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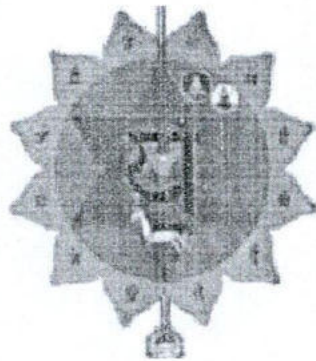
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# Transcendence of binary opposition between private and public sphere through feminine aesthetics in classical dance form

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## Introduction :

The world of classical dance and most of the writing on it exhibited an intrinsic uneasiness in dealing with dance as an activity and a profession. Classical dance has been heavily associated with the 'High Caste' syndrome to legitimize the dancer's position as a respectable one in contemporary society. Till today, a stereotype exists, for girls and women who would like to take up a career in dance. The vision of dance framed an idealized version of the dance, 'ideal' dance body, the 'ideal' dance narrative, the 'ideal dancers' and that became everyone's understanding of truth and 'the reality' and finally accepted classical dance form.

On the other hand, an 'ideal' space for the woman is considered to be the private sphere, within the domestic conjugal structure of a family. The dancers in India have always been considered as 'un-domestic' and hence unsuited to conjugal life. The dancers have been consistently in a dilemma of the duality of their inner and outer world, battling the stereotyping for a long time in their professional life. Any resistance of a performer to childbearing and family role

leads to the basic question, in what way is the woman expected to represent the culture and tradition? (Ref Niranjana-2001; 69) It means that representation of culture need not mean performing cultural acts, but, childbirth and acting as a community manager for passing on the culture from one generation to the other, without actually being part of its process.

The dancing body that produces the knowledge is also at the end of the production of some new knowledge. This is the point where subjective interaction between the self and the outside world i.e. public sphere takes place and the dancing body acts as a site of such transcendence.

In this context, the present research throws light upon

1. What are the mechanisms of the communication between the body and the mind?
2. Will the embodied cultural code allows the dancing body to do so? If so, in which particular context?
3. To explore the dimensions of the invisible domestic body in the private and visible dancing body in the public.



#### Outcome of The Study :

Research leads to further research in the field of feminist debate over public and private oppositions in the classical dance form.

Research leads the conceptual framework of on transcendence of binary opposition between the public and private sphere through classical dance as a medium.

#### Feminist Research Methodology :

##### Data Collections :

- 1) Experiential Analysis
- 2) Open and close-ended questions:
- 3) The researcher has done 5 case studies of classical dancers in Bangaluru City.

Dance is entirely within the domains of theories; dance precedes theory and theory precedes the dance. Dance is born in an atmosphere of language. Within the pretext of four major theories of dance discussed by Uji Charles (2014) :

1. Sociological aesthetic theory
2. Philosophical aesthetic theory
3. Choreologists Aesthetic theory
4. Medical Therapeutic dance theory

The present paper has been conceptualized concerning the first two theories.

#### Sociological Aesthetic Theory :

This approach believes that dance movements are based on ethnic history and mannerisms. It expresses communal desires, values, and collective creativity. (Jacqui, Malone pp 10-11)

Eg- In traditional European dance aesthetics, the erect spine is the center, denoting the hierarchical ruler from which

all movement is generated. The African dancing body is polycentric; it shows a democratic quality of body parts. In a particular dance, a man turns a woman under his arms, on the broader level, it may denote male domination and female subordination. (MarusaPusnik 2010). However, in some other cultures, this movement can symbolize female superiority and male servility to a woman, signifying matriarchal structural society. In another example, women's powerful and enthusiastic movement of hips and buttocks is labelled as obscene, excessive sexuality, signifying vulgarity, and immorality, but this same movement in some other segments of the same society indicates female confidence and self-esteem and serves as gender equality and female emancipation. Among African tribes, it can only mean worship and glorification of women's uterus and thus of fertility of female beings. This is semantic language within which they are contextualized.

In this context, paralinguistic language features the sociology of dance, which entails, ethnography, ethnomusicology within which dance is performed. However, when the same is analysed from a feminist ethnography method, it is ascertained that Women in the Indian dance scenario existed in time and space. She is celebrated as a beautiful image of the traditional representative of classical dance to the excessive exaggeration of femininity portrayed in print and electronic media.

Of all the five case studies done for the purpose, it was indicated that a woman is made to feel that she can only be powerful if she is beautiful, with all their



struggles to make a balance between public and private spheres within a gender discourse. The general status of classical women dancers in the city is much higher and they consider women taking up any role within the public sector as normal just as it is for a man to take up any professional career. All of them agreed to the fact that dancing alone cannot be an adequate source of living, because many times, they may have to perform for the sake of charity.

According to Niranjana (2001), The ideal space for the woman is considered to be within the domestic conjugal structure of a family. Considering the biological and social role according to the woman as a member of the society, her role is defined as the natural vessel for childbearing and the nurturer of the child and the family. Any aberration in this process is viewed with uneasiness. Even when society accepts the woman's space in community rituals, public performances, society does not excuse her for not accomplishing her primary duties concerning domestic roles. All though biological obstacles the public performances, it is hardly spoken loudly by the artists it has been interpreted in a different fashion saying that they were able to overcome the problem. As for as invisible domestic bodies are concerned, a couple of artists agreed to the fact that men were one step behind and women were two steps ahead in taking up the domestic responsibilities. In this way, female bodies are spaced at every step.

The experiential analysis indicated that dance has become a sought-after hobby. Many parents want their daughters to come up as classical dancers, perform as a part of the group, to begin with, and

then become solo performers. Even when she chooses dance as a profession, she must be traditionally a homemaker too.

#### **Philosophical Aesthetic theory-Body as the site of Transcendence :**

In this context, women's dancing body has been treated from a feminist anthropological perspective while analyzing lived experiences of women as artists. Her body is considered as a conceptual category and philosophical discourse indicating the empirical reality.

According to philosophical aesthetic theory, dance has symbolic dimensions of expressions and that is called semiotics or hermeneutics. This has aesthetic language like music, visual arts, and others. Fokine (2008) says that there is a symbiotic relationship between society and dance. That is, one leads to another, accordingly, dance is the diagram of societal occurrences. This is similar to Duncan's belief about dance known as "Interpretive dancing" which is to be considered as an extract from life as we live it. It has to represent the socio-economic and religious and cultural aspects of our lives as we live in the society which ultimately leads to critical thinking.

Classical dance has fixed patterns of physical, rhythmic bodily movements to be performed to music with an added element of expression of feelings or communication which is called 'Sathvika Abhinaya' in Bharath Natya. Dance is an incarnation of knowledge and using the medium of dance that an artist's trying to educate and enlighten the audience with the cultural values. Through bodily performances, an artist is making the audience imagine and visualize the



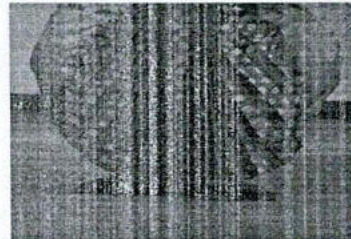
character she is trying to depict. Here not only body communicates knowledge but starts acting as the site for the production of the knowledge. It is in this junction that transcendence takes between private dancing bodies to the imagery building up within the minds of the audience about the characters who do not form the part of these dancing bodies. This type of subjective interaction between the inner and outer world has been acknowledged in the Natya Shastra. This involves kinetic connections between different body parts, the mechanisms of bodily techniques as well as mind and body communication.

**Dynamics of communication through Feminine aesthetic-Photo shoot by Ms Priyadarshini John**



For the attainment of such a state of Sathvika Abhinaya, Communication between the body parts, movement, and the mind would have been on set gradually by the Thattadavu and from a very stature of Aramandi. An artist will dance for the pattern of rhythmic movements using her body as a tool, but over the years, with consistent training, as artist forgets about herself as an ego or an individual and becomes one with the soul/spirit. During the process, her subconscious will continuously be in communication with her mind to remember what needs to be

performed in the next linear motion of time and the same will be especially gets transcended to the various body parts that are in motion filled with 'Lasya' ie feminine aesthetics.



**Thattadavu-Beginning of body communication, Photo Shoot by Priyadarshini John :**

Ms. Anuradha Shridhar thought that body is the site for the classical dances is not formed based on the bodily experience of subjective nature but of the historical experience of learning a cultural system and many times, not a part of the experience of lived life of the dancer herself. Further, she ascertained that through her body and performance, entering into an imaginary realm of divinity which does not have anything to do with everyday life at the private sphere, and for this equation to be changed women still have to go a very long way.

#### **Ideal Images of Women in Dance :**

When artists can get themselves connected with the audience with transcendence, which are the characters normally being depicted? Most of the time they were submissive, performing mythological/ epic female characters and patriarchal masculine male characters. All though established women dancers were in a better position to perform male roles

effectively, they uniformly felt opposition exists between their personal feelings and what they will be expressed in dance. However, this was differently felt and experienced by various dancers. Few felt they were able to actualize and overcome opposition in their way, but not in so much aggressive way that they would have cast in the roles such as Ugra Narasimha, Durga, Ravana, etc.

But they had to share commonly felt experiences in connection with Ardha Nari Nateswhara of Indian philosophy where they believed that every woman has masculine qualities and every male has feminine qualities within themselves but at different levels with different individuals. Women dancers can transcend these roles in a private sphere.

While there are few restrictions while Bharatha Natya performances in the sense that there is no scope for creative expressions because of the fixed patterns within every adavus. However senior dancers did experiment Bharath Natya performance with social themes. Ex such as Rukmini devi experimented with Mudhras, Maya Roa's documentary performance on masculine Walk demonstration against rape and violence -Guru poornaSureshi's Dance drama 'AntharaDwani' depicting strong feminist mythological characters of Gandhari, Ambe, Draupadhi, performances on Mahathma Gandhi. Social themes on pollution, etc. Ms. Anuradha Shridhar's performance on how even a thief will also have a mind of his own throws' insights upon how private sphere aspirations are getting space within performances at public spheres and thus the onset of transcendence from binary opposition between both of them.



**Photo Shoot by Priyadarshini John**

*Getting connected with soul, Spirit*

*On set of transcendence from private sphere and public spheres*

*Imaginary realm of divinity – No connection with everyday life at the private sphere*

*Women still have to go a very long way.*

#### **Conclusion :**

The responsibility of women as dancers, mothers, educationists, bearers of culture, makes it clear that there are simultaneous references to both the private and public, in their lives. As mothers and wives, they influence home and culture in the inner world, but they are also individuals, where their public responsibility continues all the time. With the virtue of her artistic expertise, she is more responsible than men to balance her dual roles about public and private sphere and do not exist as a free individual artist and thus difficult to totally transcend her sexuality, bodily projections and gender dimensions within society.

#### **Acknowledgement:**

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Manola, Faculty, UG Department of Women's Studies, NMKRV College Bangalore, and the following mentioned dancers as case studies.

#### Case Studies :

1. Guru Poorna Suresh, Director, Kala Sankula Indian Academy of Performing Arts.
2. Smt. Anuradha Shridhar, Couple Dancer along With Bhadratha Nathaya Dancer and film star Shridhar-Kechara Academy
3. Ms. Anagha Gowri Shridhar
4. Ms. Mansvi Kannan
5. Ms. Ragini

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|  |  | <p>9. "Financial Inclusion and Inclusive Growth: A Study of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana in India" by Malhotra, R. (2017) <b>this research examines</b> the relationship between financial inclusion, inclusive growth, and the implementation of the Jan Dhan Yojana in India.</p> <p>10. "Jan Dhan Yojana and Its Impact on Financial Inclusion in India" by Jain, A. (2018) <b>this study evaluates the impact</b> of the Jan Dhan Yojana on financial inclusion in India, focusing on the role of various factors influencing the programme's effectiveness.</p> <p>11. "The Role of Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana in Financial Inclusion: An Empirical Study" by Barman, M., &amp; Devi, K. (2018) <b>this empirical study investigates</b> the impact of the Jan Dhan Yojana on financial inclusion in India, assessing the effectiveness of the programme.</p> <p>12. "Financial Inclusion and Jan Dhan Yojana: An Empirical Study on the Indian Economy" by Roy, A., &amp; Bhattacharya, P. (2019) <b>this research examines</b> the role of the Jan Dhan Yojana in promoting financial inclusion in India, focusing on its implications for the country's economy.</p> <p>13. "Assessment of the Jan Dhan Yojana: A Study of Financial Inclusion in India" by Mohapatra, S., &amp; Rao, M. S. (2019) <b>This study assesses</b> the effectiveness of the Jan Dhan Yojana in promoting financial inclusion in India,</p> <p>14. "The Impact of Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana on Financial Inclusion in India" by Das, N., &amp; Dey, D. (2020) <b>this research</b></p> |
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