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Social Awareness Through Fusion Of Maharashtra Kirtan And Kathak Nritya

Research scholar: Vrushali Dabke,

Co-author: Dr. Manjiri Deo.

Sri Sri University, Cuttack.

Address – Mahalaxmi, Flat no. 1 and 2, Pendse Nagar, Lane no. 1, Dombivali (E), Maharashtra – 421201

Abstract

Social awareness with entertainment capturing young minds and overall society for a better future of India is of great importance. Combining these two factors through music (vocal, instrumental and dance) has been the most effective way to achieve this goal. Kirtan styles of Maharashtra and Kathak have been doing the same for decades, but separately. This research is conducted to study the effect of fusion of Maharashtra kirtan and Kathak on the audience with respect to philosophical preaching. Purpose of this research was to find whether this experimental presentation is effective in the form of only entertainment or also to make the audience understand the philosophical approach behind it. For this research quantitative and qualitative analysis is done. Survey showed a 70/30 ratio about the effectiveness of this new experiment among the audience. In qualitative methodology, interviews of Kirtankar Charudatta Aphale who presented this experiment thrice along with Senior Kathak dancer Manisha Sathe, Dr. Manjari Dev who presented Saint Tukaram dance drama in Varkari- kathak fusion format, Dr. Nandkishore Kapote who has done experiments with Bhajan bhav in both Kirtan and Kathak style were conducted and analysis was done of the experimental presentation of naradiya-kathak tradition and varkari-Kathak fusion by the researcher. Results showed that this new form of storytelling has been more effective than traditional Kathak presentation not only in understanding the story but also for understanding the philosophy behind it. A new generation who feels traditional Kirtan as boring, this experiment was effective in capturing the young generation and provided sugar coated capsules of social awareness keeping tradition alive in different ways.

Keywords - Kirtan, Naradiya, Varkari, Kathak, Storytelling

Introduction

The word *Bhakti* is derived from the root *Bhaj*, which means 'to serve or to worship', that is devotion and loving attachment to the deity (Wikipedia contributors, Bhakti, 2023). "Shrimad Bhagwat Puran verse 7.5.23-25"

"*Shravanam kirtanam Vishnu smaranam padasavanam Archana vandanam dasyam sakhyamatmanivedanam*" (Wikipedia contributors, Navavidha Bhakti, 2019)

delineates the nine ways in which we can connect with God '*Navavidha Bhakti*', out of which '*kirtan bhakti*' that is chanting God's name and glory has been given the second place.

The word *Kirtan* ('the act of praising and glorifying a form of divinity') can be translated into English as "devotional singing," specifically praising and describing divine qualities and narrating stories. A close relative to *Kirtan* is कथक (*Kathak*). *Kathak* can be translated as "storyteller," "describer," "instructor," or "main protagonist." The storytelling of a *Kathak* dancer is a tradition that aims to entertain with a message. Its main purpose is to guide people on the right path and provide education to the public. The stories in both styles present exemplary characters such as Lord Shri Ram and Lord Krishna, who impart teachings through their actions. The *Kathak* tradition includes presenting such stories before society, emphasising the message being conveyed. The *Kirtan* tradition in Maharashtra serves as a similar example to provide a foundation for these stories and develop permanent emotions. Even today, both *Kirtan* and *Kathak* styles showcase this tradition.

Delving deeper into connection between *Kathak* and *Kirtan* styles, both are related to *Hari Kirtan of Vaishnav sampraday* ('one of the Hindu denominations, specifically devoted to Lord Vishnu'). The development and transformation of two styles occurred during the 11th to 19th century. *Kirtan* style is the foundation of the *Bhakti* movement, which began in response to the invasions of the *Mughal* empire in North Central India. The *Vaishnav* tradition uses mythological and legendary stories to attract people to religion and maintain their connection to culture. This tradition was kept alive through the medium of music in various regional forms such as *Hari Kirtan* in Uttar Pradesh, *Harikatha* in South India and *Kirtan* in Maharashtra. Through the medium of storytelling and poetry recitation, these compositions by the saints of the *Bhakti* movement were presented in temples by the *Kathak lok* ('Kathak folks'). Maharashtrian saints such as Sant Dnyaneshwar, Sant Namdev, Sant Tukaram also engaged in this movement for performing *Kirtans* and composed thousands of poetries for the purpose of preaching.

Both *Maharashtriya Kirtan* and *Kathak* traditions have three basic elements: story, acting (expressing through face and body language) and preaching. The *kirtankar* who narrates the story through music, dialogue, acting and preaching is a *Hari Kathakar*. With addition of footwork, rhythm, *bols* ('syllables'), the *Kathak* dancer has been doing the same method of storytelling in Indian temples. Both the genres have been promoting devotion through singing, playing instruments, dancing, acting and oratory along with entertainment for centuries.

In Maharashtra, *Kirtan* can be divided into two traditions: *Naradiya* and *Vaarkari* (Pathak, 2003, p.7). The *Naradiya* tradition is primarily performed solo like *Kathak* artists, while the *Vaarkari* tradition is performed collectively. In both forms, poems of specific saint traditions became an integral part of presentation along with connected philosophical and social subjects, which are in oratory patterns. *Naradiya Kirtan* tradition studies show resemblance with *Kathak* temple tradition presentation.

In the *Naradiya* tradition, there are two parts of presentation: *purva rang* and *uttar rang*—that is, the initial phase and final phase.

- Initial phase (*purva rang*) consists of different prayers, poetry based on topics selected for preaching and explanation of the meaning of poetry.
- Final phase (*uttar rang*) consists of storytelling with *abhinaya* ('art of expression') related to the topic selected for the initial phase.

Kirtan ends with the same poetry of the initial phase with different *raga* ('collection of pitches similar to scale') and *theka* ('a musical composition in classical Indian music for percussion instruments') ending with *Namasmaraan* or *gajar* that is chanting god's name. *Kirtan* begins with the praise of Lord Ganesh and other deities. Even today, *Kathak* dancers in Jaipur start their presentation with *Ganesh Paran* and *Ganesh Pad*. In the *uttar rang* section of *Naradiya*, various stories are narrated. Similarly, in the expressive aspect

of *Kathak*, when performing a *pad* or composition, the story is presented through vocal and physical expressions, which are instructive. An example of this can be seen in the narration of Pt. Omkar Prasad Mishra's presentation by Rohini Bhate (2006) in her book *Lehaja* (p.51). In *Naradiya Kirtan*, some *Kirtankars* also incorporate elements of *Kathak*, such as showing the *Sam* ('the first beat'), use of *ghungroo* that is ankle bells on their feet, and even engage in *jugalbandi* ('musical duet') to some extent with accompanists.

Shovana Narayan, in her research book, "*Kathak Lok*", states that *Kathak* is a narrative dance form that combines storytelling with movement. The traditional definition of *Kathak* states that it is a form of devotional storytelling, similar to the recitation of religious stories. The purpose of the *Kathak* temple tradition was to interpret poetry or literature and awaken the sentiment of devotion. The primary focus in the temples was on poetry, which was embellished with music and dance (Narayan and Kalaha, 2023, pp.53-64). *Kathak* temple tradition was similar to the tradition of *Naradiya Kirtan*, where emotions and feelings played a prominent role. These observations are made by Shovana Narayan in her research and modifications.

The Role of Storytelling in Spreading Social Awareness

For many years, Indian saints have done the work of social awareness through many mediums such as storytelling, reading stories, devotional poetry, and so on. Indian society is an integrated diversity. Saints preached to the Indian society full of different castes, religions, customs, traditions, vows, age and means of expression to put aside mutual differences and live in equality, unity and harmony.

Katha ('story') was the most widely used medium for social awareness by preaching through entertainment. This medium was used during the *Bhakti* movement by North and South Indian saints through *Kirtan*. In North India, inspired by the literature of saints of the *Vaishnava* sect, *Kathak Jana* ('storytellers') also created public awareness through the confluence of *katha* dance and preaching at the temples.

Be it the *kirtankars* ('performers of *Kirtan*') of Maharashtra or the *Kathaks* of North India, both used stories of gods and goddesses and the Puranic stories. In addition, they put forward the social problems of the time such as casteism, disrespect for women and lust in the society. Their work not only created public awareness but also instilled the importance of preservation of Indian culture and values in the society.

The period after the 11th century was a period of major regional, cultural and geographical invasions. Due to the strong foundation of Indian culture and values, the country emerged from it like a phoenix. The invasions in modern times, however, are mainly ideological, intellectual, mental and emotional, and are attacking the foundation of Indian culture. Indian soldiers and civilians are fighting against these attacks, but these attacks are taking hold of mind and intellect like slow poison. In such times, there is a need for sugar-coated methods and innovative experiments to guide the children and young generation of the society through mediums that are close to their heart and well in-tune with their mentality.

A look at the history of *Kathak* and *Maharashtriya Kirtan* makes it clear that both styles have the power to change with the times and dance with novelty while maintaining a foundation of tradition to appeal to every generation. There have been discussions about the effect of *Naradiya Kirtan* and *Kathak* storytelling methods on society's upliftment separately but the effect of combination of elements of both the styles on society has not been analysed yet. It has not been researched whether these two styles, which have the ability to accommodate all aspects of human life can be an effective means to face the modern-day aggressions. A study of the extent to which the confluence of *Kathak* - *Kirtan* can be useful for social awareness has not been conducted till date. The purpose of this research paper is to review this topic in depth.

Methodology

For this research, we conducted interviews of senior *Maharashtrian Kirtankar* and *Kathak* experts over the period of 3 years . We analysed new experiments with both styles as part of our research. We rolled out a survey questionnaire among people of different age groups and backgrounds and analysed their responses for quantitative and qualitative analyses. Participants from the age 15 years to 70+ years were selected for this research. Majority of the participants were classical dancers, their family members, observers and teachers.

The survey questionnaire was based on whether participants had witnessed the Kirtan and Kathak presentations, the messages they took away from those experiences and the emotional effect on the audience. We used numerical and descriptive scales for this research. The survey questionnaire was sent through e-mail and WhatsApp in the form of a Google Forms survey link to the participants. The responses data was analysed and visually presented in the Google Forms application itself.

Research statement

Fusion of *Maharashtriy Kirtan* and *Kathak Nritya* is an effective way of creating social awareness in modern society of India

Objectives

To find the common factors of both styles and understand the acceptance of the audience and society to the fusion experiment of *Kathak* and *Kirtan* for preaching and creating social awareness.

Findings

The following are our findings from the data collected through the interviews and the survey questionnaire's responses:

- We received from a diverse group of respondents ranging from 15 years to 70 years of age.
- Majority of the survey respondents were from the field of *Kathak* or related to it.
- The survey respondents hailed from Central, Western Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Pune Nasik, Gujarat, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kochi, Japan and Bahrain.
- About 93% of the respondents had knowledge of types of *Maharashtra Kirtan*.
- The respondents had experienced *Kirtan* in both online and offline modes.
- About 9.4% of the respondents has seen *Kirtan* since their teenage years.
- About 55.6% of the respondents attend *Kirtan* occasionally; 25.5% rarely and others very rarely.
- About 36.8% of the respondents attend *Kathak* performances very frequently.
- About 13.2 % of the respondents enjoy *taal* ('cycle of beats'), 32.5% enjoy *bhaav* ('expression') and about 54.4% enjoy both together.
- A staggering 63.2% of the respondents preferred story-based *bhaav*.
- A little over half of the respondents, about 50.9%, already witnessed experimental performances of *Kirtan* and *Kathak*.
- Some of the examples of stories cited by the respondents were preaching through the incidences of life history of various saints such as Sant Janabai, Namdeo, Kanhopatra, Ramdas Swami, Gajanan Maharaj with covering subjects of friendship between God and devotee, complete devotion, transformation as a human being, importance of *Shakti* with *Bhakti* (strength of mind through strength of body), cleanliness of the society and so on.
- About 50.9 % of the respondents rated these fusions at a 10 on the scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest).

- 52.6% of the respondents enjoyed the fusion purely as performances; 28.9% were attracted to its preaching part.
- 86% of the respondents strongly agreed that the fusion of *Kirtan* and *Kathak* would be highly effective in preaching in modern times.
- About 60.5% of the respondents agreed with its use for social awareness.
- About 55.3% of the respondents strongly agreed that this fusion will be useful in attracting youth of country.
- 100% of the survey respondents accepted this experiment as a good medium of preaching through entertainment.
- Almost all, about 99.1%, agreed with the content of this experiment being traditional yet accommodating modernity.

Conclusion

Through the observation of the results, we conclude that the research statement is proved that the *Kirtan - Kathak* fusion will definitely prove to be effective way of preaching preservation of Indian culture and show positive effect with respect to social awareness. This fusion is flexible enough to be effective on the future generations and changes in the society's mindset.

Though many kathak practitioners have attended or have tried these fusions, they have always kept both forms separate during performance like 'Kathak Kirtan' by Pandita Manisha Sathe and Rashtriya Kirtankar Charudatta Aphalebua in 2017 and 2018 (ticketor.com, natakawala). In this *kirtan* was performed by Aphalebua and Kathak was presented by Manisha Sathe ji. Times entertainment Newspaper reviewed this project and quoted, "Kirtan is narrating a story with music and dance. Kathak is a combination of pure dance (Nrutta) and storytelling (Abhinay). The show was a blend of kathaa (story) aspect of kirtan that gave rise to Kathak. (Times entertainment, April 4, 2018). Saint Tukaram dance drama based on Varkari Sampraday conceptualised by Dr. Manjiri Deo, Kirtan kathak by Padmashri Dr. Puru Dadhich which researcher personally witnessed, after the success of all such experimentative fusion projects, its qualitative aspect was discussed. However, the real positive effect of these fusions was absolutely proved when this quantitative analysis was conducted. This analysis and research provide a clear idea, relativity and preferences of the audience about *Kirtan-Kathak* fusion in numbers and values, this providing evidence for the qualitative analysis done for this research statement.

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

We used the following survey questionnaire to examine the understanding and opinions of people about the fusion of *Kirtan* and *Kathak* traditions (shared with respondents via Google Forms).



Social Awareness Through Fusion of Maharashtra Kirtan and Kathak Styles

Namaste,

I am **Sangeetacharya (Dr) Vrushali Shashank Dabke**, a Kathak exponent, currently pursuing my PhD at Sri Sri University in Cuttack. My research aims to assess the effectiveness and significance of Maharashtra Kirtan and Kathak Nritya in terms of social awareness, enlightenment and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Some examples of Kathak - Kirtan fusion include:

- Sant Namdev by **Guru Dr. Manjiri Deo**
- Kathak - Kirtan by senior Kirtankar, **Charudatta Aphale ji**, and senior Kathak dancer, **Pandita Manisha Sathe ji**
- Kathak - Kirtan by myself, **Dr. Vrushali Dabke**, with the storyline of Shabari Mata and Sant Janabai

Questionnaire

1. **What is your age?**
2. **What is your profession?**
3. **Where do you reside?**
4. **Have you ever heard of or seen Maharashtra Kirtan styles (Naradiya or Varkari):**
yes/ No
5. **If yes to the above question, did you watch it Online or Offline? (mention venue/place if you answer 'Offline')**
6. **At what age did you watch it?**
7. **How often do you see Maharashtra Kirtan styles?**
Very Frequently, Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, Very rarely
8. **How often do you watch Kathak performances?**
Very Frequently, Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, Very rarely
9. **What part of Kathak do you enjoy the most**
Taal (includes Thaata, Aamad, Todaa, etc.), Bhav (expressional which includes Gat-bhaav, Thumri, Bhajan, etc.), Both
10. **In Bhaav, which choreography style do you prefer?**
Story-based, Poetry/Lyrical-based
11. **Have you seen Kathak - Kirtan experimental choreography?**
Yes/No
12. **If you answered yes to the above, mention names of artists/performers who you have seen perform Kathak-Kirtan experimental choreography.**
13. **Which stories were the performances based on? (Mention in 2 lines)**

14. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate this fusion of Kathak - Kirtan?

1 Very Poor-----10 Excellent

15. Which part of this fusion did you like the most, or were left enthralled by?

Stories used, Preaching (the message the story tried to convey), Performances of the artists, Other

16. How effective is this fusion as a tool for preaching?

To a great extent, Somewhat, Very little, Not at all

17. This fusion will serve as an effective way of spreading social awareness in an entertaining way. Do you agree with the above statement?

Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

18. This fusion of Kathak - Kirtan will attract the younger generation and will create awareness about cultural values. Do you agree with the above statement?

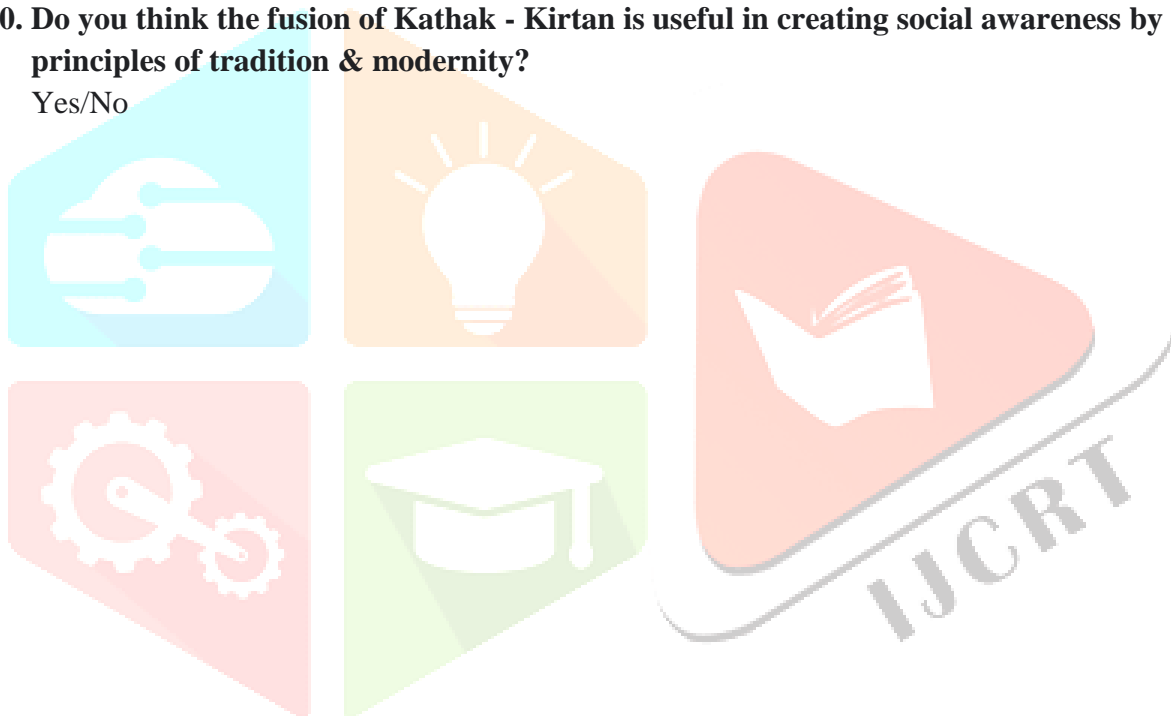
Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

19. Do you think Maharashtriya Kirtan - Kathak fusion will act as a good medium of preaching through entertainment for the modern society?

Yes/No

20. Do you think the fusion of Kathak - Kirtan is useful in creating social awareness by combining principles of tradition & modernity?

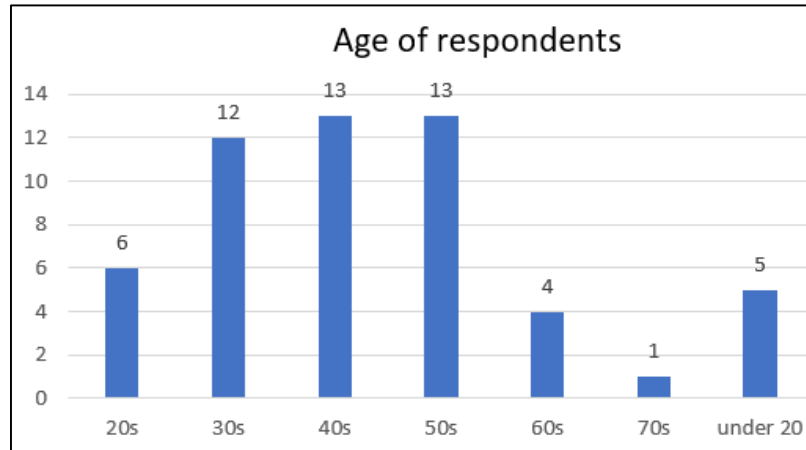
Yes/No



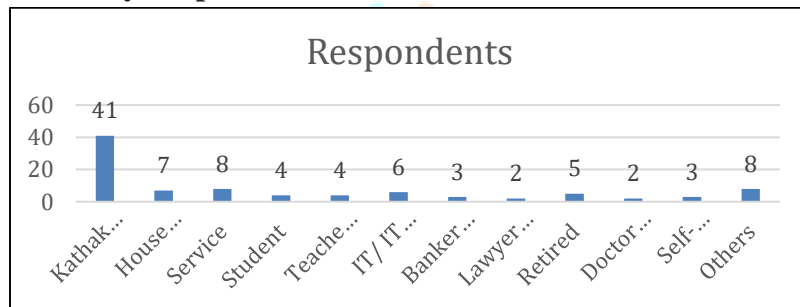
Survey Responses and Data Visualisation

The following information contains the responses to the survey questionnaire.

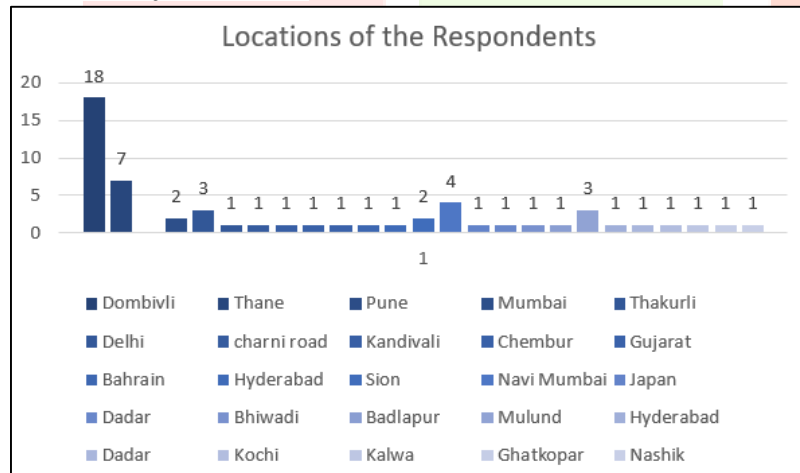
What is your age?



What is your profession?



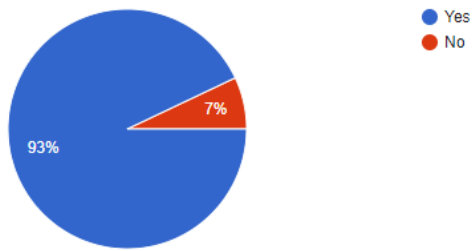
Where do you reside?



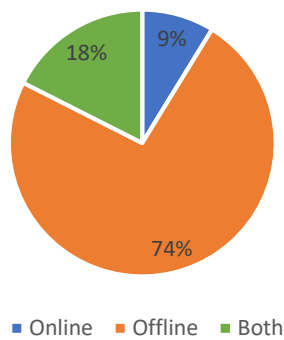
Have you heard of or seen Maharashtra Kirtan styles (Naradiya or Varkari)?

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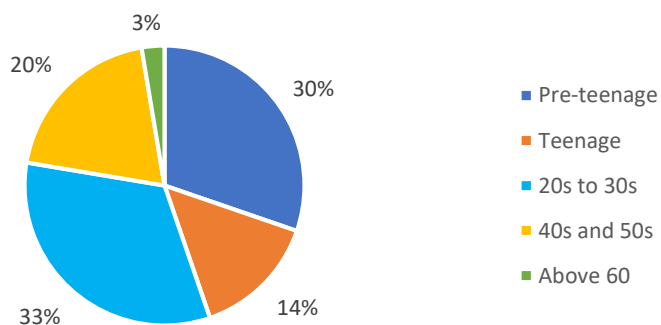
114 responses

**Did you watch it Online or Offline?**

Did you watch it Online or Offline?

**At what age did you watch it?**

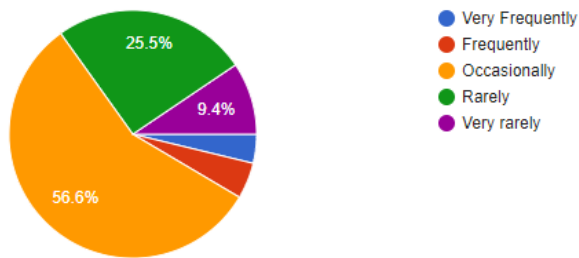
At what age did you watch it?



How often do you see Maharashtra Kirtan styles?

How often do you see Maharashtra Kirtan styles?

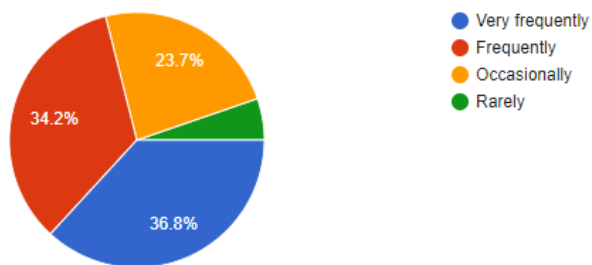
106 responses



How often do you watch Kathak performances?

How often do you watch Kathak performances?

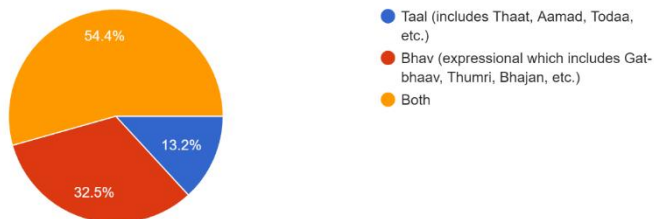
114 responses

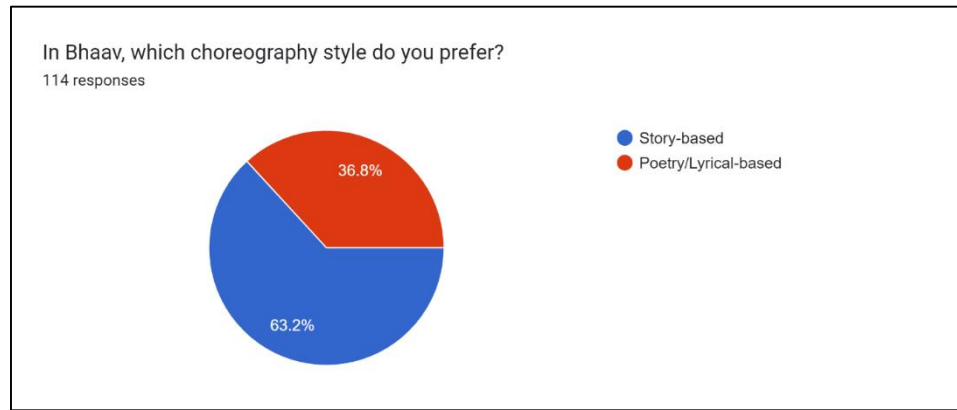
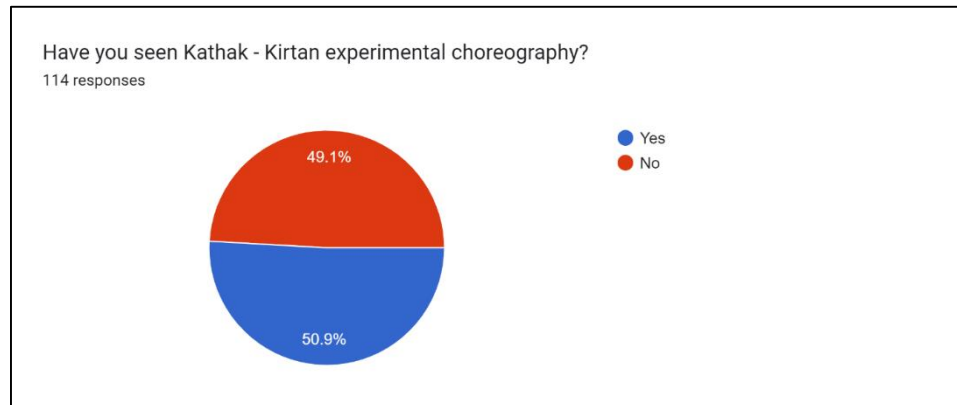


Which part of Kathak do you enjoy the most?

Which part of Kathak do you enjoy the most?

114 responses



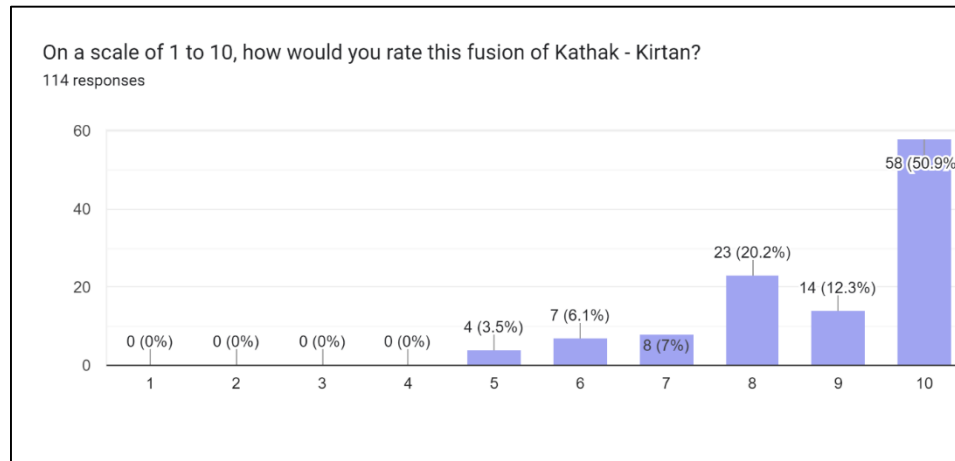
In Bhaav, which choreography style do you prefer?**Have you seen Kathak – Kirtan experimental choreography?****Mention names of artists/performers who you have you seen perform Kathak-Kirtan experimental choreography.**

- Dr. Vrushali Dabke and her students
- Guru Pandita Maneesha Sathe and Charudatta ji Aphale
- Shree Swarupanand Maharaj and Shree Janardan Maharaj, Shree Dinkar Maharaj
- Shri Ayodhya Sharan Misra
- Guru Rajashri Shirke
- Dr.Aditi Deshkar, Sushri Paullomi Mukherjee, Vishal Krishna, Dr.Sunil Sunkara, Smt Sharvari Jeminis
- Nilima Hirwe, Radhika Sathe, Gauri Jog
- Guru Kathak Queen Dr. Jayantimala Mishra ji
- Dr. Manjiri Deo
- Sunil Sunkara
- Sau. Varsha Kolhatkar
- Riya Vasu
- Shilpa Patwardhan

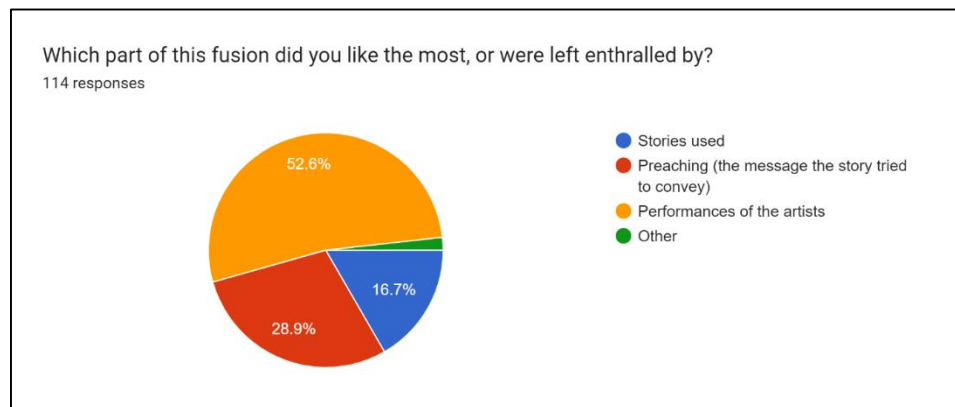
Which stories were the performances based on?

- Shabari
- Janabai
- Abhang Sant Vani
- Sant Kirtan
- Geet Ramayan
- Krishna Janma and Leela
- Pandurang
- Ram, Raavan and Mandodari
- Shurpanaka
- Vaarkari
- Vishnu Vandana
- Gandhari
- Vitthala, Ramdas Swami
- Lords Rama, Krishna, Hanuman and Shiva
- Gajanan Maharaj Jeevan Charitra, Ashadi Ekadashi Vaari, Dnyaneshwar Tukaram
- Ramayan and Mahabharat
- Dashavatar
- Sant Kanhopatra
- Kaivalyavaari
- Khel Mandiyela – Sant Tukaram
- Shankar, Parvati and Shiva Puja
- Abhang of Sant Tukaram (Sundar te dhyan), Sant Naamdev (Kaanada Raja Pandharicha), Sant Dnyaneshwar (Kanya Sasurasi Jaydev te Dhyan)
- Rani Padmini, Rajmata Jijabai

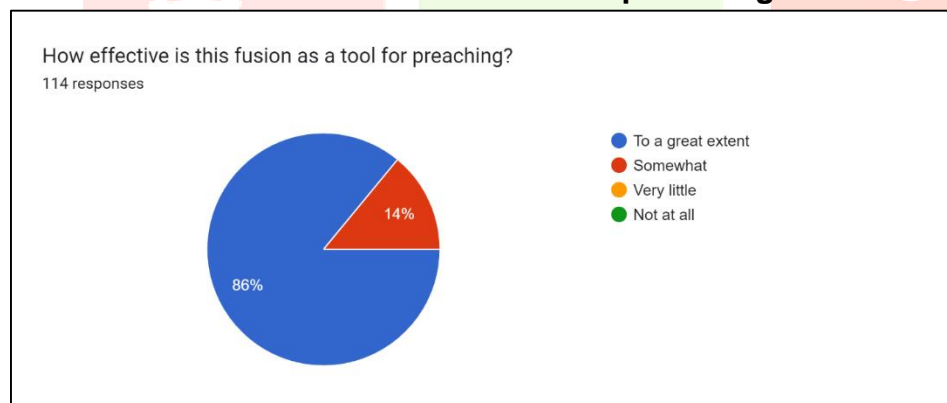
On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate this fusion of Kathak – Kirtan?



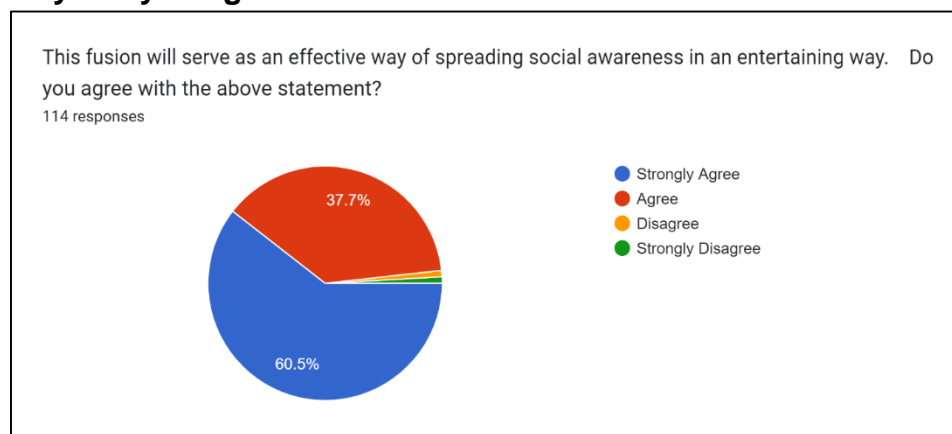
Which part of this fusion did you like the most, or were left enthralled by?



How effective is this fusion as a tool for preaching?



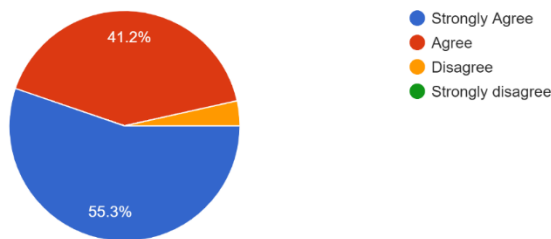
This fusion will serve as an effective way of spreading social awareness in an entertaining way. Do you agree with the above statement?



This fusion of Katha – Kirtan will attract younger generation and will create awareness about cultural values. Do you agree with the above statement?

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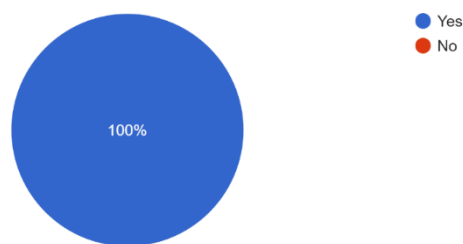
114 responses



Do you think Maharashtriy Kirtan – Kathak fusion will act as a good medium of preaching through entertainment for modern society?

Do you think Maharashtriy Kirtan - Kathak fusion will act as a good medium of preaching through entertainment for the modern society?

114 responses



Do you think the fusion of Katha – Kirtan is useful in creating social awareness by combining principles of tradition & modernity?

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