother enforced certain beliefs and rituals before I started dancing, and over time, those practices became ingrained in me. Eventually, I made a profession out of dancing. I am currently a psychology student, and I discovered my passion for psychology through my study of dance. In dance, we encounter a wide range of expressions and emotions, which have the ability to convey deep meaning. Similarly, in psychology, we study the human mind through expressions and emotions. This realisation of the interconnectedness between the two disciplines led me to choose psychology as my field of study.”

“Speaking about dance, I'm much more strict in following some beliefs while dancing like I won't wear a chappal while dancing, before start dancing I pray to the goddess of earth, I only start dancing after having a bath and also light a lamp, I won't dance during periods.”

Ambili's, identity has been profoundly shaped by her dance journey, beginning with early exposure to music at the age of four and continuing through their professional life. Dance is not only a profession but a defining aspect of who she is. Dance has played a central role in shaping her sense of self. Initially choosing literature for her undergraduate studies, she later found her true calling in dance, which has since become a core part of her identity. This journey has been supported by strong family backing, further reinforcing her confidence and commitment to dance. The subject believes in spirituality beyond religion, viewing divinity as something that resides within and can be accessed through dance. This belief has further strengthened her identity as both a dancer and a spiritually aware individual.

“My personal life enriched through dance, which intensified my self-awareness and social capital. I have built a deep connection with my students, colleagues and wide dance communities, forming a strong network of supporters, which has enhanced my personal and professional life.”

According to Saritha, dance has been a significant part of the her life from a young age, shaping her identity and self-concept over decades. Her identity is closely intertwined with her spiritual beliefs, particularly her admiration for Shiva and Muruga. Through the act of performing dances dedicated to these deities, she has found a deeper connection to her own spirituality, which in turn has shaped her self-concept. The discipline they have acquired through dance, such as early morning warm-ups and structured practice, reflects a strong sense of self-

discipline and commitment to their art. Her identity as a dancer is not just about the physical act of dancing but also about embodying the spiritual and emotional aspects that come with it.

“My personal life in economic terms has changed a lot through dance and said if dance hadn't happened in my life I would have ended up in kitchen life.”

“Through dance, I earned discipline like doing warm-ups early in the morning and doing different styles one by one every day.

According to Jithalekshmi, Dance has been integral to shaping her identity from a very young age. As she progressed from a child with a natural talent to a postgraduate student and future PhD candidate in Bharathanatyam, her identity as a dancer has been central to her self-concept. Her long-term engagement with dance has reinforced her sense of self, both as an individual and as a dancer. The discipline, emotional connection, and spiritual practices associated with dance have shaped her personality, values, and self-awareness. The ability to express deep emotions through dance, whether intentionally or not, reflects a strong alignment between her inner self and her outward expression.

Dance has been integral to shaping my identity from a very young age. As I progressed from a child with a natural talent to a postgraduate student in Sociology and a future PhD candidate in Bharathanatyam, my identity as a dancer has been central to my self-concept.

Margi Usha, as a dancer has been shaped by her disciplined approach and deep emotional connection to her performances. Her belief that dance requires changing emotions according to character changes reflects her understanding of the fluidity of identity within the dance. Through continuous practice and performance, she has developed a strong sense of self that is intertwined with her identity as a dancer. Her disciplined lifestyle, rooted in her family's influence, has helped solidify her self-concept. She view dance as a structured art form that requires one to act rather than fully embody a character, which has allowed them to maintain a clear sense of identity separate from the roles they perform.

“My identity as a dancer has been shaped by my disciplined approach and deep emotional connection to my performances.”

Priyanka's sense of identity was profoundly shaped by her dance journey, even when her relationship with dance was complicated. Initially, dance was more about meeting her father's expectations, leading her to associate it with strictness and discipline rather than self-expression. However, after taking a break from dance and witnessing her peers excel in styles

like Kuchipudi, her perspective shifted. She rejoined dance classes, this time driven by personal desire rather than external pressure. This decision marked a turning point in her identity as she realized that dance was more than just a skill—it was an integral part of who she was. The discipline and memory skills she developed through dance began to influence other aspects of her life, including her studies and teaching abilities. Through teaching, she discovered a new facet of herself, recognizing that she had a natural talent for guiding others in their dance journeys. Dance became a medium through which she could express herself more fully, even in everyday interactions, where she often used hand gestures—a habit formed through years of dance practice.

“Through dance I started becoming more expressive, even some people have told me that I use hand gestures while talking, it may be because of dance. Through dance, I gained memory, as we are trained to learn dance in a short time which builds my memory power. Through dance, I realised that I have a skill in teaching. Teaching dance is not everybody’s cup of tea but I realised I have a teaching skill.”

4.2.3 What are the effects of spiritual practices within classical dance on dancers' well-being?

Mithra says that for her dance has a significant impact on her mental and emotional well-being. She describes dance as a stress buster, helping them release tension and manage stress, especially during demanding times like college work. The ritualistic and disciplined approach to dance also provides a sense of control and stability, contributing to emotional balance. Her ability to connect with the audience and draw energy from their reactions further supports her mental well-being, boosting her confidence and reduces stage fear. Additionally, the spiritual and emotional connection they experience during certain performances, such as feeling a divine presence, contributes to a sense of fulfillment and positive energy. The connection between her mind, body, and spirit that she achieves through dance contributes to a sense of wholeness and balance in her life. This harmony helps Mithra navigate both personal challenges and academic pressures with a greater sense of inner peace and emotional clarity.

“At times when I stopped dancing, I had difficulty managing stress.”

“Dance is a stress burst. When stressed out with college work, I dance to new songs and choreograph new songs, which releases my stress.”

Ambili, she has never experienced any stress, attributing this to her deep connection with dance. When feeling stressed, she turns to religious songs, dance videos, and reading as coping mechanisms. Dance serves as a significant source of mental and emotional well-being for the her. Her belief that teaching dance is equivalent to visiting a temple suggests that dance is a form of meditation and spiritual practice that brings peace in her. The subject's ritual of cleaning the surroundings and lighting a lamp before class further indicates the calming and centering effects of her practice. Additionally, she reports that dance has helped her students develop discipline and respect, suggesting that the practice positively impacts other's mental and emotional well-being as well.

“ I'm doing my profession with satisfaction, therefore I haven't felt any stress till now ”

Saritha, relies on dance as a key method for managing stress and maintaining emotional well-being. For the her, spiritual dance is a crucial tool for maintaining mental and emotional well-being. In times of stress, she turns to dancing to songs dedicated to Lord Shiva, which serves as a powerful stress reliever. This practice allows them to channel their stress into a spiritual outlet, transforming negative emotions into a deep sense of peace and connection to the divine. Furthermore, the subject believes that dancing, even when feeling physically weak or unwell, has the power to overcome sickness, highlighting the strong mind-body connection facilitated by spiritual dance. The emotional responses she experiences during performances, ranging from tears to ecstasy, indicate the cathartic and healing effects of spiritual dance on their emotional state.

In times of stress, I always turn to dancing to Lord Shiva's songs as my go-to stress reliever. I make it a point to dance even when I feel weak or unwell, because I firmly believe that through dancing, I can overcome my sickness. The song makes a deeper connection to divinity.

Jithalekshmi's experience with dance, particularly the emotional and spiritual aspects, has had a significant impact on your mental and emotional well-being. The intense emotional experiences during performances, such as crying or feeling anger, indicate a deep emotional engagement with the stories she portrays. Despite the intense emotions she experiences during performances, she maintains a strong connection to her mental and emotional well-being. The act of performing is cathartic, allowing her to express and process emotions in a controlled environment. This emotional release, combined with the spiritual connection she feels through dance, contributes to her overall well-being.

Margi Usha, her engagement with spiritual dance has a significant impact on her mental and emotional well-being. Her belief that staying engaged in dance prevents her from being affected by life's problems reflects the therapeutic nature of their practice. By immersing themselves in dance classes and performances, she finds little time to dwell on disappointments or problems. This constant engagement acts as a coping mechanism, helping her maintain emotional stability and mental clarity. The spiritual energy they experience during dance also plays a role in alleviating physical discomfort, contributing to her overall sense of well-being.

“I’m always engaged with class and I travel a lot for performances therefore usually I don’t get time to think about my disappointments. Everybody will definitely face problems in life, but if we are engaged the whole day then those problems won’t affect us.”

According to Priyanka, her journey with dance reveals a profound connection between spiritual dance and her mental and emotional well-being. Despite an initial lack of interest and the robotic routine imposed by strict institutional training, dance gradually became a transformative force in her life. This transformation began with the birth of her sister, which brought maturity and a new perspective on life. When she pauses her dance, she experiences a sense of frustration. Her reconnection with dance during her 11th standard, after a hiatus that left her physically unfit and affected her health, reignited her passion. Through dance, she discovered her expressiveness, memory skills, and teaching abilities, which she believes are not common in everyone. Priyanka's experiences with cultural and religious conflicts, particularly as a Christian learning and performing Hindu cultural dance, highlighted the societal challenges and biases that often overshadow the true value of art. Yet, these experiences also deepened her understanding of spirituality. During a significant performance, Priyanka felt an energy within her that transcended her physical limitations, making her feel connected to something greater than herself. The audience's reactions and a friend's comment that she embodied the goddess Devi reinforced this spiritual connection, which she had previously questioned due to her Christian background. This moment marked a shift in Priyanka's perception of spirituality, as she realized that spiritual dance could profoundly impact her mental and emotional state, offering a sense of fulfillment and resilience that she had not experienced before.

“To overcome disappointments I usually write it down to my notes or hear sad songs, but during unhappy times if I’m dancing I may not think about those worries. I usually choreograph new

dances when I sit idle, mostly I prepare for future programmes. I select songs and choreograph them for future dance programmes.”

“During my break from dance, I became physically unfit and it affected my physical as well as mental health.”

“Usually taking long break from dance makes me frustrated.”

4.2.4 How do cultural and social contexts shape and influence spiritual dance practices in classical dance?

Mithra's connection to her community through dance has also helped her develop social bonds that support her growth, both as a dancer and as an individual. The shared experiences of learning, performing, and reflecting on dance with her peers and teachers have provided her with a network of like-minded individuals who value the spiritual and emotional depth of classical dance. Mithra's personal transformation is deeply connected to her spiritual experiences in dance. The rituals she follow before dancing—such as praying to the goddess of the earth, bathing, and lighting a lamp—demonstrate a profound respect for the spiritual aspect of dance. These practices help them prepare mentally and spiritually, leading to a heightened sense of self-awareness and connection during performances. The spiritual feelings they experience while performing historical dances like Krishna Leela further illustrate this transformation. The act of merging into the character they portray on stage shows how deeply they internalize the spiritual and emotional aspects of the performance. This connection between dance and spirituality has influenced their personal growth, helping them become more disciplined, organized, and introspective.

“In my perspective, spirituality is an energy residing inside oneself. Nowadays I rarely visit temples, but believe that god is an energy that resides in you, and that energy controls us in many ways. So a balance in control of energy and control of ourselves is equal to spirituality.”

Ambili, her journey into dance began at the age of 12, influenced by her father, who was likely inspired by the subject's grandmother, a professional Thiruvathira teacher. Although initially choosing literature for her undergraduate studies, later the subject ultimately pursued postgraduate education in dance, marking a pivotal shift in her life path. This decision led to profound personal transformation. The subject describes experiencing a deep sense of divinity and spiritual fulfillment while performing dance. She believe that teaching dance is equivalent to visiting a temple, highlighting the spiritual significance, she is attached to her practice. This spiritual connection has brought peace, joy, and an enhanced sense of purpose to their life.

Dance has not only enriched the subject's personal life by fostering self-awareness and financial independence but also brought respect and increased social capital. Her personal and professional life has been transformed through the strong network of students, colleagues, and the wider dance community she have built.

“According to me, spirituality is apart from religion, spirituality means a form of peace inside you. If you can live your life peacefully it means there is a spiritual energy residing inside you. By helping others itself we will feel divinity.”

To Mithra, the cultural and social context of her dance practice is rooted in traditional beliefs and rituals passed down from her mother. This cultural heritage shapes her approach to dance, including the importance of rituals and respect for tradition. Her belief that classical dance has a close connection with spirituality and religious themes highlights the cultural significance of dance in her life. Additionally, the user's understanding of social issues through dance, such as poverty and violence against women, shows how dance serves as a medium for cultural and social expression. This cultural awareness is further reinforced by her interactions with the audience, where she gain energy and validation, indicating the social role of dance in building community and shared experiences.

“I strongly believe that dance is connected to various other fields of study. For me, dance has been a way to learn about and empathize with marginalized communities. Each dance performance tells a story of sacrifice and struggle, shedding light on social issues such as poverty and violence against women.”

For Ambili, she has performed both within and outside Kerala, noting significant differences in how the art is perceived and appreciated in different cultural contexts. In Kerala, audiences are described as judgmental, focusing on superficial aspects like costume and background, whereas outside Kerala, the art form is more genuinely appreciated. In Kerala, the subject observes that Malayali audiences often judge performances based on external factors, which can undermine the value of the art itself. This cultural context contrasts with the more appreciative audiences outside Kerala, where the she feels more respected and acknowledged for their artistic skill. And her own rituals, such as cleaning the surroundings and lighting a lamp before dance practice, reflect traditional cultural practices that emphasize respect, discipline, and spirituality in dance. Through teaching dance, the subject has seen positive behavioral changes in young students, especially in terms of discipline and respect for elders.

This suggests that dance, within this cultural context, serves not only as an art form but also as a means of socialization and moral education.

“I have performed inside and outside Kerala. From that I understood in Kerala, Malayalees won't appreciate one's skill, most people degrade by finding the flaws, but outside we are being appreciated and provided with gifts. Malayali audiences judge performance by their costume, colour, race, financial background etc, they don't value the art in the way it has to be viewed.”

According to Saritha, she has been involved in dance both as a practitioner and teacher for many years, observing cultural and social changes in dance practice and teaching methods. Her experience with spiritual dance occurs within a cultural framework that values discipline and spiritual connection. However, she has observed a shift in the cultural and social context of dance, particularly in how students approach learning. While her own training emphasized discipline and sequential practice, she notes that modern students often have limited time and must be taught according to their availability. This change reflects broader social shifts in how time is managed and the prioritization of activities. Despite these changes, her teaching continues to instill a sense of discipline and respect for the art form, particularly in helping hyperactive students become more focused and attentive during performances. The communal aspect of dance classes also fosters social connections, with students imitating each other's expressions and learning through observation.

To Jithalekshmi, her practice way of Bharathanatyam is deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual traditions. The rituals she follows, such as avoiding non-veg food before performances and understanding the stories behind the dances, reflect the cultural significance of Bharathanatyam as a spiritual practice. Bharathanatyam, as a classical dance form, is not just an art but a means of cultural and spiritual expression. Her approach to learning and performing Bharathanatyam is deeply intertwined with the cultural values and spiritual beliefs that have been passed down through generations. This connection to cultural heritage and spirituality provides a strong foundation for her dance practice, ensuring that each performance is not just a display of skill but a cultural and spiritual offering.

Margi Usha, observes that many students start dancing due to their parent's interest, but eventually develop their own passion for the art. This highlights the cultural and social influences on dance practice within their community. Her experience reflects a broader cultural context where dance is often introduced to children by their parents, creating a social framework in which dance becomes a shared family and community activity. As students

progress, they not only learn the technical aspects of dance but also undergo behavioural changes, suggesting that dance plays a role in socialization and personal development.

“Most of the students start dance with the interest of their parents and gradually after learning they become interested to dance. Even their parents says that they have many behavioural changes through learning dance.”

For Priyanka, her dance journey is deeply intertwined with the cultural and social contexts in which she grew up. As a Christian learning classical dance rooted in Hindu culture, she often questioned the relevance of this art form to her identity. She witnessed firsthand the cultural tensions that can arise when religious boundaries intersect with artistic expression, such as when her friend faced criticism for performing a Hindu dance at a church event. These experiences highlighted for Priyanka the often contentious relationship between art and societal expectations. Additionally, she encountered instances where the value of art was undermined by social hierarchies, such as when she finally won a dance competition only because the usual manipulation of results by a biased teacher was not possible. These experiences shaped Priyanka's understanding of how art, including spiritual dance, is often subject to cultural and social forces that can either elevate or diminish its true value. Despite these challenges, her commitment to dance remained strong, and she continued to choreograph and prepare for future performances, determined to stay true to her passion in a world that sometimes failed to recognize its worth.

“I studied classical dance in a Hindu cultural way and being in a Christian community, I have questioned whether it is needed for me to study Hindu cultural dance. One of my experiences was when my friend danced to a Hindu song at the church and she danced so well, but the people of the church made it a controversy that it is not good to dance to a Hindu song by a Christian. It made me realise that people won't value art, they run behind their selfish needs.”

“Another experience was, when I planned to participate in the final dance competition of my school life, till then whenever I performed, I didn't won any prize. This time also I felt that I was not going to win but as part of my desire, I danced. And when the result was published I won the prize. The twist behind the result was usually a teacher used to manipulate the result, this time she couldn't change the result. Usually, the prize was given to students who were close to that teacher or financially developed. This thought made me realise that value for art is not given in the right way. Art is being valued according to the recommendation and thickness of currency.”

4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is a foundational method of analysis that needs to be defined and described to solidify its place in qualitative research. Thematic analysis is a widely used method of analysis in qualitative research. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning repeatedly. Hence while going through the data, the researcher found the following themes and analysed the cases.

4.3.1.1 Themes

The researcher has delineated four main themes to guide the analysis of the collected data

i. Spiritual Feelings

Spiritual feelings in dance encompass a deep sense of connection to something greater than oneself, often experienced as a form of divine presence or energy during performances. This spiritual connection manifests through rituals, such as abstaining from certain foods before a performance, and is felt profoundly while dancing, where the individual may experience a merging with the dance itself. These feelings are not merely about religious devotion but about accessing a higher state of consciousness where dance becomes a form of worship and a way to find meaning and purpose in life. The physical sensations, such as body vibrations after performing, further emphasize the powerful spiritual resonance that dance can evoke, creating a sacred space where the dancer feels aligned with the divine.

The experiences of the individuals highlight connection between dance and spirituality. Across different perspectives, spirituality is seen as an inner energy that transcends religious boundaries, guiding their practice and enhancing their connection to the divine. Rituals such as praying, lighting lamps, and abstaining from certain foods before performances contribute to creating a sacred atmosphere, deepening their spiritual experience during dance.

Many of them describe feeling a sense of merging with their performance, leading to powerful emotional and physical sensations, such as crying tears of joy or experiencing body vibrations, which they interpret as a resonance with spiritual energy. This connection often manifests in their belief that their audience also senses the divine presence during their performances, particularly when they embody characters from historical or religious narratives.

For some, spirituality also involves teaching dance, which they equate to religious acts, and helping others, which ties into their broader understanding of spirituality as a force for peace and connection. Their performances often lead to a transformative experience, elevating dance beyond physical movement to a deeper, more meaningful expression of their spirituality

ii. Personal Growth

Personal growth is a continuous journey of self-improvement, learning, and development that shapes an individual's character, skills, and identity. It involves the pursuit of knowledge, the refinement of talents, and the cultivation of emotional and spiritual awareness. Through personal growth, one gains a deeper understanding of themselves, their purpose, and their place in the world. This process often requires stepping out of comfort zones, embracing challenges, and reflecting on experiences to foster resilience and adaptability. Ultimately, personal growth leads to a more fulfilling and meaningful life, as individuals evolve into their best selves, equipped to navigate the complexities of life with confidence and insight.

The individuals in these cases experienced significant personal growth through dance, which not only made them more disciplined, flexible, and organized but also deepened their understanding of religious beliefs and the meanings behind the songs they perform. Dance has enriched their lives by bringing respect, social capital, financial independence, and helping them build meaningful relationships. Their commitment to dance from a young age fostered a disciplined approach to life, influencing their spiritual and emotional development. They have also gained the ability to critically analyze others' performances and continuously improve their own. Dance has served as a medium for self-discovery, instilling a strong sense of purpose, enhancing self-awareness, and transforming their personal and professional identities. Through these journeys, dance has been a source of inner strength, spiritual connection, and a path to realizing their full potential.

iii. Self-Realisation

Self-realization is the process of understanding and embracing one's true nature, purpose, and inner self. It involves a deep awareness of who we are beyond superficial identities, often revealed through experiences that connect us to our core essence. In the context of dance, self-realization manifests when the dancer transcends the physical act of dancing, reaching a state where they are fully immersed in the expression of emotions and spiritual connection. This immersion leads to a heightened state of consciousness, where the dancer becomes attuned to their inner being, gaining insight into their emotions, motivations, and life purpose. Through

this journey of self-discovery, dance becomes more than just an art form—it becomes a pathway to understanding and fulfilling one's existence.

Through dance, individuals experience profound self-realization and a deep sense of purpose. Their performances provide self-satisfaction, fulfillment, and a connection to their true selves. The emotional depth involved in portraying characters on stage leads to moments of self-discovery, as they engage with and express complex emotions. Audience feedback reinforces their sense of self, highlighting the impact of their art on others. The connection between dance and other fields, such as psychology, enhances their understanding of human expressions and emotions, further fueling their passion. Dance also serves as a spiritual journey, helping them recognize the humanity in others and find divinity in their experiences. As they mature, some discover a passion for teaching dance, realizing its potential as a medium for expression and connection. This realization of their innate teaching abilities marks a turning point in their lives, allowing them to share the joy and purpose they have found in dance with others. Overall, dance acts as a transformative force, enabling individuals to explore and understand their inner selves, leading to greater self-awareness, clarity, and a deeper sense of meaning in life.

iv. Emotional Feelings

Emotional feelings play a significant role in dance, serving as both a medium of expression and a reflection of the dancer's internal state. For dancers, performing is not merely a physical act but an emotional journey where they embody and communicate complex emotions through movement. This engagement with emotions allows dancers to connect deeply with their audience and with themselves. The ability to convey genuine sadness, joy, anger, or serenity through dance enriches the performance, making it a powerful conduit for emotional exploration and expression. The intense emotional experiences during and after performances often lead to a heightened sense of self-awareness and catharsis, revealing the transformative power of dance in processing and articulating feelings.

They have experienced a range of emotions while performing, from mischievousness in Krishna's act to anger and love in other styles. These emotions are not just acted out but are felt deeply, as she immerses herself in the character she is portraying. The process of learning the meaning of each word in the songs she performs allows her to connect with the emotions on a deeper level. After performances, she often feels a sense of divinity or positive energy, which is a testament to the emotional intensity of her dance.

Emotion plays a central role in their dance practice, deeply connecting them to the stories and spiritual experiences they convey. This emotional intensity often leaves them in a trance-like state, enriching their performances and allowing for a profound connection with the audience. Their experiences during performances are intense and varied, with emotions such as tears, happiness, and ecstasy reflecting genuine engagement with the characters they embody. The ability to express emotions authentically is a natural response to understanding the stories they portray, leading to performances that transcend the moment and resonate emotionally even after they have ended.

Their emotional journey through dance has been complex, marked by challenges such as biased judgments in competitions. However, dance ultimately became a vehicle for them to express emotions more freely, leading to emotionally transformative experiences. Managing their emotions during performances allows them to maintain control and flexibility, conveying a wide range of feelings without losing themselves in the process. These experiences highlight the emotional depth and power of dance as a medium for self-expression and connection with both the audience and their inner selves.

v. Stress Management

Stress management through dance is an effective and diversified approach that integrates physical movement, emotional expression, and spiritual connection. Engaging in dance provides a structured and rhythmic form of exercise that helps reduce cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress. The repetitive motions and focus required during dance practice can serve as a form of mindfulness, shifting attention away from stressors and promoting a state of relaxation. Additionally, the emotional release experienced through dance allows individuals to process and express their feelings, which can alleviate emotional tension. The spiritual aspects of dance, such as the sense of purpose and connection to a higher power, further contribute to stress relief by fostering inner peace and enhancing overall well-being. Through these combined effects, dance becomes a powerful tool for managing stress and maintaining mental and emotional balance.

Dance is a powerful stress management tool for them, offering relief from the pressures of college work and life. By dancing to new songs or choreographing, they channel their energy and emotions, finding release and relaxation. Even on stage, they draw energy from the audience, which helps reduce stage fear and boosts confidence. However, when they stop dancing, they struggle to manage stress, showing how essential dance is to their well-being.

Their stress management is holistic, combining spirituality, culture, and self-care. They engage in activities like listening to religious songs, watching dance videos, and reading religious or historical books, which not only relax them but also deepen their spiritual connection to dance.

Dance also serves as a therapeutic outlet, especially when they are stressed. They find solace in dancing to songs dedicated to Lord Shiva, believing that it helps them overcome sickness. This practice reinforces both their physical and spiritual resilience.

Their structured dance routines—beginning with warm-ups and including exercises, classes, and mudra revision—provide a sense of order and control that helps alleviate stress. This immersion in dance offers them a refuge from daily life, renewing their sense of calm and balance.

By staying constantly engaged with dance through classes and performances, they prevent negative thoughts from taking hold. Dance allows them to channel stress into creative expression, turning obstacles into opportunities for growth. Through this proactive approach, dance becomes a key element in managing stress and fostering personal well-being.

Conclusion

Across these six cases, it becomes evident that classical dance serves as more than just an artistic pursuit; it is a spiritual practice that deeply influences the dancers' self-development. The physical discipline of the art form is intertwined with mental, emotional, and spiritual growth, developing self-awareness, inner peace, and personal transformation. Whether through teaching or continued practice, each dancer experiences classical dance as a pathway to spiritual expression that profoundly shapes their identity and life journey.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of spiritual expression through classical dance in building one's self. The findings of the research brought to light that the dancers have been influenced in shaping themselves. They have felt changes in their spiritual feelings, personal growth, self-realisation, mental and emotional feelings, and stress management. The findings of the research provide positive influence in respondents life. This chapter consolidates the data which is presented and analysed in the previous chapter.

5.1.1 Spiritual Feelings

The experiences of the individuals in this study reveal a strong connection between dance and spirituality. For them, spirituality is an inner energy that goes beyond specific religious beliefs, guiding their dance practice and deepening their connection to the divine. They incorporate rituals like praying, lighting lamps, and avoiding certain foods before performances to create a sacred atmosphere, which enhances their spiritual experience during dance.

Many participants describe feeling deeply connected to their performances, sometimes experiencing intense emotions or physical sensations like crying tears of joy or feeling vibrations in their bodies. They interpret these sensations as signs of spiritual energy, feeling as though they are merging with the dance. This connection is so profound that they believe their audience also senses the divine presence during their performances, especially when they portray characters from historical or religious stories.

For some individuals, spirituality is also expressed through teaching dance. They view this as a sacred act, similar to religious practices, and believe that helping others through dance is an essential part of their spiritual journey. Through teaching, they share the peace and connection that dance brings to them, expanding their understanding of spirituality as a force for good in the world.

Overall, their performances are not just about physical movement; they are a form of spiritual expression. The act of dancing allows them to connect with something greater than themselves, leading to transformative experiences that elevate their practice beyond mere performance.

This research highlights how dance serves as a meaningful expression of spirituality, offering individuals a way to connect deeply with their inner selves and the divine.

5.1.2 Personal Growth

The research reveals that spiritual expression through classical dance profoundly influences personal growth. The individuals in this study experienced significant development, becoming more disciplined, flexible, and organized through their engagement with dance. This practice not only enhanced their physical abilities but also deepened their understanding of religious beliefs and the meanings behind the songs they performed. Dance played a crucial role in enriching their lives by bringing them respect, social capital, financial independence, and helping them build meaningful relationships.

Starting dance at a young age instilled a strong sense of discipline and order in their lives, which carried over into their spiritual and emotional development. Their dedication to dance fostered a disciplined approach to life, where they learned to balance various aspects of their personal and professional identities. This commitment also led to a deeper connection with their spirituality, as they gained a better understanding of the religious themes present in their performances.

Additionally, dance provided them with the ability to critically analyze others' performances, helping them continuously improve their own. This reflective practice not only honed their skills but also contributed to their personal growth, as they became more aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. Through dance, they discovered a medium for self-expression and self-discovery, which gave them a strong sense of purpose and enhanced their self-awareness.

Dance also became a source of inner strength and spiritual connection for these individuals. It offered them a way to explore their emotions, connect with their spirituality, and realize their full potential. The act of performing and engaging with dance allowed them to tap into a deeper sense of self, fostering a transformation in their personal and professional lives.

In summary, the study finds that classical dance, through its spiritual and expressive aspects, plays a pivotal role in the personal growth of individuals. It helps them develop discipline, deepen their spiritual beliefs, build meaningful relationships, and discover their true selves. Dance not only enriches their lives but also serves as a path to realizing their full potential,

both personally and professionally. Through this journey, dance emerges as a powerful tool for spiritual expression, self-discovery, and personal transformation.

5.1.3 Self Realisation

Through dance, individuals undergo significant self-realization and discover a deep sense of purpose. Their performances provide them with self-satisfaction, fulfillment, and a connection to their true selves. The emotional depth involved in portraying characters on stage leads to moments of self-discovery, allowing them to engage with and express complex emotions. Feedback from the audience further reinforces their sense of identity, highlighting the impact of their art on others.

The connection between dance and other fields, such as psychology, deepens their understanding of human expressions and emotions, feeling their passion for dance. For many, dance is not just an art form but also a spiritual journey, helping them see the humanity in others and find a sense of divinity in their experiences. As they grow, some individuals discover a passion for teaching dance. This realization marks a turning point in their lives, as they recognize the potential of dance as a powerful medium for expression and connection. Sharing the joy and purpose they have found in dance with others becomes a fulfilling aspect of their lives.

Overall, dance serves as a transformative force, allowing individuals to explore and understand their inner selves, leading to greater self-awareness, clarity, and a deeper sense of meaning in life. It becomes a path to self-discovery, spiritual growth, and personal fulfillment, showing how art can profoundly impact one's identity and sense of purpose.

5.1.4 Emotional Feelings

In their dance practice, individuals experience a wide range of emotions, deeply connecting with the characters they portray. Whether expressing Krishna's mischievousness or the intensity of anger and love in other roles, these emotions are not merely performed—they are deeply felt. By understanding the meaning behind each word in the songs they perform, they connect more profoundly with the emotions of their characters. After performances, they often feel a sense of divinity or positive energy, reflecting the emotional intensity of their dance.

Emotion is central to their dance, allowing them to fully immerse themselves in the stories and spiritual experiences they convey. This emotional depth often leads to a trance-like state during performances, enriching their connection with the audience. Their experiences on stage are varied and intense, with feelings of tears, happiness, and ecstasy emerging from genuine engagement with the roles they embody. The ability to express emotions authentically comes naturally as they understand the stories they portray, resulting in performances that leave a lasting emotional impact.

Their emotional journey through dance has not been without challenges, such as facing biased judgments in competitions. However, dance has ultimately provided them with a way to express their emotions more freely, leading to transformative experiences. Managing their emotions during performances allows them to convey a wide range of feelings while maintaining control and flexibility, ensuring they do not lose themselves in the process.

These experiences highlight the emotional depth and power of dance as a medium for self-expression, connecting both the audience and the dancers with their inner selves. Dance becomes a powerful tool for exploring and expressing emotions, enhancing their personal and spiritual growth.

5.1.5 Stress Management

Dance serves as a crucial stress management tool for the individuals in this study, providing them with relief from the pressures of college and daily life. By dancing to new songs or creating their own choreography, they are able to channel their energy and emotions, finding both release and relaxation. On stage, the energy from the audience helps them reduce stage fright and boost confidence. However, when they stop dancing, they find it difficult to manage stress, highlighting the importance of dance in their overall well-being.

Their approach to stress management is holistic, blending spirituality, cultural practices, and self-care. They engage in activities like listening to religious songs, watching dance videos, and reading religious or historical books. These activities not only help them relax but also deepen their spiritual connection to dance.

Dance also acts as a therapeutic outlet, especially during times of stress. They find comfort in dancing to songs dedicated to Lord Shiva, believing that this practice helps them overcome sickness and strengthens both their physical and spiritual resilience.

Their structured dance routines, which start with warm-ups and include exercises, classes, and the revision of mudras, provide a sense of order and control that helps alleviate stress. Immersing themselves in dance offers a refuge from the stresses of daily life, leaving them with a renewed sense of calm and balance.

By staying constantly engaged in dance through classes and performances, they are able to prevent negative thoughts from taking hold. Dance allows them to channel stress into creative expression, turning challenges into opportunities for growth. This proactive approach makes dance a key element in managing their stress and enhancing their personal well-being.

5.2 SUGGESTIONS

The research on spiritual expression through classical dance and its role in self-development offers several valuable insights that can be extended to society at large.

Recognize and Promote the Spiritual Value of the Arts

Society should recognize the arts, including classical dance, not merely as entertainment but as valuable tools for spiritual growth, self-discovery, and emotional well-being. Policies that integrate art and spirituality in education, mental health, and wellness initiatives can help individuals build a deeper sense of self and purpose.

Integrate Arts and Culture into Mainstream Education

Introduce classical dance and other traditional art forms as part of the mainstream education curriculum, emphasizing their potential to foster self-awareness, discipline, and emotional intelligence. This would contribute to the holistic development of students, promoting creativity and cultural appreciation.

Support and Fund Cultural Preservation Initiatives

Governments and institutions should actively fund and support initiatives that preserve classical dance forms and other traditional arts. These efforts can ensure the continuity of cultural heritage while fostering individual and societal spiritual growth.

Promote Inclusivity in the Arts

Encourage diversity and inclusivity in dance and other cultural practices, ensuring that people from all walks of life, regardless of gender, age, or background, have access to artistic and spiritual opportunities. By making the arts more accessible, society can benefit from a more culturally enriched and spiritually connected population.

Use Dance and the Arts for Mental Health

Promote the use of classical dance and other artistic practices as therapeutic tools in mental health services. Societal mental health initiatives can integrate dance therapy to help individuals cope with stress, anxiety, depression, and other emotional challenges, improving overall mental well-being.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The study, “Beyond the Movements: Influence of Spiritual Expression Through Classical Dance in Building One’s Self,” sought to explore the intricate relationship between classical dance, spirituality, and self-development. By delving into the experiences of classical dancers, the research uncovered how spiritual expression through dance shapes and enhances personal growth, self-realization, emotional well-being, and stress management. The findings highlight the profound impact of dance as more than just a physical activity—it serves as a powerful tool for spiritual expression and personal transformation.

One of the central themes of the study was the deep connection between classical dance and spirituality. Participants articulated that their dance practice was not merely a series of physical movements but a sacred ritual imbued with spiritual significance. The incorporation of rituals, such as praying, lighting lamps, and adhering to dietary restrictions before performances, underlines the dancers’ belief that dance is a conduit for spiritual energy. This belief is further reinforced by their emotional and physical experiences during performances, where feelings of joy, divine vibrations, and profound emotional release are interpreted as manifestations of spiritual connection.

This spiritual dimension of dance extends beyond personal practice to the performance itself, where dancers perceive their audience as also engaging in a shared spiritual experience. Whether portraying mythological figures or historical characters, the dancers feel that their

performances transcend mere entertainment, becoming acts of spiritual expression that resonate deeply with the viewers. This perception of dance as a medium for spiritual connection underscores its significance in the dancers' lives, providing them with a sense of purpose and fulfillment that transcends the material aspects of their art.

The research also illuminated how classical dance fosters personal growth. Participants reported that their involvement in dance from a young age instilled discipline, flexibility, and a structured approach to life. This discipline was not limited to the physical demands of dance but extended to their spiritual, emotional, and professional lives. The rigorous practice of dance, coupled with an understanding of the religious and cultural narratives underlying their performances, contributed to a holistic development that encompassed both personal and spiritual dimensions.

Dance also played a pivotal role in enhancing their social capital, financial independence, and the ability to build meaningful relationships. Through dance, these individuals gained respect and recognition in their communities, which in turn boosted their self-esteem and sense of identity. The ability to critically analyze their own and others' performances also contributed to their growth, fostering a continuous process of self-improvement and self-discovery. The personal growth facilitated by dance is thus multifaceted, encompassing not only physical and artistic development but also spiritual and emotional maturity.

Another significant finding of the study was the role of dance in facilitating self-realization. The participants described their dance practice as a journey of self-discovery, where the act of portraying various characters and engaging with complex emotions on stage led to a deeper understanding of their true selves. This process of self-realization was further reinforced by the feedback they received from their audiences, which served as a mirror reflecting their strengths and areas for growth.

The connection between dance and other fields, such as psychology, further deepened their understanding of human emotions and expressions, enhancing their passion for dance and its spiritual dimensions. For many, this journey of self-realization culminated in a desire to teach dance, viewing it as a sacred act that allowed them to share their spiritual and emotional experiences with others. Teaching dance became a fulfilling extension of their personal growth, offering them a way to contribute to the spiritual and emotional development of their students.

The emotional depth experienced by the dancers during performances was another key aspect of their self-realization. The ability to authentically express emotions such as joy, love, anger, and sadness on stage not only enriched their performances but also allowed them to connect more deeply with their own emotions. This emotional engagement often led to transformative experiences, where the boundaries between their personal and artistic selves blurred, resulting in a heightened sense of self-awareness and fulfillment.

In addition to fostering personal growth and self-realization, the study found that classical dance serves as an effective tool for stress management. Participants reported that dance provided them with a therapeutic outlet for releasing the pressures of daily life, whether through engaging with new choreography, performing on stage, or simply immersing themselves in the spiritual aspects of their practice. The structured routines of dance, which included warm-ups, exercises, and the revision of mudras, offered a sense of order and control that was crucial for managing stress.

Moreover, the spiritual practices associated with dance, such as listening to religious songs and engaging in cultural rituals, further enhanced their ability to cope with stress. The participants viewed dance as a holistic practice that integrated physical, emotional, and spiritual elements, providing them with a balanced approach to stress management. The study highlights how dance can serve as a powerful tool for maintaining emotional well-being, offering a refuge from the challenges of daily life and contributing to a sense of inner peace and resilience.

The six case studies provide rich insights into how spiritual expression through classical dance contributes to the development of one's self, offering varying perspectives across different ages, stages of life, and dance styles.

Mithra Starting at the age of 3, Mithra's journey in Bharatanatyam has been integral to her identity. Dance has not only developed her discipline and artistic skills but also deepened her self-awareness and emotional balance. For Mithra, spiritual expression through dance acts as a meditative practice, enhancing her personal and spiritual growth alongside her academic pursuits in Psychology.

Ambili, As a professional dancer and teacher, Ambili's relationship with Bharatanatyam has evolved from a childhood hobby to a lifelong spiritual practice. Her spiritual connection to the dance sustains her through her career, allowing her to navigate life's challenges with a sense of

purpose and self-fulfillment. Teaching dance further amplifies her spiritual journey, as she imparts not just technical skills but the deeper spiritual essence of the art to her students.

Saritha who has been both a dancer and teacher for nearly three decades, finds spiritual solace and emotional grounding in her dual practices of Bharatanatyam and Mohiniyattam. Dance has been a consistent force in her life, helping her manage personal responsibilities while fostering a strong inner sense of self. Her long teaching career highlights how the spiritual elements of dance influence both her personal life and professional work.

Jithalekshmi With plans to pursue a PhD in Bharatanatyam, Jithalekshmi exemplifies the pursuit of spiritual expression through lifelong learning. Her deep engagement with multiple forms of classical dance, including Koodiyattom and Kerala Nadanam, reflects her desire to continue evolving spiritually and intellectually. For her, dance is a channel for self-expression, emotional release, and continuous personal development.

Margi Usha As a professional dancer specializing in Koodiyattom, Bharatanatyam, and Mohiniyattom, Margi Usha's life revolves around the spiritual discipline of dance. Beginning her dance journey later than some of the others, at age 15, Usha still found profound spiritual depth in the classical forms. Her commitment to her craft has helped her find a strong spiritual and emotional anchor, both as a performer and a teacher, deepening her sense of self over time.

Priyanka Joseph dance started at a young age and remains a significant aspect of her life. As a postgraduate student, she experiences classical dance as a tool for self-exploration, blending academic knowledge with spiritual and emotional development. Her engagement with Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam, and Kerala Nadanam contributes to her holistic growth, offering a platform for self-discovery and personal empowerment.

Across these six cases, it becomes evident that classical dance serves as more than just an artistic pursuit; it is a spiritual practice that deeply influences the dancers' self-development. The physical discipline of the art form is intertwined with mental, emotional, and spiritual growth, fostering self-awareness, inner peace, and personal transformation. Whether through teaching or continued practice, each dancer experiences classical dance as a pathway to spiritual expression that profoundly shapes their identity and life journey.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the profound impact of classical dance as a medium for spiritual expression and personal transformation. The findings reveal that dance is not merely

an art form but a spiritual practice that enriches the lives of those who engage with it. Through dance, individuals find a path to self-discovery, emotional depth, and personal growth, ultimately leading to a more fulfilling and balanced life.

5.4 FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

While the study offers valuable insights into the role of spiritual expression through classical dance in building one's self, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The small sample size and the qualitative nature of the research limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. The deeply personal and complex nature of spirituality also posed challenges in data collection, as participants struggled to articulate their spiritual experiences fully. Additionally, time and resource constraints limited the depth of interviews and data analysis, which may have impacted the richness of the findings.

Future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size, incorporating a more diverse range of participants, and exploring the relationship between classical dance and spirituality in different cultural contexts. Quantitative studies could also complement qualitative findings by providing measurable data on the impact of dance on personal growth, self-realization, and stress management. **Diverse Geographical and Cultural Representation:** Consider expanding the study to include participants from different regions and cultural backgrounds. This would help to explore how spiritual expression through classical dance varies across different cultural contexts and whether the findings are consistent or differ based on regional influences.

Inclusion of Male Dancers: The study could benefit from including a more balanced representation of gender. Exploring the experiences of male dancers could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender influences the spiritual aspects of classical dance.

Track Changes Over Time: Conduct a longitudinal study to track the development of spiritual expression and personal growth in dancers over an extended period. This could provide insights into how the influence of dance evolves as dancers mature and their spiritual practices deepen.

Comparison with Other Dance Forms: Compare the influence of spiritual expression in classical dance with other dance forms, such as contemporary or folk dance. This could help identify whether the spiritual experiences described are unique to classical dance or if they are present in other forms of dance as well.

Ethnographic Approach: Consider adopting an ethnographic approach by spending extended periods with dance communities to observe their practices, rituals, and daily lives. This immersive method could yield richer, more nuanced data on how spirituality and dance are intertwined in everyday life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Academia.edu. (2020). How is Indian classical dance viewed abroad: Some answers from a diplomat, dancer, and scholar. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/39931732/How_is_Indian_classical_dance_viewed_abroad_Some_answers_from_a_diplomat_dancer_and_a_scholar
- Beauregard, M., & O'Leary, D. (2007). *The spiritual brain: A neuroscientist's case for the existence of the soul*. HarperOne.
- Bhattacharya, S., & Lihala, S. (n.d.). Self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and perfectionism: A study on Indian classical dancers. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, 4(1), 112-115. ISSN - 2249-555X
- Braun, N., & Kotera, Y. (2021). Influence of dance on embodied self-awareness and well-being: An interpretative phenomenological exploration. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 16(2), 254-272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2021.1924910>
- Capello, P. P. (Ed.). (2019). Research in dance/movement therapy: Diverse global approaches. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, 41(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10465-020-09326-7>
- CID Dance Studies. (n.d.). Introduction to dance studies. *CID Dance Studies*. Retrieved from <https://cid-ds.org/introduction/>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Jain, V., & Singh, S. J. (n.d.). The role of yoga and classical dance in enhancing spiritual well-being. *Journal of Spirituality and Health*, 11(2), 45-60.
- Kieft, E. (2014). Dance as a moving spirituality: A case study of Movement Medicine. *Dance Movement Therapy*, 1(1), 21-34. https://doi.org/10.1386/dmas.1.1.21_1
- Kieft, E. (2022). Exploring dance as spiritual practice. *Feminism and Religion*. Retrieved from <https://feminismandreligion.com/2022/07/31/exploring-dance-as-spiritual-practice-by-elaine-kieft/>

- Liberal Arts DPU. (2021). The art of symbolism: Bharatanatyam mudras. *Liberal Arts Blog*. Retrieved from <https://liberalarts.dpu.edu.in/blogs/the-art-of-symbolism-bharatanatyam-mudras>
- Liberal Arts DPU. (2021). The elements of Bharatanatyam: Mudras, postures, and expressions. *Liberal Arts Blog*. Retrieved from <https://liberalarts.dpu.edu.in/blogs/the-elements-of-bharatanatyam-mudras-postures-and-expressions>
- Mala, M. (2020). From ancient rituals to modern stage: Tracing the evolution of Indian dance. *Medium*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@mayukhmala/from-ancient-rituals-to-modern-stage-tracing-the-evolution-of-indian-dance-5c861b59b753>
- Murray, R. B., & Zenter, J. P. (1989). *Nursing concepts for health promotion*. Prentice Hall.
- Puchalski, C. M. (2014). *Spirituality and health: The art of compassionate medicine*. Oxford University Press.
- Scheff, H., Sprague, M., & McGreevy-Nichols, S. (Eds.). (2020). Exploring dance forms and styles: A guide to concert, world, social, and historical dance. *Dance Studies Journal*, 15(4), 56-78.
- Schuf, H. M. T. (2012). Dancing towards personal and spiritual growth. *New Journal of Dance*, 2(1), 33-45. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njd-2012-0004>
- Secrets of Solo. (2023). Spiritual dimensions of dance. Retrieved from <https://secretsofsolo.com/2023/04/spiritual-dimensions-of-dance/>
- Selfcare Flexx. (2023). The role of dance in spiritual expression. *Medium*. Retrieved from <https://selfcareflexx.medium.com/the-role-of-dance-in-spiritual-expression-a789ca366afb>
- Trek Fun Trek. (2021). Indian classical dance: A spiritual experience. Retrieved from <https://www.trekfuntrek.com/indian-classical-dance-a-spiritual-experience/>
- Verywell Mind. (2020). Why identity matters and how it shapes us. Retrieved from <https://www.verywellmind.com/why-identity-matters-and-how-it-shapes-us-7504546>

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

PERSONAL PROFILE

- 1) NAME
- 2) AGE
- 3) RELIGION
- 4) SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND
- 5) MARITAL STATUS
- 6) CULTURAL BACKGROUND
- 7) MOTIVE

QUESTIONS RELATED TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) Can you describe your background and experience with Indian Classical dance?
- 2) How did you first become interested in Indian classical dance?
- 3) Have you experienced spirituality while performing dance, if so explain?
- 4) How would you define spirituality in your own words?
- 5) How do you integrate spirituality into your dance practice?
- 6) From your perspective, what defines spiritual expression in Indian classical dance?
- 7) Could you share examples of, how specific dance movements or gestures are used to convey spiritual themes or concepts and also about the commonly portrayed themes?
- 8) In your opinion, how does Indian Classical dance differ from other forms in its ability to express spirituality?
- 9) How has your engagement with Indian classical dance influenced you in spiritual growth and personal growth?
- 10) Have you observed any specific changes in yourself or others as a result of engaging with classical dance on a spiritual level?
- 11) What psychological and emotional benefits do you believe dancers derive from exploring spirituality through their practice?
- 12) How does the training process in Indian classical dance incorporate spiritual elements?
- 13) What are some specific techniques or rituals used in training that enhance spiritual awareness or connection?
- 14) How do you believe classical dance and spirituality help individuals heal from life traumas?
- 15) Have you encountered instances where dancers or audiences experienced healing or transformation through spiritual themes portrayed in dance performance?