

Exploring Self-Transcendence in Kathakali Artists: Psychological, Spiritual, and Cultural Dimensions of Their Performance and Practice

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ABSTRACT

Kathakali, an ancient theatre form from Kerala, India, is renowned for its unique fusion of literature, music, acting, and dance. Narrating stories from Hindu mythology such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Kathakali has evolved from a blend of Dravidian and Aryan traditions. This classical dance form is characterized by vivid costumes, expressive gestures, and intricate makeup, making it a celebrated art form both in India and globally. The primary objective of this research is to explore the self-transcendence experiences of Kathakali artists. It aims to understand how personal and professional aspects, such as personal tragedies, passion for Kathakali, religious practices, societal messages, and overall satisfaction in the artistic field, contribute to achieving self-transcendence. The study employs a qualitative research approach, conducting in-depth interviews with Kathakali artists. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to include a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds. The interviews focused on various aspects of their lives and careers, including their motivations, challenges, and the spiritual and psychological impacts of their art. The findings indicate that Kathakali artists experience significant self-transcendence through their dedication to the art form. Factors such as overcoming personal tragedies, deep passion for Kathakali, involvement in religious practices, and the societal impact of their performances play crucial roles in this process. The artists reported a profound sense of connectedness, wholeness, and personal growth as a result of their engagement with Kathakali. The study highlights the unique psychological and spiritual dimensions of Kathakali. Drawing on Pamela Reed's theory of self-transcendence, the research shows that the artists expand their personal boundaries inwardly, outwardly, and temporally. This expansion leads to greater awareness of their values, dreams, and goals, as well as a deeper connection with others and their environment. Kathakali not only serves as a medium for artistic expression but also facilitates self-transcendence among its practitioners. The dance form's integration of gesture, expression, and performance creates a holistic artistic experience that fosters psychological and spiritual growth. Understanding the self-transcendence experiences of Kathakali artists offers valuable insights into the transformative power of art and its significance in the cultural and spiritual landscape of Kerala. This research underscores the importance of preserving traditional art forms like Kathakali, as they provide a pathway for artists to achieve psychological and spiritual well-being. The study suggests that the practice

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of Kathakali can lead to a heightened sense of self-awareness, enhanced personal growth, and a deeper understanding of one's connection to the broader community and environment. The findings also highlight the role of cultural and religious practices in supporting the artists' journey towards self-transcendence, emphasizing the holistic nature of their artistic and spiritual practices. In conclusion, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how Kathakali artists experience self-transcendence through their art. By exploring the intersection of personal and professional aspects, the study reveals the profound impact of Kathakali on the artists' psychological and spiritual lives. The insights gained from this research contribute to a broader understanding of the transformative potential of traditional art forms and their role in promoting mental and spiritual well-being. This study advocates for the continued support and promotion of Kathakali, recognizing its cultural, psychological, and spiritual significance in the lives of its practitioners.

Keywords: *Kathakali, Self-transcendence, Traditional art forms, Psychological well-being, Spiritual growth*

Kathakali, a classical dance-drama from Kerala, India, is a unique blend of literature, music, acting, and dance that vividly brings to life stories from Hindu mythology. It is known for its elaborate costumes, detailed gestures, and dramatic makeup. The origins of Kathakali can be traced back to ancient temple rituals, where it evolved from the traditional worship practices of the Dravidian race, integrating dance into religious ceremonies. This rich cultural heritage not only preserves the art form but also imparts a spiritual dimension to the performances. The art of Kathakali is considered a spiritual journey for both the artists and the audience, creating a profound connection between the divine and the mortal realms.

In its early stages, Kathakali was performed in temple courtyards and royal courts, primarily depicting stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Over centuries, it has developed into a sophisticated art form with a structured format, including intricate hand gestures (mudras), facial expressions (rasas), and movements that convey specific emotions and narratives. The performers undergo rigorous training, often starting from a young age, mastering the art of storytelling through their body and expressions. This intense dedication and discipline required for Kathakali performance contribute to the artists' spiritual and personal growth, leading to the phenomenon of self-transcendence.

Self-transcendence in Kathakali is observed as a state where the artist transcends their ego, experiencing a sense of unity with the story, the audience, and the divine. This transcendental state is achieved through years of practice, devotion, and a deep understanding of the spiritual aspects of the stories being depicted. The artists often describe this experience as losing themselves in the performance, where the boundaries between the performer and the character blur. This phenomenon is not just a psychological experience but also a cultural and spiritual one, deeply rooted in the traditions and values of Kerala's society.

Self-Transcendence

Pamela Reed was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1952. She received her BSN from Wayne state University in 1974, and procured her Master of Science degree in psychiatric-mental health of children and adolescents, as well as nursing education in 1976. She acquired her PhD with a concentration in adult aging in 1982. Her longstanding research focuses on the

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relationship between overall wellbeing and spirituality. According to Reed, self-transcendence is described as a major resource for developing maturity, as an expansion of personal boundaries outwardly, inwardly, and temporally. A key assumption is that people develop their definitions of who they are and their sense of connectedness and wholeness through a series of steps, beginning with no differentiation in infancy, through self-centeredness in youth, to secured, generative self-identity in adulthood, followed by integrity and self-transcendence in old age. Self-transcendence theory was influenced by three major historical events in science, nursing, and Reed's history. That are, Life span movement-philosophical and empirical evidence supporting the concepts of developmental change throughout the lifespan, then Martha roger's theory in nature of change in, human beings healing and wellbeing throughout the lifespan provided inspiration for the self-transcendence theory, and the developmental processes were created based on reed's experiences of child, adolescent, and adult psychiatric, mental health care. The frame work of self-transcendence lies on two major assumptions; first one is that the human beings are integrated within their environment and second one is that the self-transcendence is a developmental imperative.

According to Gordon Allport, "personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical system that determine his unique adjustment to the environment". Theories of personality should consist of a set of assumptions concerning human behaviour together with rules for relating these assumptions and definitions to permit their interaction with empirical or observable events. At this point we can explain some theories, which explains self-transcendence.

Self Transcendence in Personality Theories

People may view self-transcendence in ways that vary based on their own values, the general idea behind it is the same. Self-transcendences are at its core, about transcending (or rising above) the self and relating to that which is greater than the self. In simpler terms, it is the realization that you are one small part of a greater whole, and acting accordingly. Self-transcendence could be considered the neglected younger sibling of self-actualization; the concept of self-actualization has been around for quite a while and was well known for its place on top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow argued that there is a higher level of development, what he called self-actualization. We can achieve this level by focusing on things beyond the self like altruism, spiritual, awakening, liberation from egocentricity, and the unity of being. In Man's Search for Meaning, one of the most profound books, victor Frankl writes the real aim of human existence cannot be found in what is called self-actualization. Human existence is essentially self-transcendence rather than self-actualization. Self-actualization cannot be attained if it is made an end in itself; but only as a side effect of self-transcendence. According to reed's theory, people can be considered open system whose only obstacle between themselves and self-transcendence is the boundary they impose upon themselves. Human need some conceptual boundaries, of course, but the expansion of these boundaries outward to include more of the environment, more human beings, puts people in a state of greater connectedness with their environment and encourages a sense of "wholeness" they may not otherwise have. There are many citations regarding self-transcendence in different theories. The researcher mentioned only some theories, which lies very close to the research.

The need and significance of this study is to explore the factors that contribute to self-transcendence among Kathakali artists, understanding how their cultural background,

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spirituality, and personal values influence their performance. By examining these elements, the study aims to provide insights into the unique psychological and spiritual experiences of Kathakali artists. It also seeks to highlight the importance of preserving this ancient art form, which not only serves as a cultural heritage but also as a medium for spiritual enlightenment and personal growth for the artists involved.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. This involves exploring the psychological and spiritual experiences that artists undergo during their performances. The study aims to identify the key factors that lead to this transcendental state, providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between cultural practices, spirituality, and personal values in the context of Kathakali. By doing so, the research seeks to contribute to the broader field of psychology and cultural studies, offering a unique perspective on the transformative power of traditional art forms.

Another objective is to examine the role of spirituality in the lives of Kathakali artists. This includes understanding how their spiritual beliefs and practices influence their approach to the art form and their experience of self-transcendence. The study aims to highlight the significance of spirituality in enhancing the artists' performance and personal growth. It also seeks to explore the connection between the spiritual aspects of Kathakali and the artists' sense of identity and purpose. By investigating these elements, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the spiritual dimensions of artistic performance.

The study also aims to explore the cultural factors that contribute to self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. This includes examining the influence of traditional values, societal norms, and cultural practices on the artists' experiences. The research seeks to understand how the cultural context of Kerala shapes the artists' approach to Kathakali and their experience of self-transcendence. By doing so, the study aims to highlight the importance of cultural heritage in fostering spiritual and psychological growth. It also seeks to emphasize the role of traditional art forms in preserving and promoting cultural identity.

Additionally, the study aims to identify the psychological factors that contribute to self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. This involves examining the artists' personality traits, emotional experiences, and cognitive processes that influence their performance. The research seeks to explore how these psychological factors interact with cultural and spiritual elements to create the experience of self-transcendence. By investigating these aspects, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological dynamics of artistic performance. It also seeks to contribute to the field of performance psychology by highlighting the unique experiences of Kathakali artists.

Hypotheses

The study hypothesizes that spirituality plays a crucial role in the experience of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. This hypothesis is based on the understanding that Kathakali is deeply rooted in religious and spiritual traditions. The artists' spiritual beliefs and practices are expected to enhance their connection to the stories they depict, leading to a transcendental state. This hypothesis aims to highlight the significance of spirituality in the artistic performance and personal growth of Kathakali artists. It also seeks to emphasize the role of spiritual practices in fostering a sense of unity and transcendence.

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Another hypothesis is that cultural values and traditions significantly influence the experience of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. This includes the impact of societal norms, traditional practices, and cultural heritage on the artists' approach to the art form. The hypothesis posits that the cultural context of Kerala, with its rich tradition of Kathakali, plays a crucial role in shaping the artists' experiences. By exploring this hypothesis, the study aims to highlight the importance of preserving cultural heritage in fostering spiritual and psychological growth. It also seeks to emphasize the role of traditional art forms in promoting cultural identity and unity.

The study also hypothesizes that personal values and moral beliefs contribute to the experience of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. This includes the influence of ethical principles, personal integrity, and moral commitment on the artists' performance. The hypothesis suggests that artists who align their personal values with the stories they depict are more likely to experience self-transcendence. By investigating this hypothesis, the study aims to provide insights into the role of personal values in enhancing artistic performance. It also seeks to highlight the significance of moral and ethical considerations in fostering a sense of unity and transcendence.

Additionally, the study hypothesizes that personality traits such as sensation seeking, passion, and commitment play a crucial role in the experience of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. This includes the influence of the artists' emotional experiences, cognitive processes, and motivational factors on their performance. The hypothesis posits that artists with high levels of sensation seeking, passion, and commitment are more likely to experience a transcendental state. By exploring this hypothesis, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological dynamics of artistic performance. It also seeks to contribute to the field of performance psychology by highlighting the unique experiences of Kathakali artists.

Participants

The participants in this study are Kathakali artists with more than 30 years of experience, both male and female, exclusively from Kerala. This selection criteria ensure that the participants have a deep understanding and extensive experience in Kathakali, which is essential for exploring the phenomenon of self-transcendence. The artists' long-term engagement with the art form allows for a comprehensive examination of their psychological and spiritual experiences. By focusing on experienced artists, the study aims to capture the nuances of self-transcendence that may not be evident in less experienced performers.

The selection of participants also aims to ensure a diverse representation of artists, considering both male and female performers. This is crucial for understanding the potential gender differences in the experience of self-transcendence. By including artists of both genders, the study aims to provide a balanced perspective on the factors influencing self-transcendence. It also seeks to explore the unique challenges and experiences faced by male and female Kathakali artists. This gender-inclusive approach aims to highlight the role of gender in shaping the psychological and spiritual experiences of Kathakali performers.

The exclusive focus on artists from Kerala is based on the understanding that Kathakali is deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of this region. By selecting participants from Kerala, the study aims to capture the authentic experiences of artists who are immersed

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in the cultural context of Kathakali. This regional focus allows for an in-depth exploration of the influence of cultural heritage on the experience of self-transcendence. It also seeks to emphasize the importance of preserving the traditional practices and values of Kerala in fostering spiritual and psychological growth among Kathakali artists.

The participants' extensive experience in Kathakali is expected to provide valuable insights into the long-term psychological and spiritual impacts of the art form. This includes understanding how years of practice and dedication contribute to the experience of self-transcendence. The study aims to explore the ways in which the artists' long-term engagement with Kathakali influences their personal and spiritual growth. By focusing on experienced artists, the research seeks to highlight the transformative power of traditional art forms in shaping the lives of performers. It also aims to emphasize the significance of sustained practice and commitment in achieving self-transcendence.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The research tool used in this study is a semi-structured questionnaire, designed to explore the psychological and spiritual experiences of Kathakali artists. The questionnaire consists of eight questions, focusing on variables such as satisfaction, spirituality, passion, commitment, and experience. This qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the artists' personal experiences and perceptions. The semi-structured format provides flexibility for the participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words, offering rich and detailed insights into the phenomenon of self-transcendence.

Content analysis is employed to study the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. This method involves systematically categorizing and interpreting the data to identify patterns and themes related to self-transcendence. By using content analysis, the study aims to uncover the underlying factors that contribute to the artists' experiences. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the psychological and spiritual dimensions of Kathakali performance. It also provides a structured framework for analysing the qualitative data, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings.

The research methodology involves conducting in-depth interviews with 19 Kathakali artists, all of whom have more than 30 years of experience in the art form. The interviews are conducted using the semi-structured questionnaire, allowing for a detailed exploration of the artists' experiences. This qualitative approach is essential for capturing the nuances of self-transcendence, which may not be evident through quantitative methods. By focusing on experienced artists, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of Kathakali on the performers' psychological and spiritual growth.

The semi-structured questionnaire is designed to explore various aspects of the artists' experiences, including their satisfaction with the art form, their spiritual beliefs and practices, and their passion and commitment to Kathakali. The questions are open-ended, allowing the participants to provide detailed and nuanced responses. This approach ensures that the data collected is rich and comprehensive, providing valuable insights into the phenomenon of self-transcendence. By focusing on key variables such as satisfaction, spirituality, passion, and commitment, the study aims to identify the factors that contribute to the artists' experiences.

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Data Collection

Data collection for this study is conducted through in-depth interviews with 19 Kathakali artists. The interviews are designed to explore the artists' psychological and spiritual experiences, focusing on the factors that contribute to self-transcendence. The semi-structured questionnaire is used as the primary data collection tool, providing a flexible framework for the interviews. This approach allows the participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words, offering rich and detailed insights into their experiences. By conducting in-depth interviews, the study aims to capture the nuances of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists.

The interviews are conducted in person, allowing for a direct and personal interaction with the participants. This approach is essential for building rapport and trust, ensuring that the artists feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences. The in-person interviews also allow the researcher to observe the participants' body language and non-verbal cues, providing additional context for the data. By conducting the interviews in person, the study aims to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected. It also allows for a deeper exploration of the artists' experiences, capturing the nuances of self-transcendence.

Each interview lasts approximately one hour, providing ample time for the participants to elaborate on their experiences. The interviews are audio-recorded with the participants' consent, ensuring an accurate and detailed record of the data. The recordings are transcribed verbatim, capturing the participants' responses in their own words. This approach ensures the richness and depth of the data, providing valuable insights into the phenomenon of self-transcendence. By using audio recordings and verbatim transcripts, the study aims to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data collected.

The semi-structured questionnaire used in the interviews consists of eight open-ended questions, focusing on key variables such as satisfaction, spirituality, passion, commitment, and experience. The questions are designed to explore various aspects of the artists' experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to self-transcendence. The open-ended format allows the participants to provide detailed and nuanced responses, offering rich insights into their psychological and spiritual experiences. By focusing on key variables, the study aims to identify the factors that influence self-transcendence among Kathakali artists.

Scoring and Variables

The variables measured in this study include satisfaction, spirituality, passion, commitment, and experience. These variables are considered key indicators of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. Satisfaction refers to the artists' sense of fulfilment and contentment with their performance and involvement in Kathakali. Spirituality encompasses the artists' religious beliefs, spiritual practices, and the sense of connection to the divine experienced during their performances. Passion refers to the intense emotion and enthusiasm that the artists feel towards Kathakali, while commitment represents their dedication and perseverance in mastering the art form. Experience refers to the number of years the artists have been involved in Kathakali and their depth of understanding of the art form.

The scoring of the qualitative data involves categorizing the responses to the semi-structured questionnaire into these key variables. This is done through content analysis, which involves systematically coding the data to identify patterns and themes related to self-transcendence.

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The responses are analysed to determine the presence and intensity of each variable, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to self-transcendence among

Kathakali artists. By using content analysis, the study aims to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, offering valuable insights into the psychological and spiritual experiences of the artists.

The variable of satisfaction is measured by exploring the artists' sense of fulfilment and contentment with their involvement in Kathakali. This includes their feelings of accomplishment, joy, and pride in their performances. The responses are analysed to determine the level of satisfaction experienced by the artists, providing insights into how these variable influences self-transcendence. The study aims to highlight the importance of satisfaction in enhancing the artists' psychological and spiritual experiences, emphasizing the role of positive emotions in fostering a sense of unity and transcendence.

Spirituality is measured by examining the artists' religious beliefs, spiritual practices, and the sense of connection to the divine experienced during their performances. This includes exploring how the artists' spirituality influences their approach to Kathakali and their experience of self-transcendence. The responses are analysed to determine the significance of spirituality in the artists' experiences, providing insights into how this variable contributes to self-transcendence. The study aims to emphasize the role of spirituality in enhancing the artists' performance and personal growth, highlighting the spiritual dimensions of Kathakali.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that out of 19 Kathakali artists interviewed, 17 showed clear signs of self-transcendence. This high prevalence suggests that self-transcendence is a common experience among Kathakali artists, likely due to the intense dedication, spirituality, and cultural immersion involved in their practice. The artists reported feeling a deep sense of connection with the characters they portrayed, often describing their performances as a form of spiritual journey. This transcendental state is characterized by a loss of self, where the artists feel united with the story, the audience, and the divine.

Key factors identified as contributing to self-transcendence among the artists include culture, spirituality, values, satisfaction, sensation seeking, and passion. The cultural heritage of Kathakali, with its rich traditions and spiritual significance, plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of unity and transcendence. The artists' spiritual beliefs and practices enhance their connection to the stories they depict, leading to a deeper, more meaningful experience. Personal values, such as integrity and moral commitment, also influence the artists' approach to Kathakali, contributing to their sense of fulfilment and transcendence.

Satisfaction emerged as a significant factor in the experience of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. The artists reported feeling a profound sense of fulfilment and joy from their performances, which enhances their sense of unity and transcendence. This satisfaction is derived from various sources, including the artistic achievement, the emotional connection with the audience, and the spiritual significance of the stories. The study highlights the importance of satisfaction in enhancing the psychological and spiritual experiences of Kathakali artists, emphasizing the role of positive emotions in fostering self-transcendence.

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Spirituality plays a pivotal role in the experience of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. The artists' spiritual beliefs and practices deeply influence their approach to the art form, enhancing their connection to the stories and characters they portray. The spiritual aspects of Kathakali, including the rituals and traditions, contribute to the artists' sense of unity and transcendence. The study underscores the significance of spirituality in the artistic performance and personal growth of Kathakali artists, highlighting the transformative power of spiritual practices in fostering a sense of unity and transcendence.

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is the small sample size. With only 19 participants, the findings may not be generalizable to all Kathakali artists. The limited sample size restricts the scope of the study, potentially overlooking variations in experiences and perspectives among a larger and more diverse group of artists. Future research should aim to include a larger sample size to enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. By addressing this limitation, future studies can offer a broader perspective on the factors influencing self-transcendence.

Another limitation is the exclusive focus on artists from Kerala. While this focus is essential for capturing the authentic experiences of artists immersed in the cultural context of Kathakali, it may not account for regional variations within Kerala or the experiences of Kathakali artists from other parts of India or the world. This geographical limitation restricts the study's ability to explore the potential influences of different cultural and regional contexts on self-transcendence. Future research should consider including participants from various regions to provide a more diverse and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The qualitative nature of the study, while providing rich and detailed insights, also presents limitations. The subjective nature of the data collected through in-depth interviews may introduce biases and variations in interpretation. The semi-structured questionnaire, although designed to capture the nuances of the artists' experiences, may not fully encompass all aspects of self-transcendence. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more robust and comprehensive analysis of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. This approach would enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

The reliance on self-reported data from the artists presents another limitation. The subjective nature of self-reports may be influenced by the participants' memory, perception, and willingness to share personal experiences. This may introduce biases and affect the accuracy of the data. Future research should consider incorporating additional data collection methods, such as observations and performance analyses, to complement the self-reported data. By triangulating data from multiple sources, future studies can enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of self-transcendence.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the significant role of culture, spirituality, and personal values in the experience of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. These factors interact to create a profound sense of unity and transcendence during performances. The artists' deep

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connection to the cultural heritage of Kathakali, their spiritual beliefs and practices, and their personal values contribute to their psychological and spiritual experiences. The study emphasizes the importance of preserving the traditional practices and values of Kathakali in fostering spiritual and psychological growth among artists. It also underscores the transformative power of traditional art forms in enhancing personal and spiritual development.

The findings suggest that self-transcendence is a common and significant experience among Kathakali artists, driven by their intense dedication, spirituality, and cultural immersion. The artists' sense of satisfaction, passion, and commitment to Kathakali play crucial roles in enhancing their experience of self-transcendence. The study provides valuable insights into the psychological and spiritual dimensions of Kathakali performance, highlighting the interplay between cultural practices, spirituality, and personal values. It also contributes to the broader field of psychology and cultural studies by offering a unique perspective on the transformative power of traditional art forms.

The study underscores the importance of spirituality in the artistic performance and personal growth of Kathakali artists. The artists' spiritual beliefs and practices enhance their connection to the stories they depict, leading to a deeper and more meaningful experience. The study highlights the transformative power of spiritual practices in fostering a sense of unity and transcendence, emphasizing the significance of spirituality in the lives of Kathakali artists. It also underscores the need for future research to explore the spiritual dimensions of other traditional art forms, providing a broader understanding of the role of spirituality in artistic performance.

The research highlights the role of personal values in the experience of self-transcendence among Kathakali artists. The artists' ethical principles, personal integrity, and moral commitment significantly influence their approach to Kathakali and their experience of self-transcendence. The study emphasizes the importance of personal values in enhancing the artists' psychological and spiritual experiences, highlighting the role of moral and ethical considerations in fostering a sense of unity and transcendence. It also underscores the need for future research to explore the influence of personal values on the experience of self-transcendence in other traditional art forms.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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