A Study on Brahmanical Influence in Indian Classical Arts with Reference to Chennai

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Abstract—**Introduction:Indian classical arts, including Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, and Kathak, are widely regarded as refined cultural expressions. However, these traditions have long been embedded in Brahmanical aesthetics, leading to the marginalization of non-Brahmin and Dalit communities. This research critically explores how caste operates within the classical arts, shaping participation, pedagogy, and recognition.Aim and Objectives:The primary aim is to examine the extent of caste-based exclusion and cultural hegemony in Indian classical arts. Specific objectives include analyzing the dominance of Brahmanical values in aesthetic standards, investigating caste representation in institutional spaces, and assessing public perceptions of inclusivity within the classical arts.Methodology:This study uses an empirical research design, focusing on primary data collection through structured surveys and informal interviews. The questionnaire was administered to performers, students, scholars, and audiences across various regions in India. A sample size of 200 respondents was selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure diversity in caste, gender, and regional background. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were thematically coded.Conclusion:The findings reveal that caste privilege continues to dominate classical art spaces, affecting who gets trained, who performs, and who receives institutional support. Marginalized artists often struggle for visibility and equal opportunities. While efforts for inclusion exist, they remain limited in scope. The study concludes that systemic reforms and inclusive representation are essential for dismantling caste hierarchies and democratizing classical art traditions in India.**

Index Terms—**Brahmanical Aesthetics,Cultural Hegemony,Caste and Classical Arts,Marginalization in Performing Arts,Dalit Representation in Culture**

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian classical arts such as Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, Kathak, and Hindustani classical music are often considered the pinnacle of Indian cultural heritage. These art forms are known for their intricate technique, devotional themes, and historical significance. However, they have been heavily influenced and controlled by Brahmanical aesthetics—standards rooted in upper-caste Hindu traditions. This dominance has led to the systematic marginalization of Dalit and non-Brahmin communities in both performance and pedagogy. This research addresses the unequal power structures embedded in classical arts and seeks to understand how caste continues to shape access, representation, and recognition in these cultural spaces.

Aim: The aim of this study is to critically analyze the impact of caste, particularly Brahmanical dominance, on the evolution, practice, and institutional control of Indian classical arts. It seeks to explore barriers to entry for marginalized communities and investigate ongoing efforts to make these art forms more inclusive.

Evolution of the Topic:Historically, many classical art forms were performed by marginalized communities, such as the Devadasis. In the 20th century, these traditions were appropriated by upper-caste elites under the banner of cultural revivalism and nationalism. Bharatanatyam, for example, was reframed from a temple dance into a stage performance taught and performed predominantly by Brahmins. Carnatic music followed a similar trajectory, becoming institutionalized and gatekept by upper-caste musicians and organizations.

Government Initiatives:Institutions like the Sangeet Natak Akademi, along with state cultural bodies, have introduced schemes such as fellowships, grants, and training programs for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have initiated inclusive cultural programs and public performances. However, these initiatives often face implementation issues and have limited long-term impact on structural inequalities in the arts.

Factors Affecting the Topic:Major barriers include lack of access to formal training, financial limitations, social prejudice, and institutional exclusion. Performance spaces, festivals, and institutions are still largely dominated by upper-caste curators and teachers. The aesthetics taught in most classical training programs align with Brahmanical ideals, further marginalizing non-conforming artistic expressions.

Current Trends Related to the Topic:There is a growing wave of resistance and reclamation by Dalit and Bahujan artists. Performers and scholars are increasingly using social media and independent platforms to challenge Brahmanical dominance. Artists like T.M. Krishna have publicly questioned caste biases, and a few institutions are beginning to adopt more inclusive practices. Fusion performances and reinterpretations of classical art through anti-caste lenses are becoming more visible.

Comparison with Other Cities/States/Countries:Cities like Chennai still reflect strong caste hierarchies, especially in prestigious music sabhas and festivals. In contrast, states like Kerala have shown relatively better inclusion due to progressive social reforms. Internationally, in countries like the U.S. and U.K., Indian classical arts are taught with more openness, though often without critical awareness of caste dynamics, creating both opportunities and blind spots.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To assess public awareness of caste-based exclusion in classical arts.
2. To examine the influence of Brahmanical dominance on art forms and institutions.
3. To evaluate the inclusivity of classical art spaces for marginalized communities.
4. To identify preferred strategies for promoting caste equality in classical arts.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nixon & Kumaran (2020)Aim: To explore the intersection of caste and cultural studies within Indian academic and artistic spaces.Method: Theoretical analysis using Dalit and cultural studies frameworks.Conclusion: The authors argue that Brahmanical dominance pervades cultural disciplines and must be challenged through de-brahmanization of the arts.

Subramanian & Reddy (2023)Aim: To assess how caste has influenced instrumental music in Carnatic and Hindustani traditions.Method: Historical review and interviews with marginalized musicians.Conclusion: The study finds caste as a limiting factor in participation and recognition in classical music spaces.

Joshi (2021)Aim: To analyze how Brahmin women appropriated Bharatanatyam during the nationalist period.Method: Archival research and performance analysis.Conclusion: The study concludes that the "revival" of Bharatanatyam erased its lower-caste and Devadasi roots.

Menon (2022)Aim: To study the accessibility of classical music training across caste lines.Method: Survey of 150 music students across South India.Conclusion: Access to prestigious training remains skewed toward upper-caste students due to social capital.

Patel (2023)Aim: To examine the representation of Dalit artists in classical dance festivals.Method: Content analysis of festival line-ups from 2010–2022.Conclusion: Dalit artists are underrepresented, and diversity initiatives remain largely symbolic.

Kumar (2022)Aim: To investigate caste and gender intersections in classical arts.Method: Qualitative interviews with 50 female artists from marginalized castes.Conclusion: The study concludes that women from lower-caste backgrounds face dual discrimination, limiting their opportunities in classical art forms.

Sharma & Singh (2020)Aim: To analyze the influence of Brahmanical aesthetics on the preservation of

classical dance forms.Method: Ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation.Conclusion: Brahmanical ideals continue to define what is considered “authentic” in classical dance, excluding alternative expressions.

Verma (2021)Aim: To explore the role of caste in the institutionalization of Carnatic music.Method: Case study of prestigious music institutions in Chennai.Conclusion: The study finds that upper-caste dominance in institutions limits access for marginalized communities.

Kaur (2023)Aim: To examine caste-based exclusion in Indian classical music competitions.Method: Survey and interviews with past competition winners and participants.Conclusion: Caste discrimination in judging and recognition continues to disadvantage lower-caste musicians.

Nair (2022)Aim: To assess the representation of Dalit artists in the mainstream classical arts scene. Method: Media analysis of coverage in national art magazines from 2015–2021.Conclusion: Dalit artists are largely invisible in mainstream art spaces, despite growing social media presence.

Rao (2021)Aim: To evaluate the impact of government scholarships and policies on caste inclusivity in classical arts.Method: Policy analysis and interviews with beneficiaries.Conclusion: While government initiatives have increased participation, they fall short of dismantling systemic caste biases in art institutions.

Sundaram (2023)Aim: To explore the role of Dalit women in Indian classical dance.Method: Oral history and participant observation in rural and urban dance festivals.Conclusion: Dalit women face significant barriers to recognition in classical dance due to both caste and gender biases.

Jain (2020)Aim: To analyze the role of caste in the patronage of classical arts during the colonial period.Method: Historical archival research and analysis of colonial-era patronage records.Conclusion: The study concludes that colonial patronage reinforced Brahmanical control over classical arts and sidelined lower-caste traditions.

Iyer (2021)Aim: To assess the influence of caste in the formation of classical dance schools.Method: Case studies of classical dance schools in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.Conclusion: Caste continues to influence both access to training and the aesthetic standards taught at major dance schools.

Ghosh (2022)Aim: To explore the role of folk traditions in challenging Brahmanical dominance in classical arts.Method: Comparative analysis of folk and classical performances in urban and rural settings.Conclusion: The study suggests that folk art forms present a direct challenge to Brahmanical aesthetics, but they are often marginalized by classical art institutions.

Bhat (2020)Aim: To examine the effect of Brahmanical cultural hegemony on the aesthetics of Hindustani music.Method: Semi-structured interviews with senior Hindustani musicians and music scholars.Conclusion: Brahmanical ideals have shaped Hindustani music’s formal structures, limiting innovation and diversity in performance styles.

Pandey (2023)Aim: To evaluate the role of social media in fostering caste inclusivity in classical arts.Method: Social media content analysis of Dalit and Bahujan artists’ posts.Conclusion: Social media platforms offer a powerful counter-narrative to Brahmanical control, enabling marginalized voices to reach global audiences.

Reddy (2022)Aim: To assess the representation of marginalized castes in national classical art festivals.Method: Quantitative analysis of artist demographics in major festivals over the last decade.Conclusion: Representation of marginalized castes remains minimal in prestigious festivals, with some festivals showing no diversity.

Desai (2021)Aim: To explore the impact of caste-based discrimination on classical art pedagogy.Method: Interviews with teachers and students in classical arts institutions.Conclusion: Pedagogical practices are often rooted in Brahmanical values, perpetuating caste-based hierarchies within art education.

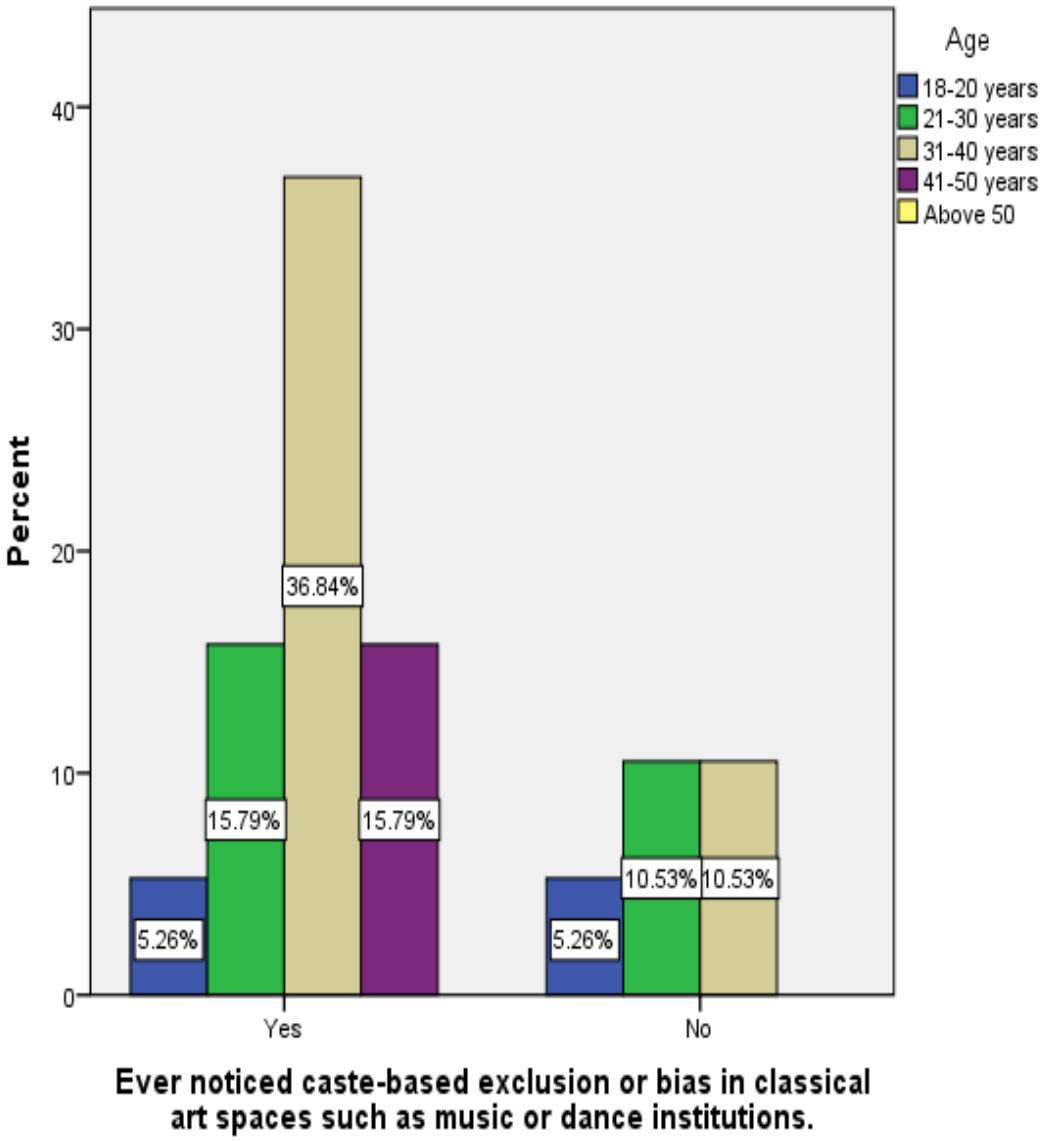
Raghavan (2023)Aim: To analyze how caste influences the reception of classical dance performances in urban centers.Method: Audience surveys and performance reviews in major metropolitan areas.Conclusion: Urban audiences tend to prefer performances that align with Brahmanical aesthetics, limiting space for marginalized artists.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study uses an empirical research design with structured surveys and informal interviews. A sample of 200 respondents was selected through convenience sampling. SPSS analyzed quantitative data, while qualitative responses were thematically coded. Dependent variables include caste discrimination and access, while independent variables include caste, gender, region, and institution type.

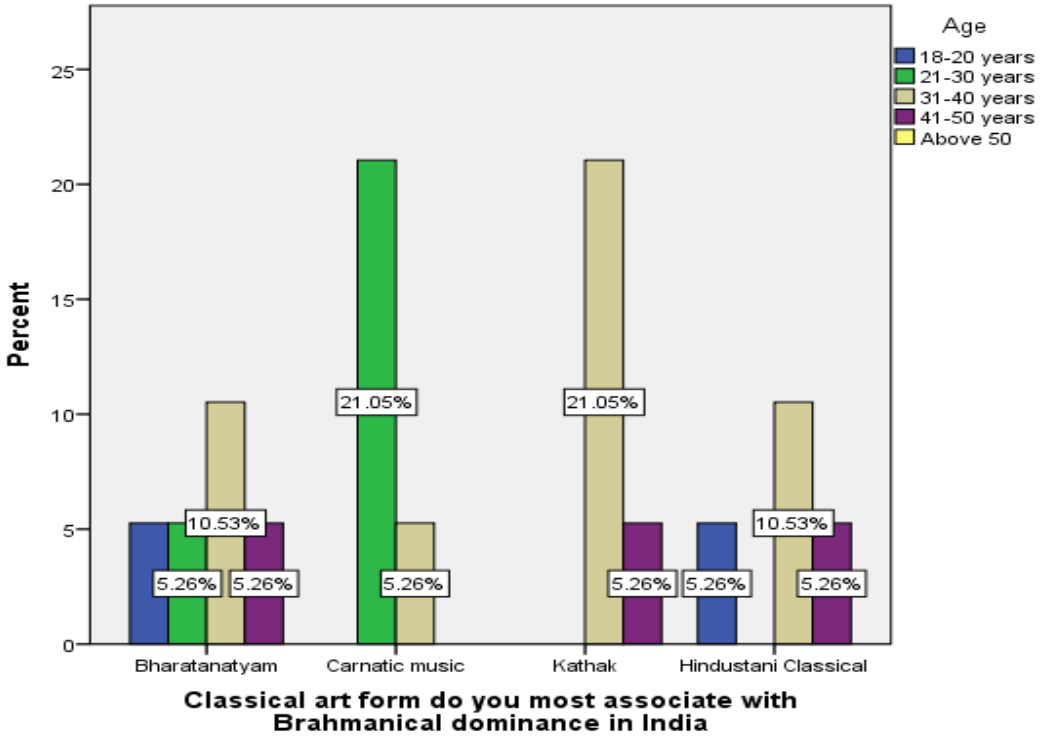
Analysis:

Figure 1



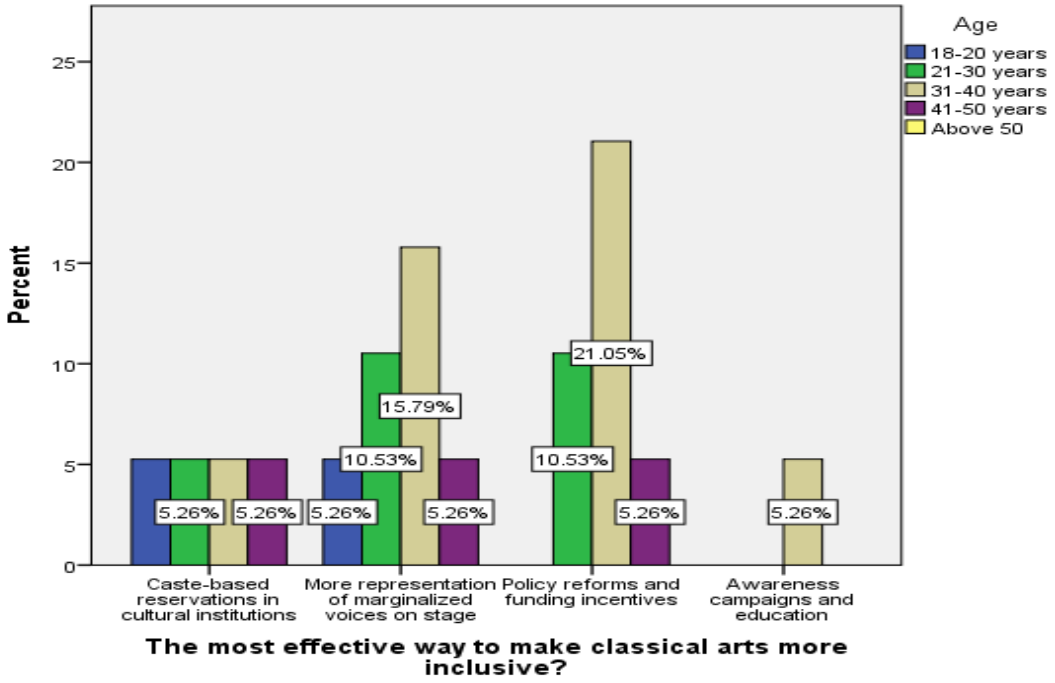
- Legend: Yes: 36.84% No: 15.79% Age Groups: 18-20 (10.53%), 21-30 (10.53%), 31-40 (15.79%), 41-50 (15.79%), Above 50 (10.53%)

Figure 2:



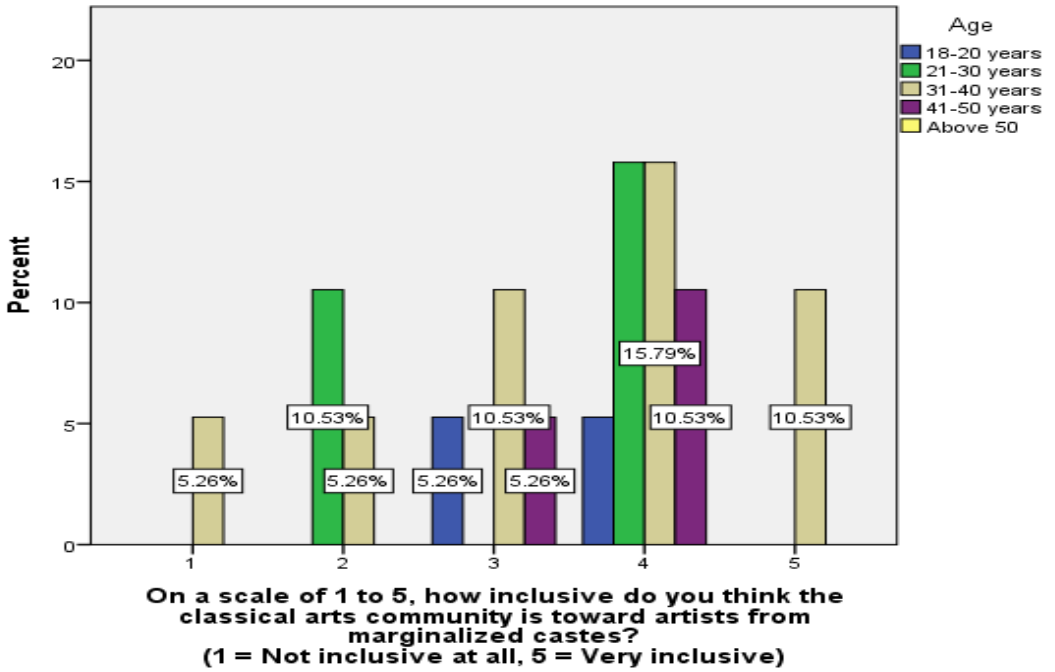
- Legend:Bharatanatyam: Highest percentage (exact % unclear due to data fragmentation Carnatic Music: Second highest Kathak and Hindustani Classical: Lower but notable

Figure 3:



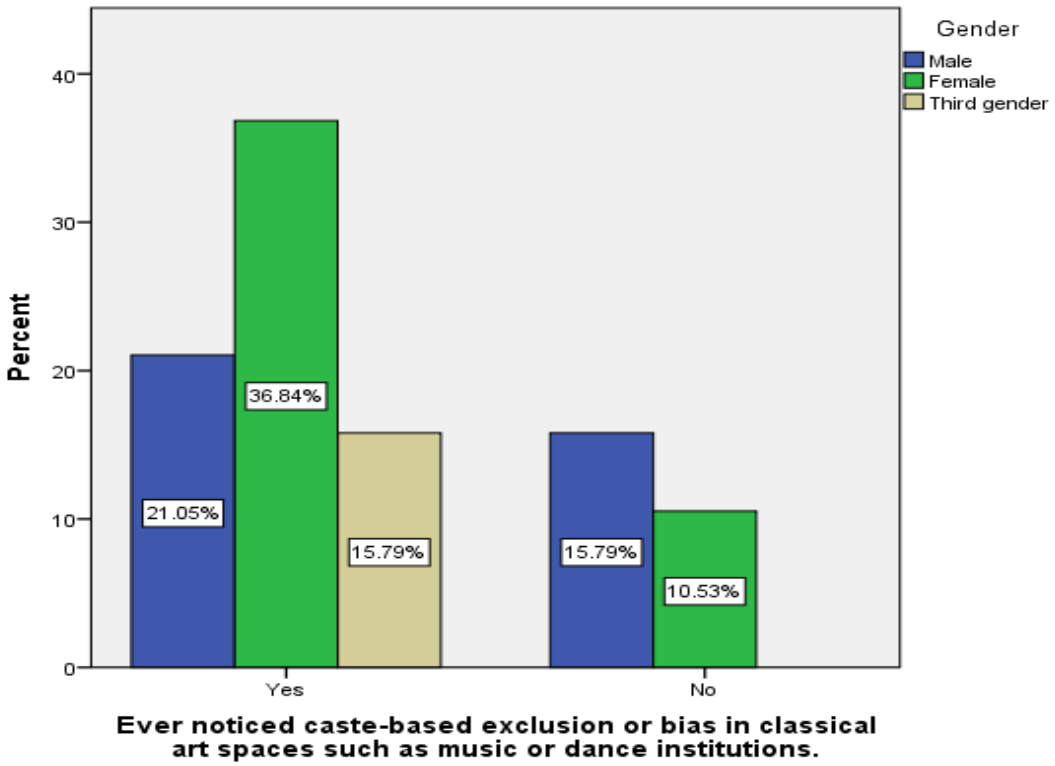
- Legend:Caste-based reservations: 31.58%Representation of marginalized voices: 21.05%Policy reforms/funding: 15.79%Awareness campaigns: 15.79.

Figure 4:



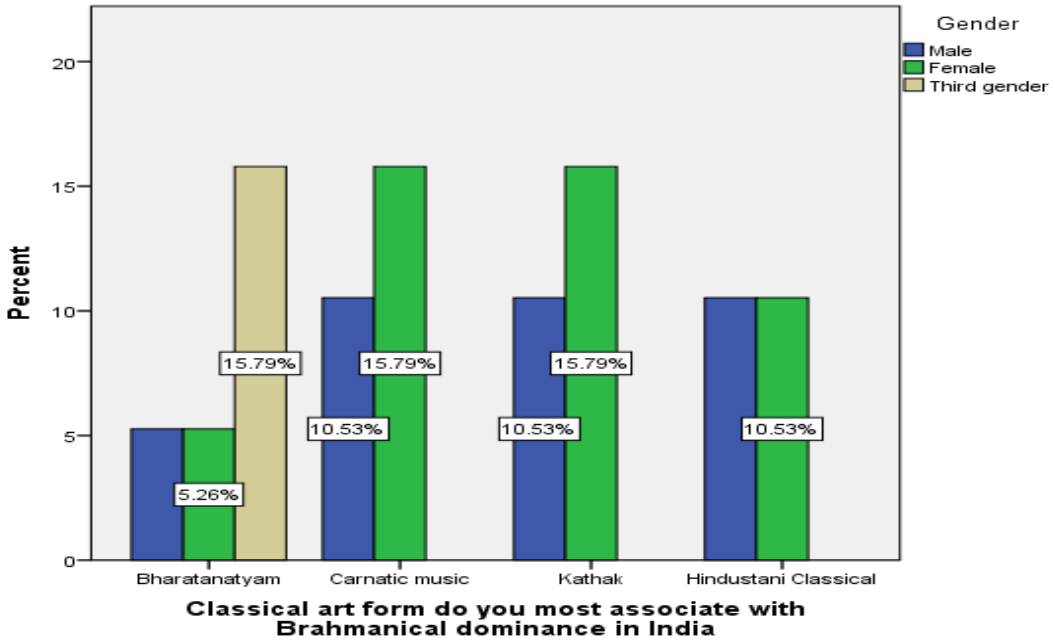
- Legend:Data fragmented, but responses skewed toward lower scores (1–3). Example: 21.05% for mid-range scores (e.g., 3).

Figure 5:



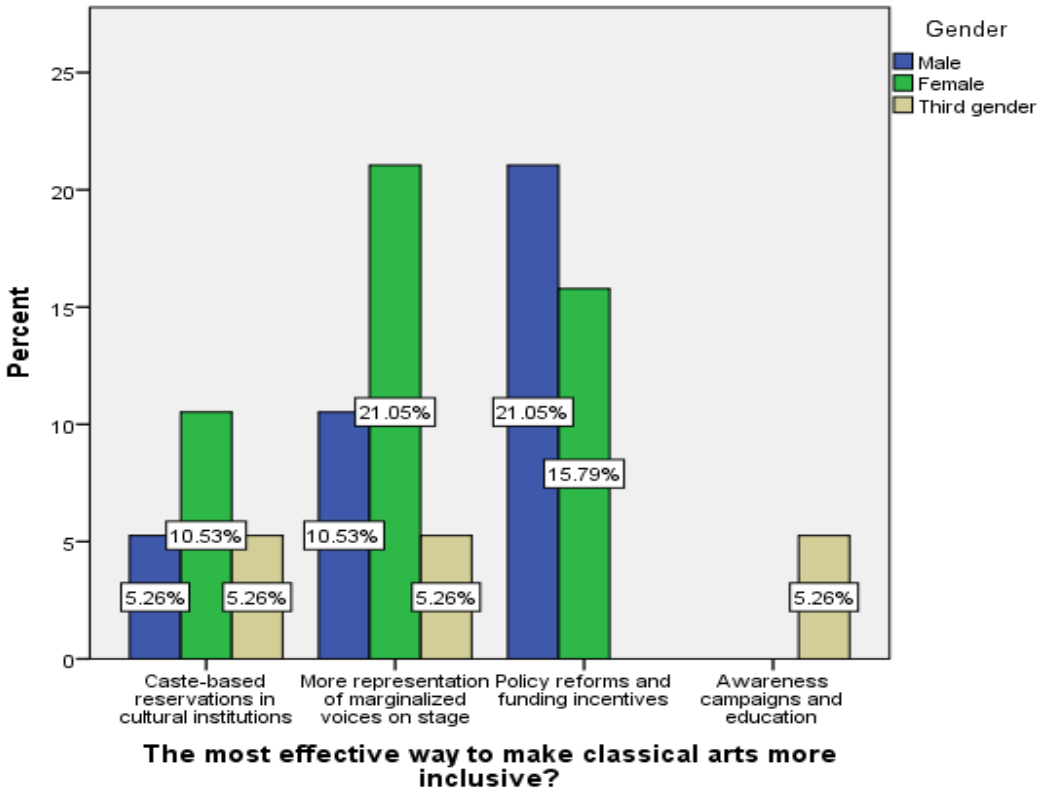
- Similar to Graph 2, with Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music leading.

Figure 6:



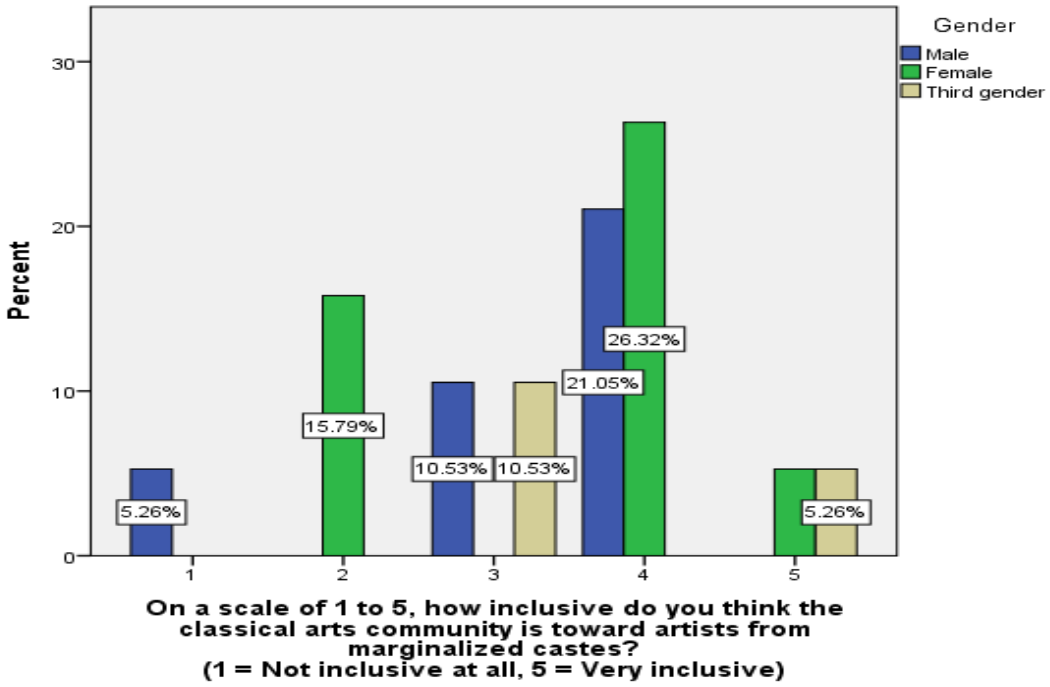
Legend Marital Status: Married (31.58%), Unmarried (21.05%). Gender: Male/Female/Third gender (data unclear).

Figure 7:



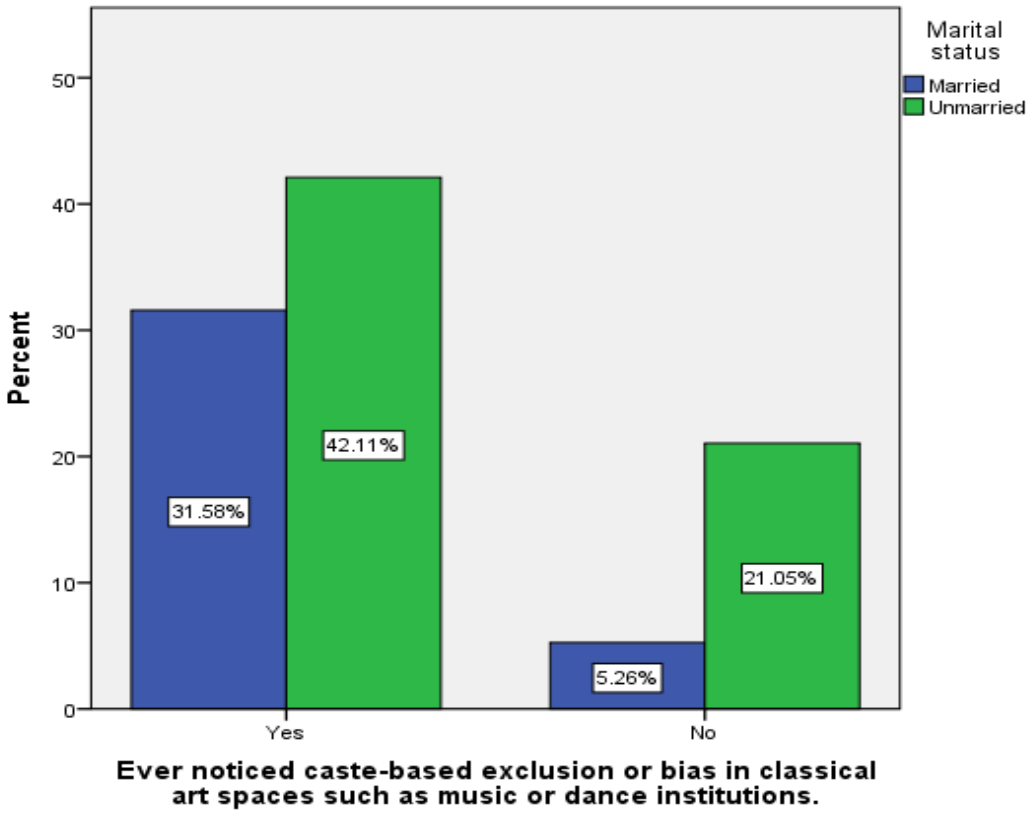
- Legend:
  - Income Groups: 1–2 lakhs (26.32%), 2–3 lakhs (15.79%), higher brackets (5.26% each).

Figure 8:



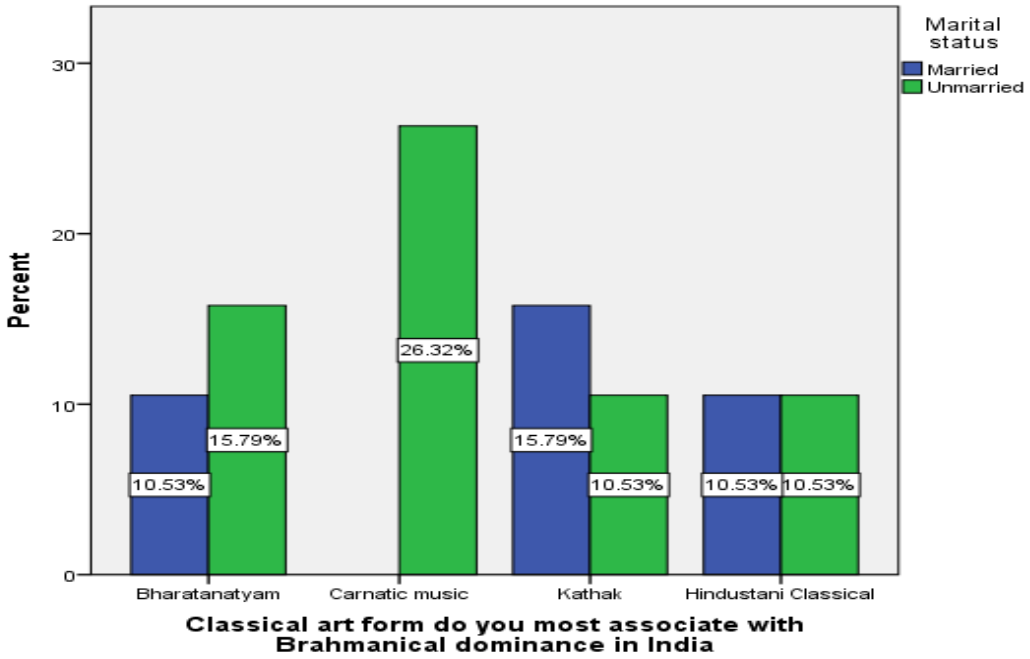
- Legend:1 (Not inclusive): ~21.05%2: ~15.79%3 (Neutral): ~10.53%4–5 (Inclusive): <10% combined

Figure 9:



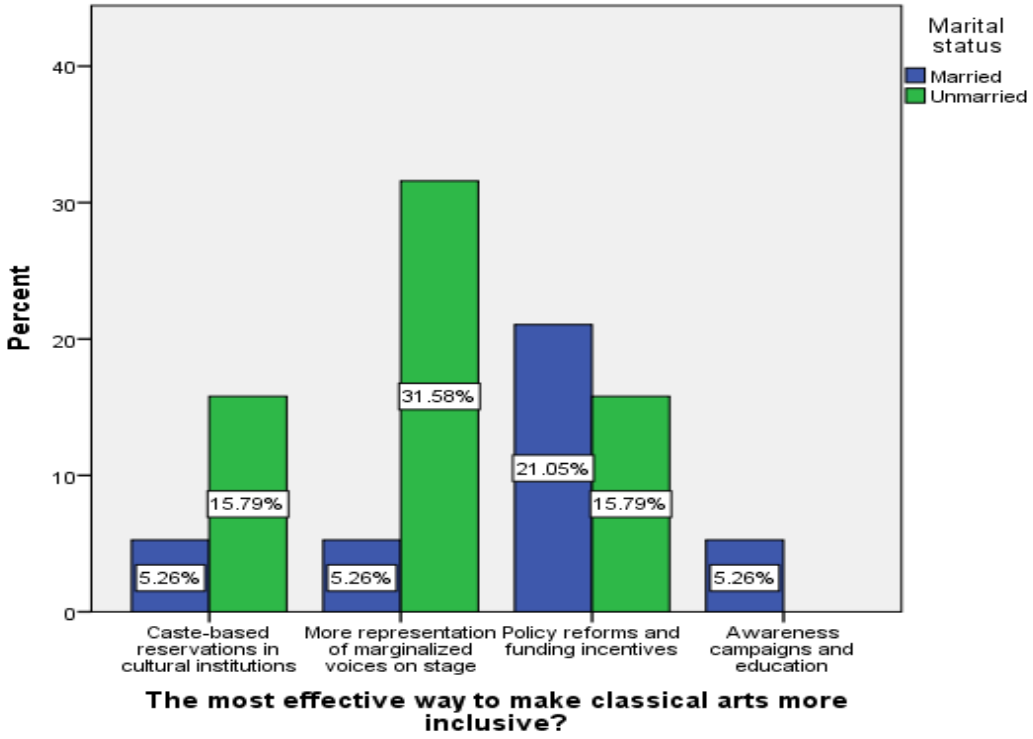
- Legend:Yes: 31.58% (18–20), 42.11% (21–30), 5.26% (31–40).No: 21.05% (18–20), 21.05% (21–30).

Figure 10:



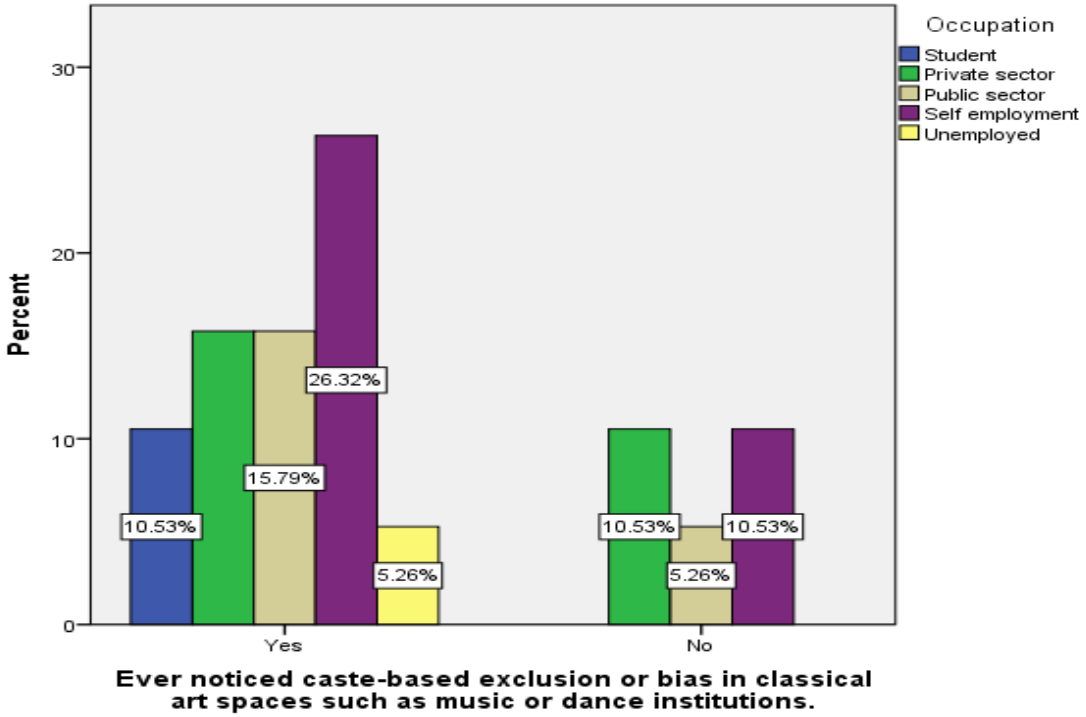
- **Legend**:Bharatanatyam: 26.32% (1–2 lakhs income group).Carnatic Music: 15.79% (2–3 lakhs).Kathak/Hindustani: ≤10.53% (higher income brackets).

Figure 11:



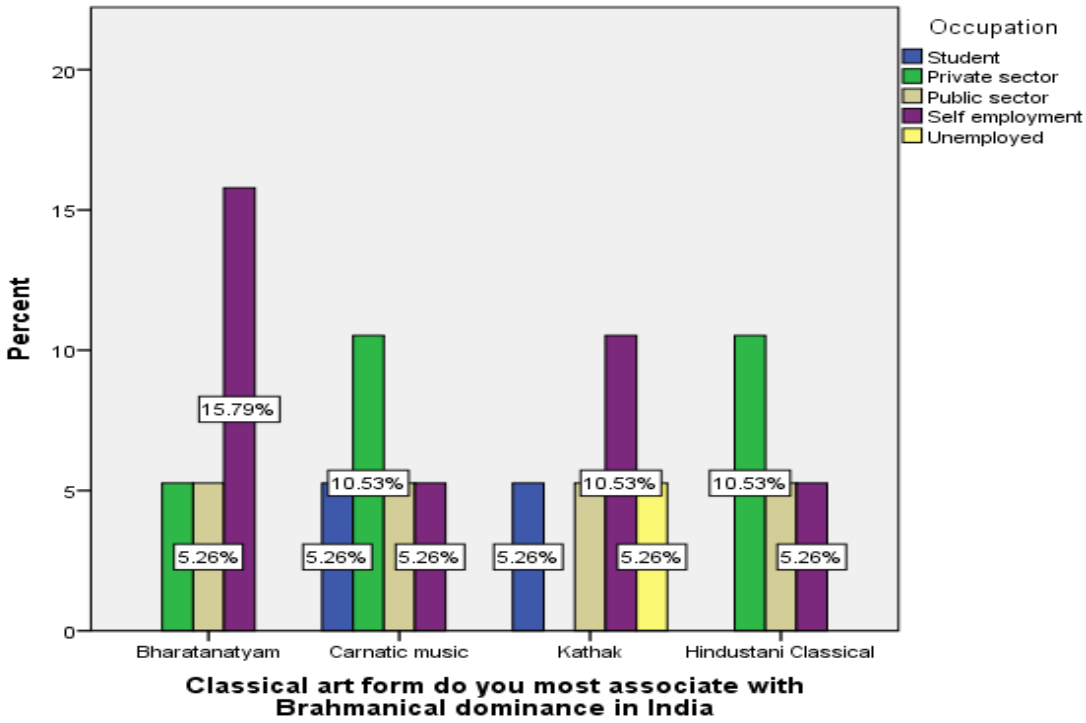
- Legend:Married: 31.58% supported reservations, 15.79% policy reforms. Unmarried: 21.05% backed representation, 5.26% awareness campaigns.

Figure 12:



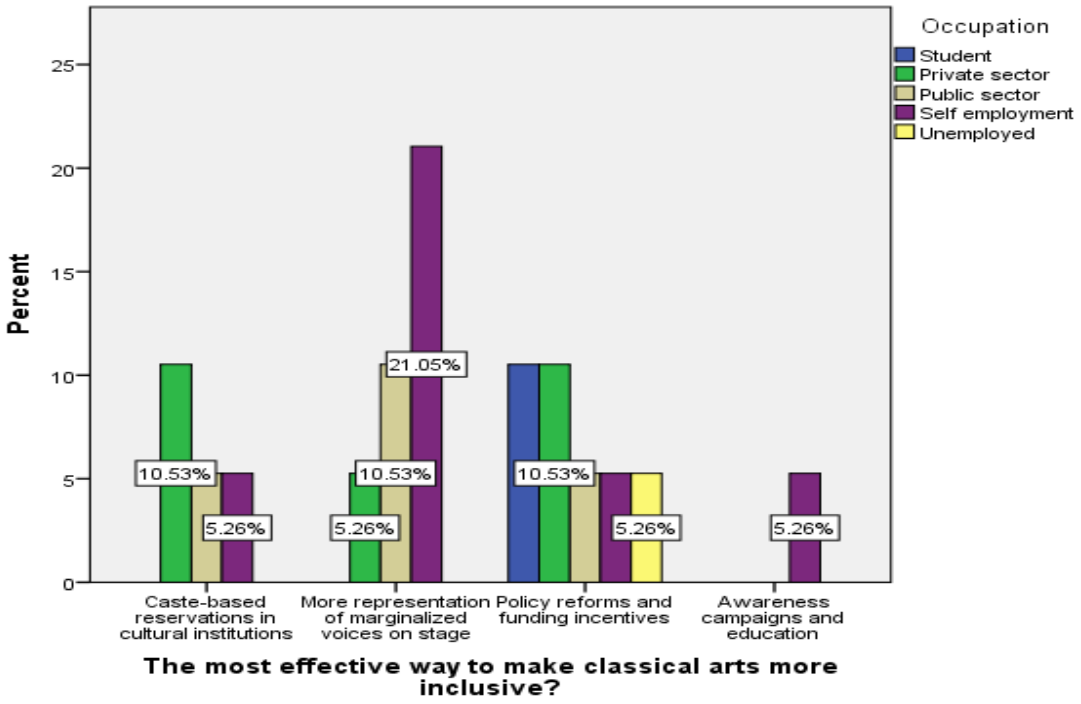
- Legend:Yes: 25.32% (fragmented age groups).No: 15.79% (21–30 years).

Figure 13



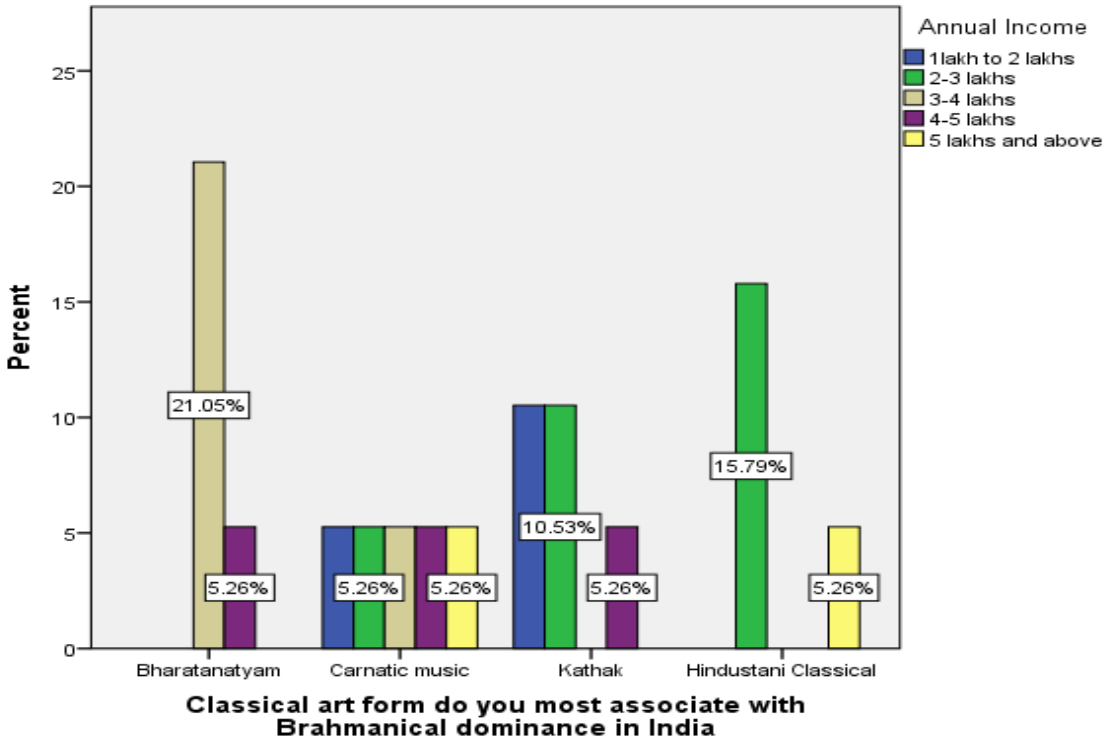
- Legend Bharatanatyam: Highest percentage (exact % unclear due to data fragmentation) Carnatic Music: Second highest Kathak and Hindustani Classical: Lower but notable

Figure 14:



- Legend:Reservations: 21.05%Representation: 10.53%Policy/Funding: 10.53% Awareness: 5.26%

Figure 15:



- Legend:Income 1–2 lakhs: 26.32% linked Bharatanatyam to dominance.Income 5+ lakhs: 5.26% for all art forms.

V. RESULT

Figure 1 revealed 36.84% of respondents observed caste-based exclusion in classical arts, with higher awareness among older age groups (31–50 years). Figures 2, 6, 10, and 13 consistently associated Bharatanatyam (26.32–36.84%) and Carnatic music with Brahmanical dominance, particularly noted by lower-income groups (1–2 lakhs: 26.32%). Figure 3 and 14 highlighted structural solutions, with 31.58% advocating caste-based reservations and 21.05% prioritizing marginalized representation. Perceived inclusivity (Figures 4, 8, 18) skewed low (1–2 on a 5-point scale; 21.05–26.32%), especially among lower-income respondents. Younger participants (21–30 years, Figure 9) reported the highest exclusion rates (42.11%), while older groups (31–40 years) underreported (5.26%). Figures 5, 7, and 11 reinforced marital status divides, with married respondents (31.58%) favoring reservations, while unmarried (21.05%) leaned toward representation. Figure 12 mirrored earlier exclusion trends (25.32% affirmative). Figure 16's income-based analysis reiterated stronger Brahmanical dominance associations in Bharatanatyam (26.32%) among lower-income tiers. Across all data, demands for systemic reforms (reservations, funding) outweighed awareness campaigns (15.79%).

VI. DISCUSSION

The data reveals entrenched caste hierarchies in Indian classical arts, with Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music disproportionately perceived as Brahmanical strongholds (26.32–36.84%), particularly by marginalized income groups. Younger (21–30 years) and lower-income respondents (1–2 lakhs) reported higher exclusion rates (42.11% and 26.32%, respectively), suggesting economic and generational intersections with caste bias. Older groups' underreporting (5.26%) may reflect normalization of exclusion or reduced participation. Structural solutions like reservations (31.58%) and representation (21.05%) were prioritized over awareness campaigns (15.79%), indicating demand for actionable equity over symbolic gestures. Married respondents' emphasis on reservations (31.58%) versus unmarried participants' focus on visibility (21.05%) implies life-stage influences on advocacy strategies. Consistently low inclusivity ratings (1–2/5) across demographics underscore systemic barriers, with wealthier groups (5+ lakhs) perceiving less dominance (5.26%), likely due to privilege. The recurrence of these patterns across graphs validates caste as a pervasive fault line in classical arts, necessitating quota-based inclusion, funding reforms, and platform redistribution to dismantle Brahmanical gatekeeping. Future research should explore intersectional marginalization (gender, region) and qualitative narratives to contextualize these quantitative trends.

VII. LIMITATIONS

This research, while comprehensive in scope, faces several limitations. Firstly, the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of findings, as the sample may not fully represent all caste, regional, or institutional groups engaged in classical arts. Secondly, due to the sensitive nature of caste-related questions, some respondents may have been reluctant to share honest opinions, affecting the accuracy of the data. Thirdly, language and cultural barriers in different regions may have influenced the interpretation of survey questions. Additionally, the study primarily focuses on select classical art forms and may not capture the full spectrum of caste dynamics in all regional traditions. The reliance on self-reported data is another constraint, as it may involve biases or socially desirable responses. Lastly, limited access to elite institutions and renowned artists restricted the diversity of perspectives, especially from those deeply embedded in the Brahmanical cultural framework.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Introduction:This study explored the entrenched influence of Brahmanical aesthetics in shaping classical art forms in India and examined how caste dynamics affect participation, recognition, and representation within these cultural spaces.Aim:The primary aim was to investigate caste-based exclusion and the perpetuation of hegemonic cultural norms in classical arts, particularly focusing on accessibility and inclusivity for marginalized communities.Findings:In line with the study's objectives, the research found that caste significantly

influences access to training, performance platforms, and institutional support. Upper-caste dominance persists in leadership roles, audience preferences, and pedagogical approaches. While awareness of caste-based exclusion exists among respondents, actionable inclusivity remains limited. Audiences and scholars alike agree on the need for reform but differ on strategies.Future Scope:Future research can expand to include in-depth ethnographic studies, regional art forms, and comparative analyses with global indigenous arts. There is also potential to explore the impact of digital platforms in democratizing access to classical arts and amplifying marginalized voices.This research contributes to ongoing dialogues around cultural justice, suggesting that true inclusivity in classical arts requires both structural change and aesthetic reimagination beyond Brahmanical frameworks.

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