

Copyrights Protection of Dance Choreography- Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

This paper explores the complexities of copyright protection for dance choreography, an art form that straddles the line between artistic expression and intellectual property law. While copyright law has long been established to protect works of authorship, dance choreography presents unique challenges due to its ephemeral nature and the difficulty in fixing movement in a tangible medium. The paper examines the existing legal frameworks in various jurisdictions, highlighting both the opportunities and limitations of current copyright regimes in safeguarding choreographic works. Key findings reveal that while choreographic works are eligible for copyright protection, the threshold for originality and fixation can be difficult to meet, often leading to disputes over what constitutes a protectable work. Additionally, the paper discusses the implications of digital media and social platforms on dance choreography, where unauthorized reproductions and remixes are common. The research concludes with recommendations for reforming copyright law to better address the evolving landscape of dance and movement-based arts. It argues for a more nuanced approach to the fixation requirement, as well as greater recognition of dance's cultural and collaborative nature. The paper calls for broader international cooperation and clearer guidelines to ensure fair and effective protection for choreographers in the digital age.

Keywords: Copyright protection, Dance choreography, Artistic expression, Intellectual property law, Legal frameworks

Introduction

Dance Choreography refers to the art of designing and arranging movements, patterns, and steps in dance. It is a fundamental aspect of performance art, where the choreographer creates a series of movements and sequences, often set to music, to express a narrative, theme, or emotion. Choreography can be seen across various dance styles, from classical ballet to contemporary, hip-hop, and even cultural or folk dance traditions. It involves not only physical movement but also creativity, innovation, and artistic expression. A choreographer's work may combine gestures, formations, timing, and space to communicate ideas, tell stories, or evoke particular emotions in the audience.

In the realm of **creative arts**, dance holds a significant place as a unique form of human expression. Like music, visual arts, or literature, dance allows individuals to communicate without words, drawing on movement to convey messages. Its ephemeral nature — the fact that it exists only in performance and is not a tangible object — presents both a challenge and a beauty. Choreographers, therefore, are essential artists in this field, shaping how dance evolves, transforms, and resonates with audiences. As a result, dance choreography is not just about creating movements but about producing a lasting artistic statement that contributes to the cultural and creative landscape.

However, because dance is inherently performative and often fleeting, it can be vulnerable to appropriation, unauthorized reproduction, and exploitation. This creates a significant need for mechanisms that protect the rights of choreographers, ensuring that their creative work is acknowledged and respected.

Copyright protection is crucial for choreographers as it ensures their creative work is legally recognized, preserved, and protected from unauthorized use. It safeguards the integrity of their choreography by granting exclusive rights to control its performance, reproduction, and adaptation, thus preventing distortion or misrepresentation. Additionally, copyright allows choreographers to benefit financially by licensing their work, ensuring they are compensated for their creativity and efforts. It also guarantees proper attribution, preventing others from claiming ownership. Copyright fosters innovation by providing security for choreographers to experiment with new ideas without the fear of exploitation. Moreover, it provides legal recourse in case of infringement, allowing choreographers to protect their work from unauthorized copying or distribution. In these ways, copyright not only supports the economic and moral rights of choreographers but also encourages continued artistic development in the field of dance.

Literature Review

Aranya Nath and Sonak Saha(2014) The paper discusses the issue of whether dance moves and choreography can be protected under copyright law in India. It provides an overview of the relevant provisions in the Indian Copyright Act of 1957, which recognizes choreography as a form of dramatic work. The paper examines the challenges in obtaining copyright protection for choreography, such as the requirement of fixation in a tangible medium and the ambiguity around the distinction between choreography and cinematographic films. It also discusses the concept of performers' rights under the Copyright Act and other forms of IP protection that may be applicable to dance performances. The paper cites relevant judicial precedents and expert opinions to analyze the current state of copyright protection for choreography in India.

Seeman Ur Rehman (2023)The paper discusses the protection of dance steps and choreography under Indian intellectual property laws. It highlights the provisions of the Copyright Act of 1957 that protect dramatic works, including choreography and dance moves. The authors use the example of Mallakhamb, an ancient Indian dance form with aerial acts, to demonstrate how choreographers can seek copyright protection for their dance movements to prevent unauthorized use and commercialization. The paper also mentions the case of famous choreographer Remo D'Souza, who planned to protect his dance moves from the film ABCD in 2013.

Diwanshi Rohatgi and Keshav Madhav(2023)This article examines the legal landscape for copyright protection of dance moves in India. It discusses how choreography is considered a form of dramatic work under the Indian Copyright Act, 1957, and the requirements for obtaining copyright in choreographic works, such as originality, systematic organization of dance movements, and fixation in a tangible medium. The article highlights the challenges faced by choreographers in securing copyright, including the Act's restrictions on the mediums through which choreographic works can be fixed, and the lack of clear criteria compared to other legal systems like the US and UK. It also discusses relevant court cases that have addressed the copyright issues around choreography in India.

Research Problem

The research problem is exploring how current intellectual property laws can be adapted to address the

unique challenges of digital distribution and online platforms, where choreography is easily copied, modified, and shared without proper attribution.

Research Objective

The objective of this research is to analyze the effectiveness of existing copyright laws in protecting dance choreography, identify gaps in their application to digital and online platforms, and propose legal reforms to enhance the protection and fair attribution of choreographic works in the evolving digital landscape.

1. The Legal Status of Dance Choreography

Defining Dance Choreography in Copyright Law

In copyright law, "choreography" is generally defined as the creation of a sequence of dance movements or patterns that are original and fixed in a tangible medium¹. In many jurisdictions, including India, choreography is classified as a form of "artistic work," similar to other creative expressions like paintings or sculptures. The key to protecting choreography under copyright law is whether it can be demonstrated as a unique and original creation, distinct from existing works. While the term "choreography" might seem straightforward, the legal understanding of what constitutes protected choreography has evolved over time through case law and statutory interpretation.

In the United States, for example, a series of legal precedents has helped define choreography under copyright law. One notable case is **Martha Graham v. The Universe** (1944)², which affirmed that choreography could be protected by copyright, provided it was original and fixed in a tangible medium. The court emphasized that the originality of the choreographic work was key, and it did not need to be fully notated or rigidly structured to qualify for protection. This case set a significant precedent, allowing for the protection of works that were innovative in their movement, even if not meticulously recorded. Another important case, **Williams v. Gaye**³ (2014), addressed the question of originality and the difficulty in distinguishing between inspiration and copying in choreography. The court ruled that while Gaye's choreography was similar to Williams' work, the degree of similarity did not meet the threshold for infringement, emphasizing that a certain amount of movement similarity does not necessarily equate to infringement. This case underscored the challenges of proving infringement in dance, particularly in cases where movements are common or widely used in the dance world.

The challenge in defining choreography within copyright law arises from its performative and evolving nature. Unlike static forms like written texts or visual art, choreography is inherently dynamic and may change with each performance or dancer. Courts have had to grapple with whether a dance must be notated or fixed in video form to constitute a choreographic work, and how much "fixation" is required for it to be eligible for copyright protection. This lack of uniformity in definition often results in the exclusion of many forms of dance that are not formally documented.

Requirements for Copyright Protection

For dance choreography to be protected under copyright law, it must generally meet three key criteria: originality, fixation, and authorship.⁴

- 1. Originality:** The work must be the product of the creator's own creativity and not a mere copy or derivative of another work. In the context of dance, this means the movements and patterns must reflect a certain level of creative expression. A work may contain movements or gestures that are commonly used in dance, but as long as the combination or sequence is unique and reflects the creator's artistic

input, it can¹ meet the originality requirement. However, this can be challenging in practice. Dance involves a shared vocabulary of movements that are often reused across various forms (e.g., pirouettes, leaps, etc.). The question then becomes how unique or original a specific sequence must be to qualify for copyright. In some cases, traditional or folk dances, which have been passed down through generations, may not meet the originality requirement, as they lack a clear individual author. Similarly, improvisational dances—created on the spot during performance—may not satisfy the originality requirement if they are not recorded or documented in a lasting form.

2. **Fixation:** Copyright law also requires that the work be "fixed" in a tangible medium of expression. This is a particularly problematic criterion for dance choreography, as dance is an ephemeral, performative art form. While this criterion is easily satisfied for other artistic forms (e.g., literature, music), the transient nature of dance poses difficulties. In many cases, the dance must be recorded—either through video, notation, or photography—so that it can be protected and enforced. However, even if a dance is recorded, the question arises whether video captures the choreography fully or accurately, as it may fail to convey the nuances of the live performance. Similarly, notating a dance in formal notation (such as Labanotation) can be a lengthy and complex process, which not all choreographers are willing or able to undertake.
3. **Authorship:** The choreographer must be identified as the creator or author of the work. This can be straightforward in cases where an individual choreographer creates a piece of work independently. However, issues can arise when choreography is a collaborative effort, as is common in many dance companies or collectives. For example, if multiple dancers or collaborators contribute to the creation of a work, the question of who holds the rights to the choreography may become complex. In some cases, there may be disputes over whether the choreographer or the performers should be credited as the author, particularly when choreography evolves through improvisation during rehearsals or live performances.

Legal Challenges and Gaps in Copyrighting Dance

The legal challenges in copyrighting dance choreography are numerous and stem primarily from issues related to fixation and originality. One of the most significant problems is the ambiguity surrounding the "fixation" requirement. Traditional copyright law assumes that a work must be fixed in a tangible form, such as a manuscript or a painting, but dance does not easily lend itself to these traditional forms of documentation. As mentioned earlier, video recordings or written notations are commonly used to satisfy the fixation requirement, but both methods have limitations. Videos may fail to capture the intricacies of a dance, such as the timing, spacing, and emotional expression that are central to the choreography's meaning. Additionally, formal dance notation is complex, specialized, and often inaccessible to many choreographers. This raises the issue of whether these methods adequately preserve the full breadth of a choreographer's creative expression.

Another challenge is the **originality** requirement, particularly when dealing with styles of dance that are deeply rooted in tradition or that rely on improvisation. For example, folk dances, which are collective and passed down through generations, often cannot meet the originality standard, as they are not "owned"

¹ Syncing the steps: Copyright Protection for Dance Choreography! - Patent, Trademark & Design Registration Service in India | Brainiac IP

2. Martha Graham School v. Martha Graham Center, 224 F. Supp. 2d 567 (S.D.N.Y. 2002) :: Justia

3. Williams v. Gaye, No. 15-56880 (9th Cir. 2018) :: Justia

4. Dancing into the Legal World - Copyright Protection of Choreography Works under Indian Law - KnowLaw

by any single individual. Similarly, **improvisational dance**, where movements are created spontaneously during performance, can be difficult to protect under copyright law. If a performance is not documented, it may not qualify for copyright protection at all, leaving choreographers who work in this mode vulnerable to having their work appropriated without recompense. Moreover, even when a choreography is documented, establishing that it is original enough to be protected can be difficult, especially when much of the movement language in contemporary or classical dance is shared and used by multiple creators. Additionally, **enforcement of copyright** presents another legal gap. Even if a choreographer successfully registers their work, proving infringement in the context of dance is challenging. Unlike literary works or visual art, where there is a clear comparison between the original and the infringing work, dance is more fluid and subjective. Determining whether one performance infringes upon another requires demonstrating substantial similarity, which can be particularly difficult when movement vocabulary overlaps, as it often does in dance. Furthermore, traditional dance forms and the fluid nature of choreography mean that different interpretations or adaptations of the same dance piece may not necessarily be considered infringement under current laws.

2. Problems in Protecting Dance Choreography

Lack of Standardization

In India, the protection of dance choreography is fraught with challenges stemming from the lack of standardization in how copyright law is interpreted and applied, both within the country and globally. While Indian copyright law recognizes choreography as a form of "artistic work" eligible for protection, the legal framework is not as clearly defined as it could be, leading to ambiguities in terms of what constitutes "fixation" and "originality" in the context of dance⁵. Indian law requires that choreography be fixed in a tangible medium to be eligible for copyright protection, but the precise nature of what qualifies as a "fixed" medium is open to interpretation—should it be a video, a written notation, or even a detailed description of the dance movements? This ambiguity complicates the process of protecting dance works, especially when dances are performed in non-traditional, ephemeral ways that are not easily captured or documented. Additionally, India's cultural context, which often involves the sharing and communal creation of traditional dances, can make it difficult to establish clear authorship and originality, especially for choreographers working with classical or folk dance forms that have evolved over generations. On a global scale, the lack of standardization becomes even more pronounced as international variations in copyright law further confuse the issue. While the **Berne Convention** seeks to harmonize protection for choreography, the definition of what constitutes a "choreographic work" and the threshold for originality can vary significantly across countries. For example, while in some jurisdictions choreography may be protected automatically upon creation, others may impose stricter requirements for registration or fixation, creating inconsistent levels of protection for the same work. As dance choreography is often performed and distributed across borders in the digital age, this inconsistency in copyright standards makes it challenging for Indian choreographers to protect their works internationally, or to claim ownership if their dances are reproduced without permission. The lack of a universal registration system for choreography also exacerbates the problem, as choreographers in India may struggle to assert ownership or prove infringement when their works are performed or shared globally. These complications, arising from both local and international legal variations, hinder the effective protection of choreography in India and leave creators vulnerable to unauthorized use of their work.

Issues of Fixation and Recording

One of the key issues in protecting dance choreography under copyright law is the fixation requirement, which mandates that a work must be fixed in a tangible medium to qualify for protection. In the context of dance, this creates several practical and legal challenges, particularly regarding the methods of documentation deemed acceptable for meeting the fixation standard. Under many legal systems, including in India, dance choreography must be "fixed" in a tangible form, such as a video recording, a written notation, or a photographic series, to be eligible for copyright protection. However, the notion of fixation is problematic for the inherently ephemeral nature of dance, where performances are often live and not intended to be captured in any permanent form. The fluid and dynamic quality of choreography complicates its representation, as certain aspects of movement, timing, and expression can be lost or diminished when transcribed into notation or video. For example, while written notation, such as Labanotation or Benesh Movement Notation, can capture the skeletal structure of a dance, it fails to convey the full richness of a performance—such as the nuances of timing, emotional expressiveness, and interaction between dancers—which are central to the choreography's artistic value. On the other hand, video recordings can preserve a performance, but they might not capture the choreography itself in a form that can be easily analyzed or reproduced in future performances without access to the original performer's interpretation. This raises the issue of whether a video is an adequate medium for fixation if the choreography evolves over time with different dancers or performances. Additionally, the process of fixing choreography, particularly through formal notation or video, can be time-consuming, costly, and technically demanding, which may deter many choreographers from securing copyright protection for their work. This is particularly problematic in regions with less infrastructure for such documentation, or where choreographers are working within traditions that emphasize oral transmission or improvisational performance over formal documentation. Furthermore, there is the question of how much of a choreography must be "fixed" to meet the legal requirements: can an excerpt, a fragment, or a full-length piece qualify for protection? The ambiguity surrounding these issues, combined with the evolving nature of dance as an art form that thrives on improvisation and live interaction, creates significant hurdles for choreographers seeking to protect their work under copyright law. Consequently, the fixation requirement can often exclude choreographers from receiving full legal protection unless they can afford or have the means to document their works in specific ways, undermining the very essence of dance as a living, performative art.

Infringement and Enforcement

Enforcing copyright protection for dance choreography has become increasingly difficult in the digital age, largely due to the rise of digital media and the ease with which dance routines can be copied, altered, and distributed. The primary challenge is that choreography, unlike written or musical works, is often experienced in live performance or through media that can be easily reproduced—such as social media platforms, video-sharing websites, and streaming services—where the boundaries of copyright infringement are often blurred. Once a dance is uploaded online, it can be instantly shared, altered, and re-performed by others without the original choreographer's consent or attribution. The viral nature of digital content, combined with the global accessibility of platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, means that dance routines can spread rapidly, often beyond the choreographer's control, making it difficult to trace and prove infringement. Unlike static works like books or paintings, which can be directly compared to the original in a legal dispute, choreography is fluid and can be altered in subtle ways, making it harder to define what constitutes infringement. For example, a choreographer's movements may be borrowed,

but slightly modified or performed by someone else, creating a grey area in determining whether the copy is sufficiently similar to the original to qualify as infringement. Even if the choreography is reproduced in full, enforcing the rights becomes complicated because proving infringement requires not only demonstrating that the work was copied, but also that the copying was unlawful, which is often difficult to establish in court, especially if the choreography is not clearly fixed in a medium or registered. Additionally, in many jurisdictions, including India, the legal frameworks for enforcement are often inadequate or slow to respond, and the financial and procedural burdens of pursuing infringement cases are significant, especially for independent choreographers who may lack the resources to take legal action. Furthermore, the concept of "fair use" or "fair dealing" in some countries can be invoked by those accused of infringement, providing a defence for uses that are deemed transformative or educational, further complicating enforcement. The digital nature of dance's transmission makes the task of policing unauthorized reproductions even more daunting, as choreographers often have limited means to control or monitor the widespread use of their work online. This combination of ease of reproduction, legal ambiguities, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms means that many choreographers struggle to protect their intellectual property and are often unable to secure compensation or acknowledgment for their work when it is copied or distributed without permission.

Cultural and Artistic Barriers

One of the most profound challenges in protecting dance choreography through copyright law is reconciling the artistic, fluid nature of dance with the rigid and formal structures of copyright, which were originally designed to protect more static and fixed forms of creative work, like literature or visual arts. Dance, by its very essence, is an ephemeral, performative art form that thrives on improvisation, adaptation, and collaboration, often evolving with each performance, dancer, or cultural context. This makes it difficult to apply traditional copyright principles, which typically require a clear and fixed expression of the work to qualify for protection. While copyright law demands that a work be "fixed" in a tangible medium, such as a video or written notation, these mediums can never fully capture the lived experience of a dance performance, which is rich in emotional nuance, timing, and interaction between performers. For example, a choreographer might create a piece that exists in the moment—expressed uniquely in live performance—yet when captured in a video or written down in notation, it may feel incomplete or unable to convey the full depth of the original performance. Moreover, the collaborative nature of dance, where choreographers often work closely with dancers to shape and evolve the movements, complicates the question of authorship and ownership. Who owns the rights to a piece of choreography when it is co-created through ongoing dialogue and improvisation with the performers? The fluidity of the process, where the work continually adapts and changes, often makes it difficult to pinpoint a specific, unchanging "original" that can be protected under copyright law. Cultural norms around dance also present barriers: in many traditions, particularly in non-Western or Indigenous cultures, dance is seen as a communal or collective expression, passed down through generations in ways that resist individual ownership. These traditions often prioritize the sharing and transformation of artistic works, which can be at odds with the individualistic nature of copyright law that centers on protecting a creator's exclusive rights. This clash between the communal, collaborative, and ever²-evolving nature of dance and the more

5. Intellectual Property Rights and Dance Moves: An Indian Perspective | IIPRD

6. [Legal Article] Copyright Law as a tool for Protection of Traditional Dance Forms | IPR by Shanvi Tyagi

7. Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works

8. WIPO - World Intellectual Property Organization

rigid, individualistic, and fixed requirements of copyright law means that many choreographers find themselves unable to fully protect their work, while others may be reluctant to seek protection for fear of stifling the collaborative or open nature of the art form. Ultimately, copyright law's focus on fixed, original works fails to capture the essence of dance as a living, mutable art form, leaving it vulnerable to exploitation and unauthorized use.

Unprotected Forms of Dance

In India, certain types of dance choreography face significant challenges in securing copyright protection because they may not meet the legal thresholds for originality or fixation, two core criteria for copyright eligibility. Improvisational dance, a genre where the choreography is spontaneously created during performance rather than being pre-planned or notated, is one of the most significant examples of an unprotected form of dance. Since copyright law in India (and many other countries) typically requires a dance to be "fixed" in a tangible medium, an improvised performance, which is by definition ephemeral and not documented, cannot easily qualify for protection. Even if the dancer performs an intricate and unique series of movements, if those movements are not captured through video or written notation, they remain outside the scope of copyright protection. Similarly, many forms of traditional or folk dance in India, such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, or regional folk dances, often have roots in communal or generational knowledge rather than being the work of an individual creator. In such cases, the choreography may not meet the standard of originality required by copyright law, as these dances are considered part of a cultural heritage shared by a community rather than the creation of a specific choreographer. Folk dances, which often evolve over time and are passed down orally or through performance, can thus be seen as part of a public domain, making it difficult for any single individual to claim exclusive rights over them. Furthermore, traditional dance forms may not be easily fixed in a medium that satisfies copyright requirements—since many of these dances are learned through direct transmission rather than formal notation or video recordings, they may not meet the legal criteria for fixation. As a result, these forms of dance, while culturally significant and artistically rich, may lack the legal protection afforded to more modern, individually authored choreography. This creates a significant gap in the protection of dance works in India, as choreographers of improvisational or folk-based dance may not have the same recourse to copyright protection as those working with more structured, notated, or recorded choreographies. Consequently, these dances remain vulnerable to unauthorized reproduction, adaptation, or commercialization without the creator's consent or compensation, despite their artistic value and cultural importance.

3. Prospects for Improving Copyright Protection

To improve the protection of dance choreography, several legal, technological, and creative avenues could be explored.⁶ A critical starting point would be **legal reforms** aimed at expanding the definition of "fixation" and tailoring copyright law to the specific needs of the performing arts. Currently, one of the significant barriers for choreographers is the requirement that a dance be fixed in a tangible medium, which often excludes spontaneous or live performances, as well as traditional or folk dances that are not formally documented. Reforming copyright law to broaden the understanding of fixation could include allowing live performances themselves to be considered as a sufficient form of fixation or recognizing alternative methods of capturing choreography, such as motion-capture technology, even when the dance is not recorded in a traditional manner. This would acknowledge the ephemeral nature of dance and better reflect how choreography is transmitted and experienced in the modern world. Additionally, the

introduction of laws specifically tailored to the performing arts—similar to those in place for visual arts or music—could ensure that choreography is treated with the same level of protection as other forms of creative expression, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by choreographers.

In parallel with legal reforms, **technological innovations** can play a significant role in the preservation and protection of dance choreography. Technologies such as **motion capture** can offer a new way to record choreography with far greater precision than traditional video or notation, capturing the full depth and intricacy of movement in 3D space. These digital records could then be used as a fixed, searchable representation of the work, making it easier to prove authorship and defend against infringement. Similarly, **digital archives** could be developed to store choreographic works in publicly accessible yet protected platforms, enabling choreographers to register their works while maintaining control over access and distribution. Furthermore, emerging technologies such as **blockchain** could revolutionize copyright management by providing a secure, transparent, and tamper-proof system for registering choreography, tracking usage, and managing royalties. Blockchain's decentralized nature would allow choreographers to directly control and track how their works are used, ensuring fair compensation and providing a clear, verifiable record of ownership that could be used in legal disputes.

Another promising area for improving copyright protection is through **non-traditional licensing models** such as **Creative Commons**. These licenses provide choreographers with flexible tools to share their work widely while retaining control over certain uses. For instance, a choreographer could use a Creative Commons license to allow for educational use, non-commercial performances, or remixes of their choreography, while still protecting their work from commercial exploitation without their consent. This kind of alternative licensing model could address some of the friction between the need for protection and the desire to share and collaborate, allowing for a more open approach to choreography while ensuring that the creator's intellectual property rights are respected. It also helps promote a culture of sharing and reuse, which is integral to the creative process, especially in communities where collaboration and adaptation are central to artistic production.

On the international stage, **greater cooperation and harmonization** in copyright law are essential to protect dance choreography across borders. Given the global nature of dance performance and digital media, there is a pressing need for international legal frameworks that provide clearer, more consistent guidelines for how choreography is protected. While treaties like the **Berne Convention**⁷ provide a foundation for cross-border protection, the nuances in how choreography is defined and protected in different countries still create gaps and inconsistencies. Greater harmonization of copyright laws, particularly regarding what constitutes "fixation" and "originality" in dance, would help choreographers protect their works on a global scale and reduce confusion in international legal disputes. Collaborative efforts among international organizations, such as **WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization)**⁸ and national governments, could lead to a more unified approach to copyright in the performing arts, ensuring that dance works are equally protected regardless of where they are created or performed.

Finally, **promoting awareness and education** about copyright protection is crucial for empowering choreographers, performers, and the public to understand the importance of intellectual property rights and the challenges involved in protecting them. Many choreographers, especially emerging artists, may not be fully aware of how copyright law works or the potential for their work to be infringed upon, especially in the digital age. Educational initiatives could include workshops, seminars, and online resources aimed at informing choreographers about how to secure copyright protection, the process of registration, and the available legal remedies in case of infringement. Additionally, public awareness

campaigns could help shift societal attitudes toward respecting intellectual property, particularly in creative industries like dance, where the line between inspiration and infringement can sometimes seem blurred. By fostering a culture of respect for creators' rights and ensuring that dancers and choreographers are well-equipped with the knowledge and tools to protect their work, it would be possible to reduce instances of unauthorized use and promote a more sustainable and fair creative ecosystem.

In conclusion, improving the protection of dance choreography requires a multifaceted approach that blends legal reform, technological innovation, alternative licensing, international collaboration, and public education. These efforts would create a more comprehensive framework for safeguarding the intellectual property of choreographers, addressing both the practical and philosophical challenges posed by the unique nature of dance as an art form. By advancing these prospects, the legal system can better support the creative needs of choreographers while ensuring that their works are respected, preserved, and properly compensated in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The Current State of Copyright Protection for Dance Choreography

The current state of copyright protection for dance choreography is a mixed picture, with some positive legal frameworks in place but significant gaps that leave choreographers vulnerable. Under copyright law in most jurisdictions, including India, choreography is considered an "artistic work" and can be protected if it meets specific criteria: originality, fixation, and authorship. This means that choreographers who create original and unique dance movements can, in principle, claim copyright over their work, provided it is fixed in a tangible medium, such as a video recording, a written notation, or even photographs. However, in practice, the effectiveness of copyright protection for dance is limited by several factors, especially related to the ephemeral nature of dance and the complexity of documenting and proving originality. While legal protections exist, their application to dance remains inconsistent and inadequate, especially for works that do not meet the strict fixation requirements or those that stem from traditional or communal dance practices.

The current laws fail to fully accommodate the unique and dynamic qualities of dance as an art form. For instance, dance is often collaborative, evolving, and rooted in tradition, which complicates the process of determining authorship and originality. In addition, the requirement of fixation is particularly challenging for choreographers working in genres like improvisational dance, where the choreography is often created in real time during performances and may never be formally documented. Moreover, legal frameworks do not adequately address the challenges posed by the global distribution of dance works in the digital age, where unauthorized reproductions and adaptations can easily spread across borders, creating enforcement difficulties.

Addressing the Problems

The problems identified in previous sections—related to fixation, originality, authorship, and the enforcement of dance choreography copyrights—are substantial, and the current legal framework does not fully address them. **Fixation** is perhaps the most significant barrier to copyright protection. Since dance is a performative and often ephemeral art form, the strict requirement for a work to be fixed in a tangible medium leaves many dances unprotected. Improvised dance, for example, is often not recorded, and thus cannot be legally protected under the current framework. Even when a dance is recorded, the recording might not adequately capture the nuances of the performance, leading to questions about whether it fully satisfies the "fixation" requirement.

The issue of **originality** also presents challenges. Many choreographies borrow from common movement vocabulary, and determining the threshold of originality for dance is complicated. This is particularly problematic for folk or traditional dances, which often reflect communal creativity rather than individual authorship. Copyright law's emphasis on individual authorship does not always fit well with these collaborative or collective forms of dance, leaving them without legal protection. Furthermore, **enforcement** of dance choreography copyrights is difficult, particularly in the age of digital media. As dance works are shared online and often altered or adapted without the choreographer's consent, proving infringement and enforcing rights is a cumbersome and resource-intensive process. Current systems are not equipped to manage the fast-paced, global nature of digital distribution, where choreography can easily be replicated or appropriated without adequate safeguards for the creator.

Finally, the **lack of clarity around authorship** in collaborative or improvisational dance works is another gap in the current legal framework. Many choreographers work with dancers to co-create pieces, and the distinction between choreographer and performer can sometimes blur, leading to disputes over who holds the copyright. Collaborative works are common in the dance world, and without a clear legal framework to address these situations, choreographers may be left without proper protection or control over their intellectual property.

Recommendations for Improvement

To address the gaps and challenges in the current legal framework, several reforms are needed:

- 1. Revising the Fixation Requirement:** One of the most pressing reforms would be to broaden the definition of fixation. Instead of limiting copyright protection to works that are recorded in video or written notation, the law could recognize live performances or even improvisational works as sufficient forms of fixation. This would help preserve the essence of dance as a performative art form. Alternatively, technologies like **motion capture** or **3D mapping** could be incorporated into the definition of fixation, providing a more accurate and comprehensive way to document and preserve choreography.
- 2. Clarifying Originality:** The requirement for originality should be re-examined, particularly for dance forms that draw on common movement vocabulary or traditional choreography. For folk or traditional dances, a more flexible approach to originality might be adopted, where the emphasis is on the unique combination of movements or the particular expression of a piece, rather than expecting completely novel movements. Additionally, allowing for a more inclusive understanding of **collaborative works** could help ensure that all contributors to a dance piece are recognized and protected under copyright law.
- 3. Improving Enforcement Mechanisms:** As the digital distribution of dance becomes more prevalent, copyright enforcement mechanisms must be updated. Implementing systems that track the online use of dance content, such as **digital fingerprinting** or **blockchain** technology, could make it easier for choreographers to monitor and protect their work. Blockchain, for example, could allow choreographers to register their works with an immutable digital record, providing proof of ownership and offering a transparent system for tracking use and ensuring proper compensation.
- 4. Creating Specific Laws for Performing Arts:** The development of laws tailored specifically to the needs of performing arts—especially dance—could help address the unique challenges of this art form. These laws could take into account the communal, fluid, and evolving nature of dance, creating a more adaptable legal framework for choreography that doesn't rely solely on traditional notions of authorship and fixation.

5. **Alternative Licensing Models:** Choreographers should be encouraged to explore non-traditional licensing models, such as **Creative Commons**, which allow them to share their work while retaining control over how it is used. These models could facilitate more widespread sharing and remixing of dance while protecting the creators' intellectual property and ensuring that they are compensated for commercial uses.
6. **International Harmonization:** Finally, greater international cooperation is essential to protect dance choreography across borders. As dance is a global art form and digital media transcends national boundaries, creating international frameworks for the protection of choreography—perhaps through agreements similar to the **Berne Convention**—could help provide consistent protections for choreographers worldwide.

Impact on the Dance Community

Improving copyright protection for dance choreography would have significant positive effects on the dance community, both artistically and financially. **Artistically**, stronger protection would empower choreographers to take more creative risks, knowing that their work is legally safeguarded. The assurance of copyright protection would encourage greater innovation in choreography, as creators would feel more confident in sharing their work without fear of unauthorized copying or exploitation. Additionally, a more inclusive and flexible copyright system would allow diverse forms of dance—whether traditional, collaborative, or improvisational—to be more easily recognized and protected, preserving the integrity and richness of dance across cultures and genres.

Financially, improving copyright protection would allow choreographers to better capitalize on their creations. Copyright ensures that creators are compensated for the use of their work, and with stronger enforcement mechanisms, choreographers could see a fairer share of revenue from performances, digital content, and adaptations. This would help sustain the livelihoods of independent choreographers and smaller dance companies, who often face financial challenges due to the lack of recognition and protection of their intellectual property. Moreover, by creating clearer paths for registering and enforcing choreography copyrights, choreographers could more easily protect their work from being used without permission, thus allowing them to claim their rightful share of the economic benefits generated by their creations.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the challenges and opportunities surrounding copyright protection for dance choreography in India, revealing several key issues. Firstly, while dance choreography is recognized under Indian copyright law, the requirement for fixation—meaning the choreography must be recorded in some form—remains a significant hurdle. This requirement often limits the protection of live, improvised, or performance-based works, particularly in traditional and folk dance forms. Furthermore, the concept of "originality" in choreography, which is central to copyright eligibility, is often vague and subjective, creating ambiguity and inconsistent legal outcomes. The paper also highlighted the emerging challenges posed by digital platforms, where unauthorized copies and remixes of choreographic works are rampant, further complicating the enforcement of copyright.

Implications: The findings have important implications for the dance community, copyright law, and intellectual property rights. For choreographers and dancers, the current legal framework may fail to adequately safeguard their creative works, especially in an era of digital reproduction and social media sharing. This raises concerns about fair compensation, recognition, and the preservation of cultural

heritage. The paper suggests that copyright law must evolve to address the specificities of dance as an art form, recognizing its fluidity and collaborative nature. For policymakers and legal practitioners, these findings underscore the need for a more flexible and inclusive approach to copyright protection, one that better aligns with the unique characteristics of dance.

Future Research Directions: Future research could explore several important areas to enhance the protection of dance choreography in India. One key direction is the role of new technologies, such as blockchain and AI, in providing alternative methods for tracking and protecting choreographic works. Additionally, further studies could examine the impact of legal reforms, particularly the potential for legislative changes that might ease the fixation requirement or expand the scope of protection for live performances. Comparative studies between different legal systems—such as examining how countries like the United States, the UK, and European nations handle choreography copyright—could offer valuable insights for improving India's legal framework. Finally, research into the cultural and social dimensions of choreography, particularly in the context of traditional and folk dance, could help tailor copyright policies that better reflect India's rich and diverse dance heritage.

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