



ADHRITA

2025 ISSUE

NR̥TYĀNUBHŪTI

1ST EDITION

THE ANNUAL MAGAZINE OF
ADHRITA - THE INDIAN DANCE SOCIETY
HINDU COLLEGE



About Nrtyānubhūti

Nrtyānubhūti-a name that resonates with the very essence of dance. Derived from Nrtyā (dance) and Anubhūti (experience), it embodies the profound and transformative power of movement. Dance is more than just steps and rhythm; it is an immersive journey that transcends words, evoking emotions, telling stories, and creating a deep aesthetic connection between the performer and the audience. With Nrtyānubhūti, we bring forth a magazine that seeks to capture this experience-where movement meets expression, and art finds its true voice.

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Nrtyānubhūti is the annual magazine of Adhrita, the Indian Dance Society of Hindu College. It serves as a vibrant platform for individuals with a passion for creative and expressive arts, encouraging them to explore and unleash their artistic potential. At Adhrita, we believe that dance and art are not merely forms of expression but profound means of bringing balance and harmony to life amidst its chaos.

As we proudly present the inaugural issue of Nrtyānubhūti, we mark the beginning of a journey that celebrates the richness of dance, music, theatre, and visual arts. This first edition is a step towards reating a tradition of artistic dialogue, where movement meets words, and creativity finds its voice.

About ADHRITA

Adhrita – The Indian Dance Society of Hindu College – is a vibrant collective of dancers committed to preserving and promoting the rich intangible heritage of India. Since its inception in 2014, Adhrita has celebrated the expressive power of Indian classical and folk dance forms, with a diverse repertoire that includes Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, Mohiniyattam, regional folk styles, and Bollywood. Adhrita was also awarded 2nd rank in the category of Top folk dance societies of University of Delhi circuit by DU beat in 2019.

Adhrita is more than just a performing group — it is a home for dancers. It is a space where individuals come together to share their passion, learn from one another, and grow both artistically and personally. In every rehearsal and shared moment, Adhrita fosters a strong sense of belonging and community, bound by rhythm, movement, and mutual respect.

Over the years, Adhrita has proudly represented Hindu College at prestigious platforms — from the Delhi University circuit to outstation competitions and international cultural exchanges like those hosted by the New Zealand Embassy — consistently bringing laurels to the institution. Today, it stands as one of Delhi's most respected college dance societies, known for its dedication to cultural pride, artistic excellence, and the nurturing of young talent in Indian dance.



Note from The Principal



It gives me great pleasure to congratulate Adhrita on the release of their inaugural magazine, Nṛtyānubhūti. This publication is a proud moment for both the society and the institution, and marks a new chapter in our ongoing commitment to nurturing artistic expression and cultural engagement.

Hindu College has always taken pride in fostering a vibrant and inclusive cultural environment—one that values tradition while embracing innovation. Adhrita stands as a reflection of this ethos. With a long-standing history of excellence in performance and participation at prestigious platforms, the society has been a vital part of our cultural identity. Its work not only adds colour to our campus but also offers students an avenue to connect with India's rich artistic heritage in a deeply personal and transformative way.

Nṛtyānubhūti is a meaningful extension of this journey. More than a magazine, it is a space where movement meets meaning—where the language of dance is explored, reflected upon, and reimaged. It offers readers a glimpse into the spirit of Adhrita: rooted in discipline, creative in vision, and committed to preserving and promoting the diverse traditions of Indian dance.

I am delighted to see our students take such initiative. Endeavours like this equip them with the skills of collaboration, leadership, and cultural sensitivity—qualities that Hindu College has always strived to cultivate through academic and extracurricular platforms alike.

I commend the editorial team and the contributors for bringing this idea to life with care and conviction. May Nṛtyānubhūti continue to grow, inspire, and celebrate the timeless power of dance.

Warm regards,
Anju Srivastava,
Principal,
Hindu College

Note from The Teacher- In-Charge



It gives me immense joy to witness the birth of Nrtyānubhūti, a magazine that beautifully captures the rhythm, grace, and spirit of dance. This compilation is more than a collection of articles and reflections—it is a heartfelt offering from a community that breathes art and lives tradition.

Dance is not merely movement; it is a language of the soul, a timeless expression of culture, emotion, and identity. Through Nrtyānubhūti, our dancers and writers have sought to honour this sacred art, bringing together classical wisdom, personal narratives, and creative expressions that resonate deeply with all rasikas.

I commend the entire team behind this initiative for their dedication, creativity, and sensitivity. May this magazine continue to inspire, inform, and ignite passion for dance in many hearts.

Regards,
Vaishali Sharma
Teacher-in-Charge
Adhrita – The Indian Dance Society
Hindu College

Note from The Editor-In-Chief



It gives me immense joy and pride to present to you the very first edition of Adhrita's annual magazine, Nṛtyānubhūti.

A dream nurtured with love, dedication, and passion has finally taken shape on these pages. Nṛtyānubhūti, a journey into the experience and essence of dance, stands as a testament to the spirit of Adhrita, the Indian Dance Society of Hindu College. From concept to creation, this magazine is the outcome of collective effort, imagination, and perseverance. Every piece within these pages echoes the voices of artists and thinkers who dared to dream, dared to feel, and dared to share their art with the world.

No magazine is complete without the tireless dedication of its editorial board, contributors, and design team. A special thanks to Jayaprabha Ma'am and Jyothi Ma'am for their insightful interviews. To each person who poured their time, creativity, and heart into this project, there is only one word I wish to say: thank you.

It is your commitment that has transformed an idea into something as beautiful and enduring as this magazine. As the saying goes, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

This magazine is a reflection of that collective spirit, a reminder that art thrives through appreciation, collaboration, and dedication. I am proud to present one of the few art magazines of Delhi University.

We hope Nṛtyānubhūti inspires you and invites you to reflect, much like the dance it celebrates. May you enjoy reading it as much as we loved creating it.

In the spirit of Nṛtyānubhūti,
Signing off,
Devabala Padmakumar

Note from The President



Dear Reader,

As I sit down to write this note, a wave of emotions washes over me. This is more than just a message, it's a reflection of a journey that has been deeply personal, incredibly transformative, and endlessly fulfilling. It is with immense joy and pride that I welcome you to the very first edition of Nṛtyānubhūti, Adhrita's annual magazine.

Nṛtyānubhūti-the experience of dance, perfectly captures what Adhrita means to us. It's not just about steps or rhythm. It's about the silences we share during warm-ups, the chaos before every performance, the laughter in dressing rooms, the tears after long rehearsals, and the unspoken bond that ties us all together. This magazine is a humble attempt to hold on to those fleeting moments and preserve them as memories.

This past year has been a whirlwind of movement, music, and meaning. Leading this team has been the most beautiful challenge I've ever taken on. It taught me the value of patience, the power of trust, and the strength that comes from collective passion. We've stumbled, we've soared, and through it all, we've danced our hearts out.

Adhrita is not just a dance society. It's a space where we celebrate our roots while exploring new expressions. It's where individuality meets community, and where every member brings something irreplaceable to the table. Watching everyone grow, not just as dancers, but as people, has been the biggest reward of this presidency.

To my team: thank you for believing in the vision, in each other, and in me. This magazine belongs to all of us. It holds within it the soul of our journey.

As you flip through these pages, I hope you feel what we felt on stage, in rehearsals, in moments of exhaustion, and in moments of pure joy. Because that's what Nṛtyānubhūti truly is: the lived, breathed, and danced experience of Adhrita.

With all my heart,
Khushi Singh

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SOHAM



SHREYA

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A Child of God

By Sanjana S Menon

The stage is lit as she steps onto it,
Her smile blooming slowly, her smile
inviting us into her world
as she sways to the thaala, to the rhythm
to the beats, her heart matches.
Jasmine flowers crown her hair
Her saree wrapped around her body
as she danced around the melody.
With every step, she seeks the earth beneath
Which awakes to her ringing jhumkas
And singing bangles.

She moves, her hands sculpting the air
Unfolding mudras speaking tales
Her fingers stroking a river, a moon, a flower
Her eyebrows arch as her eyes roll,
a charming act on its own
Oh, her eyes! –
round, captivating pools of light
Holding emotions as pure as her soul
Reflecting the beauty within.

She looks into the crowd,
her face lightening with a tiny nosering.
Her face – the canvas she sprays
Pleading joy as she smiles
Clutching hearts as she frowns
With every flicker of an eye, curl of the lip
She becomes the story she paints
No words yet she speaks, her expressions deep,
She converses without a sound,
A sacred language, of body and soul!

Every beat, every bend, every breath
She weaves her passion, her craft
Making every beat, every bend, every breath
Her divinity!

She's not just an art lover's muse—
She is the art the gods would choose.
She's a dancer – a flame, a breath, a child of God.

Being a dancer myself is an intimate journey— you live through your practices and take each step and each expression with care and devotion. You devote yourself to the beat, to the movement, and to the undemanding delight of becoming one with the music. However, there's something powerful about watching another dancer. You see their grace, their stillness, their passion—and you don't compare, you admire. Because you know what it takes. The long hours, the silent discipline, the love behind each gesture. As dancers, we carry not just our personal stories, but a shared reverence for each other's craft. Dance, after all, isn't just about self-expression—it's a collective language of beauty. This is a poem by a dancer admiring another dancer whose enchanting performance is a sight to behold and magic to experience.

SANJANA S MENON

Sanjana S. Menon is a passionate student of Economics with Political Science at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. She actively explores the intersections of economics, politics, and society through academic research and debates. She actively explores social issues both within and beyond the classroom, seeking to understand how economics and politics shape one another—and how they, in turn, shape the world. A trained dancer and an art enthusiast, Sanjana balances her academic pursuits with her love for the performing arts. She believes in the power of diverse experiences to enrich both thought and expression.

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ANUBHUTI

By Shreya



Wanna run away with us
To a world of
Chorus and synchronization?
Sure you got a place to
Let yourself out
Either go with the flow
Or try to be in flow
It's the choice

You'll never not be left alone
Until you try it on your own
Once you get the taste of it
It is yours
It is ours
It is the nature's pastry
As sweet as young coconut's
water

Let us not be held
That is what our name suggests
What you desire is here
Learning, laughter, memories
Every emotion could be thought of

So let your body go
Be one with sound
No worries are allowed
It is your happy place
It is safe and sound
As it should be

You'll reminisce
Every moment
Every experience
And as said,
Once you come,
There's no going back
That is the
Nrityanubhuti
In Adhrita





WHERE TRADITION DANCES THROUGH TIME

By Shimran Zaman

India's most revered classical dance form, Kuchipudi, carries a rich historical and cultural heritage rooted in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, Kuchipudi embodies devotion, storytelling and a commitment to tradition. From its roots from village performances to international recognition, the evolution of Kuchipudi showcases a dance form deeply intertwined with spirituality, artistic ingenuity and societal transformations. This article seeks to venture the journey of Kuchipudi and its relationship with its historical underpinnings, examining the interplay between traditional and contemporary expression.

TRACING THE ORIGINS OF KUCHIPUDI

Historical references reveal that multiple villages in Andhra Pradesh bear the name "Kuchipudi". But the Kuchipudi in Krishna district has long been recognised as the home of the Kuchipudi Bhagavathulu. The earliest documented mention of Bhagavathulu provided in Mackenzie's historical records has led to various scholarly debates regarding the origins of this dance tradition. Some researchers

argue that Mackenzie's mentions point to a different Kuchipudi, possibly near Vinukonda-Bellamkonda in the Guntur district. However, the poet-critic, Arudra, aligns Mackenzie's references with a Kuchipudi near Tenali in Guntur. He states "Kaifiat", (a village record of historical times) mentioning Raja Venkatadri Naidu and categorizing this Kuchipudi as a "Kasuba" village, known for its famous temple, Ramalingeswara Swamy temple established by Parasurama Swamy, and the Gopalaswamy temple, established in 1318 AD, with Pasumarthi Venkaiah serving as a priest and the Vedantam family acting as hereditary priests.

Arudra's theory further postulates that a few of these families from the Guntur-based Kuchipudi eventually migrated to the Krishna district, where they developed the Kuchipudi that we know today. In spite of various accounts and theories, it is well established that the Kuchipudi of the Krishna district has been home to the Bhagavathulu for more than five centuries.



ROYAL PATRONAGE AND HISTORICAL RECORDS

One of the most significant milestones in Kuchipudi's past belongs to the era of Golkonda Sultan Abul Hasan Tanasha (1672-1685). It was in 1678, while witnessing a Bhagavathulu performance, the Sultan was so enchanted that he donated the village as an "inaam", a land grant through "sanad", a royal proclamation. Though the original sanad is lost, allusions to this royal order are to be found in Machilipatnam District dated April 17, 1795.

By the late 18th century, the Kuchipudi villagers were having difficulties over their land rights. They approached district revenue authorities, referring to the historic sanad as evidence of ownership. A letter of April 15, 1795, recorded their claim that the then collector of Krishna District, D. W. Ragan, asked them to produce the sanad. Although it is not certain whether their petition was formally settled, but this document of 1795 confirms the fact of a royal grant made by Tanasha, indicating the Sultan's significant role in upholding Kuchipudi's heritage.

ANECDOTAL TALES IN THE HISTORY OF KUCHIPUDI

Anecdotal history attributes Siddhendra Yogi to be the visionary who institutionalized Kuchipudi as a dance-drama tradition. His contact with the village elders resulted in an

unwritten but sacred pact: each male child born into the Kuchipudi Brahmin families has to learn the art, wear the ankle bells, and at least once dance in the role of Satyabhama in the dance-drama Bhama Kalapam before the village deities, Ramalingeswara Swamy and Bala Tripura Sundari. This tradition transformed Kuchipudi from just a mere performance art form to familial and religious duty. The Bhagavathulu devoted themselves to maintaining this legacy, combining dance, music, and storytelling into a sacred art form.

KUCHIPUDI AS A FAMILY TRADITION

In contrast to most hereditary occupations in rural India, where skills were often focused on craftsmanship, the Brahmin families of Kuchipudi broke convention. Traditional Vaidikis, the vedic scholars and priests, combined their priestly function with an artistic career. While dedicated to temple worship and Vedic study, they also became guardians of Kuchipudi dance. Here, they learned, taught, and performed the art of dance, a legacy ordained by Siddhendra Yogi.

For centuries, this fusion of religion and artmanship has kept the community going. Performing arts are no longer merely aesthetic presentations but also important livelihood sources. This preservation of legacy has given rise to various challenges. Kuchipudi artists are

dealing with the fine balance between retaining traditions and the restrictions caused by their ability, family constraints, and availability of training facilities.

To counter these setbacks, certain artists even turned towards creative paths of presenting their craft, broadening their performance plans and opening new geographical territories. The diverse list of Kuchipudi elements now incorporates an assortment of offerings—sabdams, tarangams, ashtapadis, padams, javalis, and a comprehensive range of sringara literature - all in intricate harmony with the focal point of their magnum opus, Bhamam Kalapam.

But over time, this art journey has taken a different turn. Some artistes and critics argue the inadequate incorporation of written pieces that glorified human figures, especially Lords or Zamindars. written works that glorified human beings, specifically local lords or minor zamindars. But in their work of art, these painters made sure that such praise songs were seamlessly altered to fit into the general dynamics of their key themes. The history of Kuchipudi dance as a family tradition has thus not only served to retain time-honored traditions but also driven artists to venture into newer horizons, creating a harmonious fusion of tradition and innovation.

CHALLENGES FACED AND ARTISTIC INNOVATIONS IN KUCHIPUDI

The introduction of the *pagati vesham* in Kuchipudi emerged as a temporary solution, primarily catering to actors who found it challenging to establish themselves in the conventional entertainment arenas. However, the landscape of Kuchipudi underwent a transformative phase with the earnest endeavors of a new generation inspired by pan-Indian solo performance experiments.

Under the guidance of the adept teacher Laxminarayana Sastry, a group of talented young artists, including Ayyanki Tandava Krishna, Vedantam Raghavaiah, Vempati Peda Satyam, Pasumarthi Krishna Murthy, and Vedantam Jagannadha Sarma, ventured into a novel format. They crafted a three-hour program comprising diverse, disconnected items drawn from both traditional repertoires and contemporary choreographies, gaining widespread popularity. Laxminarayana Sastry's impactful teaching methods resonated beyond regional boundaries, with a successful tour across Andhra, Madras, Hyderabad, and Pune. Uday Shankar himself recognized Sastry's *hastabhinaya* (hand gestures) as fascinating, inviting the Guru to Almora to impart his knowledge. However, this promising experiment faced a setback as many practitioners transitioned into the burgeoning

cinema industry, unable to sustain the dual demands of the two professions.

Yet, the spirit of experimentation endured, taking on a new form as a group of talented artists migrated to district towns to establish schools teaching Kuchipudi. Pioneers like Vedantam Parvateesam, Vedantam Prahlada Sarma, Bhagavathula Ramakotaiah, and others, drawing from years of experience in mainstream Kuchipudi, began composing short pieces for their students. These pieces, alongside traditional items like Dasavatara Sabdam and Tharangam, became part of the evolving Kuchipudi landscape.

The culmination of these experiments reached a milestone when Vempati Chinna Satyam established his school in Madras (now Chennai). Facing new challenges, particularly with a predominantly non-Telugu, mainly female student population, Satyam embarked on innovative experiments. Drawing inspiration from Bharatanatyam's experiments and infusing them with a native Kuchipudi experience, Chinna Satyam pioneered richly lyrical dance dramas, marking a distinct evolution in the Kuchipudi tradition.

ART OF FEMALE IMPERSONATION IN KUCHIPUDI AND PERFORMING ARTS

In the field of Kuchipudi and various performing art groups nationwide,

a notable feature lies in their adeptness at compulsive female impersonation. This phenomenon extends beyond regional boundaries and is a recognized aspect in nearly twenty performing art traditions across India. Traditionally, male members of these communities take on female roles, showcasing a national, if not international, trend in performing arts. This tradition of female impersonation is observed in diverse art forms, including Yakshaganam in Karnataka, Bhagavatha Mela and Terukoothu in Tamil Nadu, Kathakali in Kerala, Bhavai in Gujarat, Khyal in Rajasthan, Swang in Haryana, Ram Leela and Ras Leela in Uttar Pradesh, Jatra in Bengal, Ankiya Nat in Assam, Chau in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, as well as Kuchipudi, Toorpu Bhagavatham, and Veedhi Bhagavatham in Andhra Pradesh, among others. These forms, deeply rooted in local vibrancy and cultural acceptance, are enacted by village troupes.

The adoption of female impersonation in these performing arts traditions can be traced back to historical and cultural factors. In the context of Natya, often compared to a yagna, the gradual exclusion of women as deemed “unclean” led to the evolution of exclusive male dance-drama traditions like Kuchipudi and Bhagavata Mela. Prof. Subrahmaniam highlights several reasons for this adoption of female impersonation:

The theoretical dichotomy between priests and law-givers as a

compromise was not practically viable, especially in South India. The proposition of claiming uncleanness as a point of rejection and necessity emerged as a pragmatic choice. Women were often responsible for caring for children, the elderly, and household rituals, making their inclusion in extended tours impractical. Moreover, women in Kuchipudi families historically did not receive training in the art of dance.

Female impersonation, particularly in the iconic Bhama Kalapam, became integral to the fame and identity of Kuchipudi. This text, centered around a female character, dictated the performance history of Kuchipudi artists. Their predicament lies not only in portraying female roles but, significantly, in embodying the crucial role of Bhama. The artistic excellence in this portrayal hinges on capturing the essence of “viraha” aspects of sringara, adding a layer of emotional depth to the performance. For generations of Kuchipudi actors, mastering the role of Bhama has been a necessity, not only for professional standing but also for securing a fulfilling livelihood in the field.


RESEARCH AND EVOLUTION OF KUCHIPUDI: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW

In the 20th century, the paradigm of dance education has undergone a substantial transformation, transitioning from traditional Gurukula Paddhati to the

institutionalization of dance with systematic syllabus-oriented teaching. Kuchipudi, as a classical dance form, witnessed this evolution with the establishment of significant institutions such as "Kuchipudi Kalaakshetram" in 1957, laying the foundation for "Siddhendra Kalaakshetram." The 1950s and 60s marked a pivotal period with the establishment of Government Music and Dance Colleges across Andhra Pradesh, introducing certificate and diploma courses in Kuchipudi.

By the late 1980s, Kuchipudi found its place in university curricula, with post-graduate courses initiated at the University of Hyderabad and Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University. This academic progression was followed by the introduction of research programs, including PhD programs. Despite the limited availability of post-graduate courses in public universities, private universities in India and abroad have taken strides in introducing Kuchipudi at the post-graduate level. Noteworthy research contributions have emanated from universities like the University of Hyderabad and Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University.

Chinta Ramanadham's 1979 thesis from Andhra University stands out as the pioneer doctoral work on Kuchipudi. Subsequent research from 1995 to 2019 produced six works at the University of Hyderabad and ten PhDs at Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University, encompassing diverse facets of Kuchipudi.



Research themes are broadly categorized into history and evolutionary processes, changes and trends, and comparative studies and interrelationships. "Traditions and Innovations in Kuchipudi" by Anuradha serves as a seminal work, offering a meticulous analysis of Kuchipudi's evolution from traditional Yakshaganas to modern dance dramas. Noteworthy research areas include Kuchipudi Yakshaganas, particularly focusing on the theme of "Pahlada," and in - depth studies on "Satyabhama" in 'Bhamakalapam.' Some research explores the interplay between Kuchipudi and allied fields, unraveling influences on Telugu cinema and analyzing changes in technique and repertoire.

In the globalized era, research from the diaspora has surfaced, shedding light on contrasts in performance practices, gender construction, and the impact of language-based reorganization on Kuchipudi's recognition as a classical dance form. While the evolving landscape of Kuchipudi research reflects its rich history, these studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the dance form's cultural, sociological, and artistic dimensions, ensuring its continued relevance and resonance in contemporary times.

CONCLUSION

In the journey of Kuchipudi, where history and tradition entwine with contemporary expressions, a captivating narrative unfolds. Rooted

in the cultural richness of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, this classical dance form resonates as a fusion of the earthly and the divine. From the resounding applause in royal courts to the institutionalization of dance education, Kuchipudi has gracefully adapted, mirroring the resilience of a cultural legacy. This article explores the challenges met by Kuchipudi artists, illustrating how they skillfully navigated the delicate balance between upholding tradition and embracing innovation. The inclusion of female impersonation, notably in Bhamakalapam, adds a unique layer to Kuchipudi's identity, echoing historical and cultural nuances. The evolving research landscape, with academic institutions embracing the dance form, illuminates the depth of its cultural, sociological, and artistic dimensions. As Kuchipudi gains global resonance, its journey reflects not just the transformation of a dance form but the spirit of a cultural heritage. The fusion of tradition and experimentation, the unwavering commitment of families to safeguard their legacy, and the adaptability of artists in the face of challenges collectively contribute to Kuchipudi's timeless allure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shimran Zaman, a Delhi based performing artiste has been dancing Odissi for the past 20 years under the able guidance of her Gurus, Late Guru Sh. Pravash Kumar Mohanty and Guru Dr. Pitambar Biswal. She has been a recipient of National Scholarship Scheme under Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India and is awarded as a Graded Artiste of Doordarshan. She has extensively performed in major festivals of India and as well as in countries like Malaysia, Colombia, Ecuador and Russia. Shimran completed her graduation in Law from Jamia Millia Islamia University and is now pursuing her Master's in Performing Arts from World University of Design. She has completed her Alankar from Akhil Bhartiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Odissi Dance and as well as Sangeet Bhaskar in Odissi Dance from Pracheen Kala Kendra, Chandigarh. Shimran has established her own institute, Lasyaayan, New Delhi where she is imparting training to the younger generation, teaching Odissi. She has been a recipient of innumerable prestigious awards, with the latest addition of Sanjukta Panigrahi Excellence Award for attaining first position in the National Odissi Dance Competition organized by Srjan and Sri Sri University. She has had the opportunity to judge various competitions in both school and college level as well. She is also currently getting trained in Kuchipudi Dance under the tutelage of Guru Smt. Sadhana Raghavendra.

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THE ART AT THE SLAUGHTER HOUSE

By Souris S

From a very young age, art and artists have been something I have looked up to with immense respect. "A person may die, and at most, two or three generations will remember them. A person should either be one who has done great deeds or an artist to break this curse. That person truly renders themselves immortal." – This is something I have heard since childhood.

Interstellar, directed by Christopher Nolan, changed a lot for me. This film made me realize why some movies deserve the title of cinema above others. It made me fall in love with this unique way of storytelling, one from which, gladly, I have not yet escaped. From that moment, until now, a part of my heart has always yearned to watch beams of light fall on a white screen—to watch movies—the place that holds the congress of arts, the place that celebrates the arts in all their forms.

While movies are mainly seen as a form of entertainment, I disagree with limiting this great art form to just that. And I am pretty sure I am not alone. I still remember a sentence from my 9th or 10th standard CIVICS textbook —*Films and movies are some of the biggest modes of communication and awareness.* There hasn't been a sentence I have agreed with more than this.

A great movie only happens when all the elements of art encapsulated within it reach their full potential. From great writing to directing, acting, music, dance, cinematography, art, production design, stunt choreography, VFX and CGI, sound design, editing, coloring, and even producing and distributing, films go beyond demanding mastery of individual arts. They also require the utmost team effort and coordination.

Films have the capability to cross boundaries, reach even the most common of people, and still not be limited by whether the viewer can read or write. This is the same cinema I admired and opened my heart to when I watched *Thaniyavarthanam*, *Ottal*, *The Great Indian Kitchen*, and many more, which, if I were to list them all, would take up my word count limit. Even if a film is not about a social issue or a pressing concern, great cinema is born only if it gets its spine right, its characters. Characters, their emotions and experiences, their ideologies and worldviews, their reflexes and coping mechanisms, are what drive a story. And sometimes, we find ourselves looking at a mirror when we perceive them in moving pictures. *The Godfather Part II* and *Chenkol* are two such great movies that have portrayed a character's progression and life perfectly.

I know a reader of this article might be puzzled about its intention. So, let me spend no more time expressing my love for films and instead move on to the core of this article. For the past month, whenever I open social media, YouTube, news, or literally anywhere, all I seem to find are endless discussions about the rising violence and drug use among youth in society. And I was not so surprised to see that their so-called *culprit* for this rising danger was movies.

That led me into a deep thought.. Do films really influence violence in people? And I think I can say with confidence that it didn't take long for me to find an answer. I had to attend a talk on drug use a few weeks back, and I happened to hear an ex-smoker's account of how he started smoking after watching a *mass masala* movie where the hero frequently smoked. This led me to recollect my experiences and ponder on the question—has cinema influenced me? When I was a kid, I was prone to frequent wheezing. This meant I had limited access to bursting crackers during festivals, and even when I could, I had to wear an annoying green mask. As years passed, this got better, and I was finally able to enjoy bursting them with full freedom and this time without a mask around my face (I didn't know then that Wuhan was planning a surprise).

It must have been 2018 or 2019 when my family and I decided to watch *Ottal*, a Kerala State Award and National Award-winning movie by Jayaraj. What began as a film showcasing the lush green beauty of nature took a drastic and haunting turn in its climax, one that I can guarantee no person would remain the same after watching.

Ottal is about how a young boy comes to live with his grandfather in Kuttanad after the demise of his parents. They love each other dearly and spend time in nature despite their very poor economic conditions. The film's ending shows the grandfather contracting a deadly disease and, seeing no other way, is compelled to send his grandson away, believing it to be the best option for him. In his own words, he remarks, "*Kuttapayi has gone to learn life.*"

We soon witness the heartbreaking plight of the child as he gets trapped in the vicious and inescapable cycle of child labor in a firecracker factory. As an innocent little kid, with life not yet having corrupted his mind, he is unable to recall his grandfather's address and writes a letter with just two words to express his sadness: "**Vallyappachayi (Grandfather) – Kuttanad (Hometown).**" The film ends in complete silence, with a child caught in an inescapable trap that of *a fish in a fish trap* (hence the name *Ottal*, meaning "fish trap"). It is safe to say that I have never burst a cracker ever since, nor have I participated in such an event.

Malayalam actor Jagadeesh, who played a role in the extremely violent A-rated film *Marco*, once remarked in what I believe is a news interview - "*If one gets influenced by movies, shouldn't one also get influenced by good movies?*" 2019, in my opinion, was a year of great cinema. I was blessed enough to be able to watch most of the Oscar-nominated movies that year. *Joker*, directed by Todd Phillips, was released in the same year and received a lot of appreciation. I have no words to describe it other than great cinema. The fresh take and compelling backstory of Batman's arch-nemesis quickly won fans' love and earned a billion dollars at the box office. While the majority of the audience liked the movie, it's safe to say that their reasons were drastically different. A huge load of cash means only one thing to movie studios, a potential for more cash. And thus, a second part to *Joker* was inevitable, and 2024 saw the release of *Folie à Deux*, the much-awaited sequel. A quick glance at its Rotten Tomatoes score is enough to say that the vast majority disliked the film. It destroyed *Joker* - literally. In the movie itself, Joaquin Phoenix's character, Arthur, states in court, "There is no *Joker*, it's just me."

While I personally didn't hate the movie as much as the majority did, there is no doubt

about its flaws and its poor succession to its predecessor. While scrolling through the reviews, I stumbled upon a very interesting comment:

"Todd Phillips would set fire to his own franchise rather than let the wrong people take the wrong message from it."

Interesting, right? Let's go back to *Joker* (2019). The first part's intention or the message it carried was one with great heart and meaning. It advocated a simple idea: *"Be kind to people suffering from mental illness."* But unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, for some, the movie meant something entirely different.

For many, *Joker* became a medium through which they could project themselves, just like how the supporters of *Joker* in *Folie à Deux* used Arthur to project their own frustrations. To them, the movie justified violence as an escape from society's cruel clutches. They saw it as validation that if society treats you poorly, you are justified in inflicting pain upon those who caused you pain. This strange reasoning is also explored in *Joji*, directed by Dileesh Pothan and starring Fahadh Faasil.

None of these so-called "supporters" truly cared for the struggling, mentally ill Arthur Fleck, who desperately needed kindness, love, and help. I strongly believe the only reason Todd Phillips made *Folie à Deux* was to hold a mirror up to these people, to show them who they truly are.

And just like in the movie, where Arthur's "supporters" only used him for their selfish cause, then abandoned him when he was no longer useful, only to later butcher him, the film itself lay butchered at the box office.

"Todd Phillips would set fire to his own franchise rather than let the wrong people take the wrong message from it."

I believe there are no better examples than *Ottal* and *Joker* to show that films do inspire people. What to get inspired by, how to get inspired, and what to take to heart depends on the viewer's mind - their rational thinking (*Yukthibodham* in Malayalam), intellect (*Vivaram* in Malayalam), and conscience (*Manasakshi* in Malayalam).

In a grass field where many cows graze, there are both flowers and cow dung. The bee seeks nectar from flowers, while the fly seeks waste in cow dung. What one chooses to embrace is solely in the perceiver's mind. So, coming back to our original question,, what is the reason for the rising violence among youth, if not movies? Pointing fingers is an easy but lame game, but let me put forward my opinion.

Having children is a couple's decision. There is nothing wrong in wanting to continue their lineage and having someone to pamper and play with. But in this very busy world, how long do they actually look after their child? The parents, both equally responsible, have no time to spare. Time passes, and even before the child reaches the 6th standard,

they are given mobile phones to play with. There is nothing wrong with that either.

But before the child has developed intellect, rational thinking, or conscience, they delve deep into the world of social media. Like movies, social media is a miniature version of society, containing both good and bad. But unlike the much-blamed movies, social media has no certification, and the ones who should certify it, the parents, are too busy to care. The child, still developing intellect, rational thinking, and conscience, is exposed to an infinite stream of information, both good and bad. And sadly, in most cases, negative things are imprinted more deeply.

As they grow, they start to live by these imprinted thoughts. A person whose conscience itself is corrupted, and which tells them that there is nothing wrong in what kind of information they are processing will also find nothing wrong with their actions. They have no rational thinking to reflect before they act. No intellect to ponder on their choices.

Even worse, in this digital age, this age of social media, our educational system doesn't care to teach students how to perceive this vast expanse of information. How to train their minds on what to get influenced by and what not to. But then again, how can we expect educational institutions to do this when they are busy increasing the number of A+ grades and producing top entrance exam ranks? My mistake for asking too much.

Mata, Pitah, Guru, Devo. We repeat these words proudly. Our elders teach us this proudly. But as I have grown, I have realized that our elders used these words to ensure we respected them and recognized their importance, a subtle way of demanding something. However, they don't always realize the true meaning of this slogan. In my perspective, this slogan represents the people with the greatest responsibility and influence. In my opinion, a *Mother* is not just someone who carried you for months and gave birth to you. A *Father* is not just someone who loves you and buys you things. Parents are not merely those who provide for your expenses, give you food, and ensure your education, essentially allowing you to live. A *Teacher* is not just someone who delivers information. And *God* is not someone you should fear, nor someone who needs to be "protected" by harming believers of other faiths.

These four figures - Mother, Father, Teacher, and God are the ones who influence generations to come. If even one of them makes a mistake, whether it is a parent failing to love and guide their child, a teacher failing to believe in and teach their students what truly matters, or religious figures failing to instill the right conscience in people, then generations of lives are bound to implode.

Parents who decided they *wanted* a child have the responsibility to ensure they raise them to be good human beings. Teachers who chose teaching as their profession have the duty to guide them. And those who act in the name of God should prove their worth in the eyes of the universe.

If all of this is done correctly, then I take my claim back, Films or Movies are not the greatest art. *Parenting, Teaching, and Faith are.*

Mohiniyattam is the Air I Breathe

A Journey of Grace, Grit, and Guru Bhakti — In Conversation with
Jayaprabha Menon

By- Devabala, Tanushka Pandey, Soham Singh

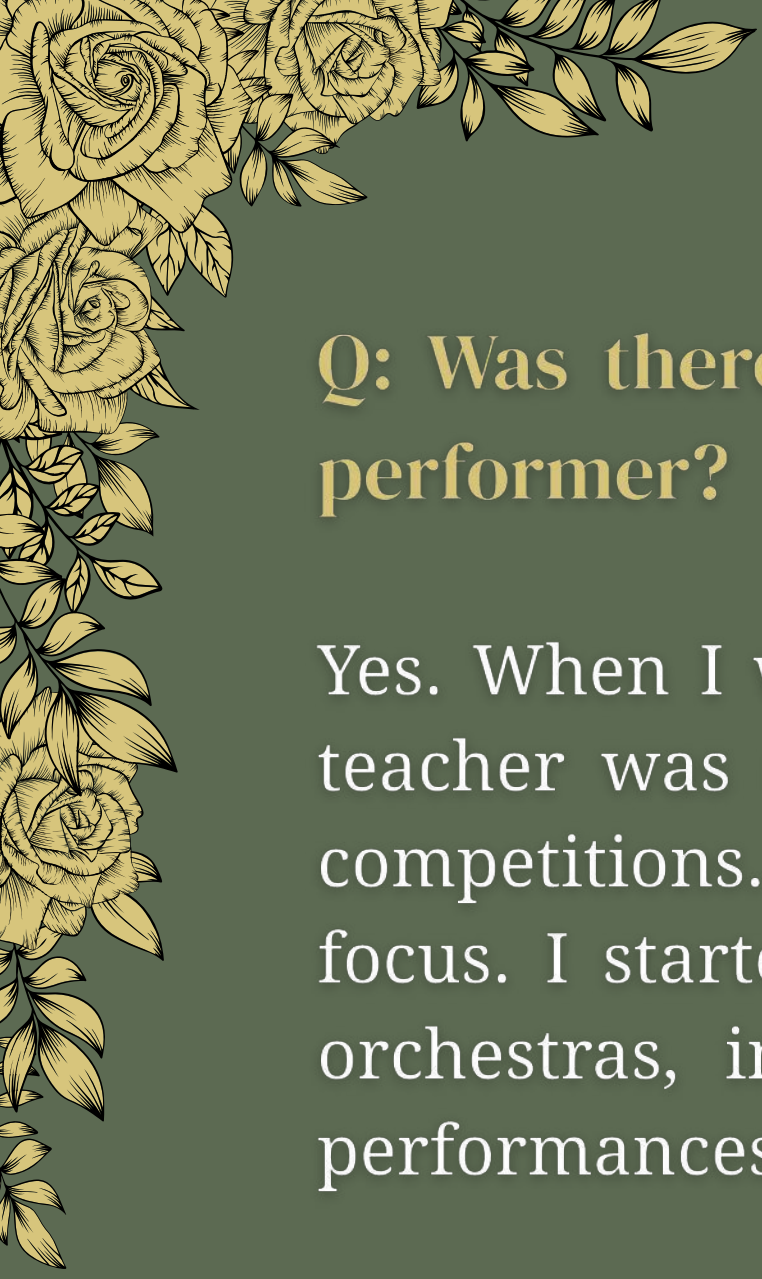


In the world of Indian classical dance, some artists are not just performers—they are carriers of tradition, bridges between generations, and passionate educators who quietly shape cultural futures. Jayaprabha Menon is one such figure. From her early days as a shy, disciplined girl in Kerala to performing on international stages and mentoring the next generation in Delhi, her life story is as gracefully layered as a Mohiniyattam performance. We sat down with her to uncover the rhythm beneath the rhythm—of childhood, challenges, cultural pride, and enduring devotion.

Q: Jaya ma'am, your love for dance seems lifelong. How did it all begin?

Like many girls in Kerala, my journey with dance began at age four. It wasn't unusual—more of a cultural norm. I started with Bharatanatyam and slowly moved into Mohiniyattam and Kuchipudi, along with folk forms. But what made it special was my parents' fierce discipline. I never missed a class. Never went to weddings, never played with friends on performance days. At the time, I resented it. Today, I'm only grateful.





Q: Was there a turning point that shifted your path from student to performer?

Yes. When I was in 10th standard, I lost a dance competition unfairly. My teacher was so disheartened, she withdrew all her students from future competitions. That's when performance—not competition—became my focus. I started performing professionally—1.5 to 3-hour shows, with live orchestras, in temples, clubs, community events. Back then, such long performances were the norm. Now they're rare.

Q: You represented India in the USSR in the 1980s. What was that like?

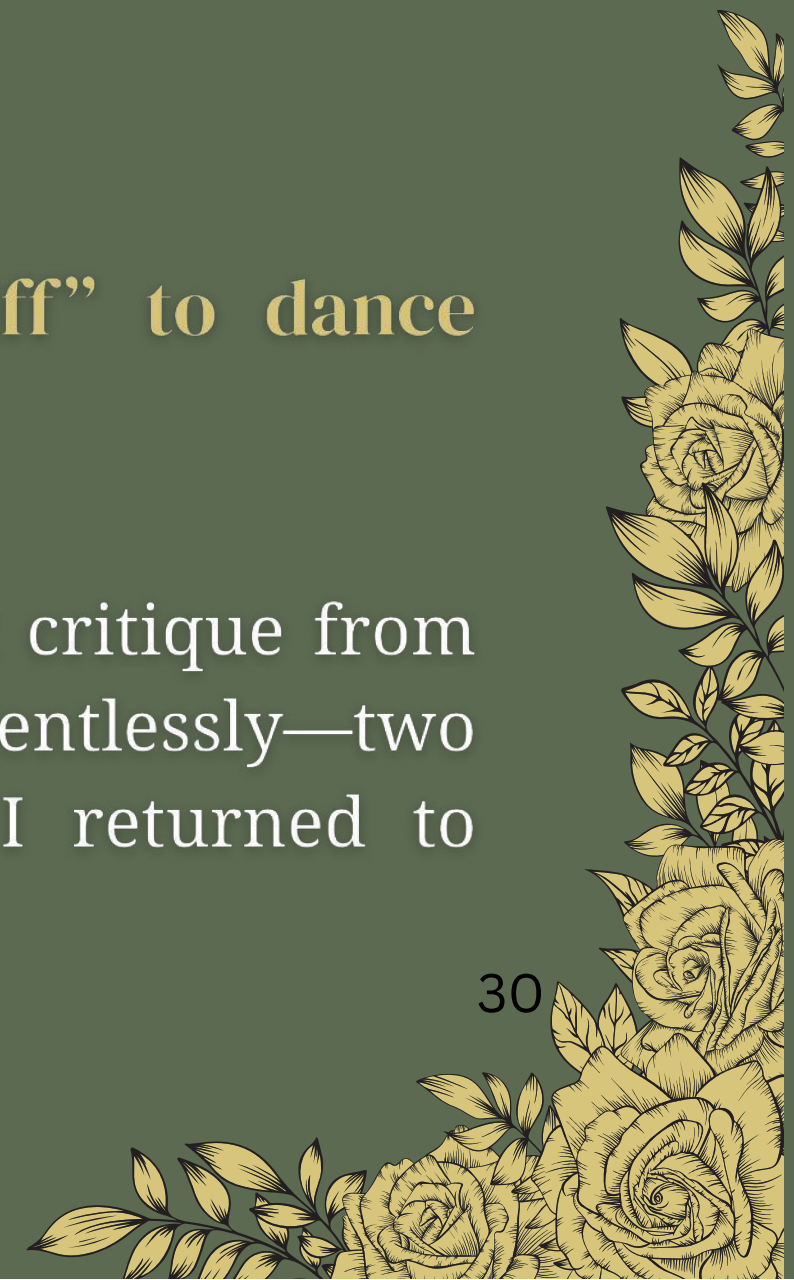
Magical. I was just 18, and traveling to the USSR felt like something from a dream. I was one of five dancers selected from Kerala to be part of a 160-member youth delegation. We were the best-performing group, and known for our discipline. It was a huge cultural moment that broadened my perspective and showed me what dance diplomacy could be.

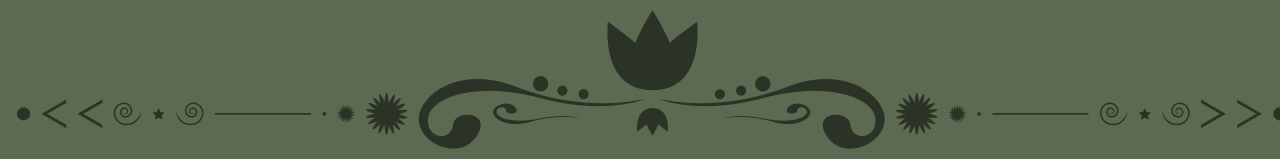
Q: You've trained under multiple revered gurus. How did that shape your identity as a dancer?

Each guru gave me a new layer. After marriage, when I moved to Baroda, I trained under Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar—a Kalakshetra master. I had to unlearn and relearn everything. From Vazhuvoor style to Kalakshetra style was a huge shift—grace to geometry, as I call it. Later, I met Guru Bharati Shivaji in Kerala. After seeing her live, I realized: This is what I want to do. I was already a scholarship holder in Mohiniyattam, but she made me start again from scratch.

Q: What was that like—to be told you were “too stiff” to dance Mohiniyattam?

Honestly? It hurt. No one had ever said that to me. But that critique from Bharti Ji became the catalyst for my comeback. I practiced relentlessly—two to three hours every day—just basics. Eventually, when I returned to Chennai, she





welcomed me back. That was the moment I knew I had truly returned—not just as a dancer, but as a sadhak.

Q: Delhi seems like a big leap in your journey. What brought you here?

We moved to Delhi in 2003, with no plans, no network—just faith. My husband and I stayed with family for a while, and I randomly applied to a dance teacher ad. That led me to Triveni Kala Sangam, where Sunderesh Sridharani Ma'am gave me free space to teach. That studio became my temple. Slowly, I built classes, joined GD Goenka, and began establishing my presence in Delhi's classical circle.

Q: You've worked with many legends. Can you share a few highlights?

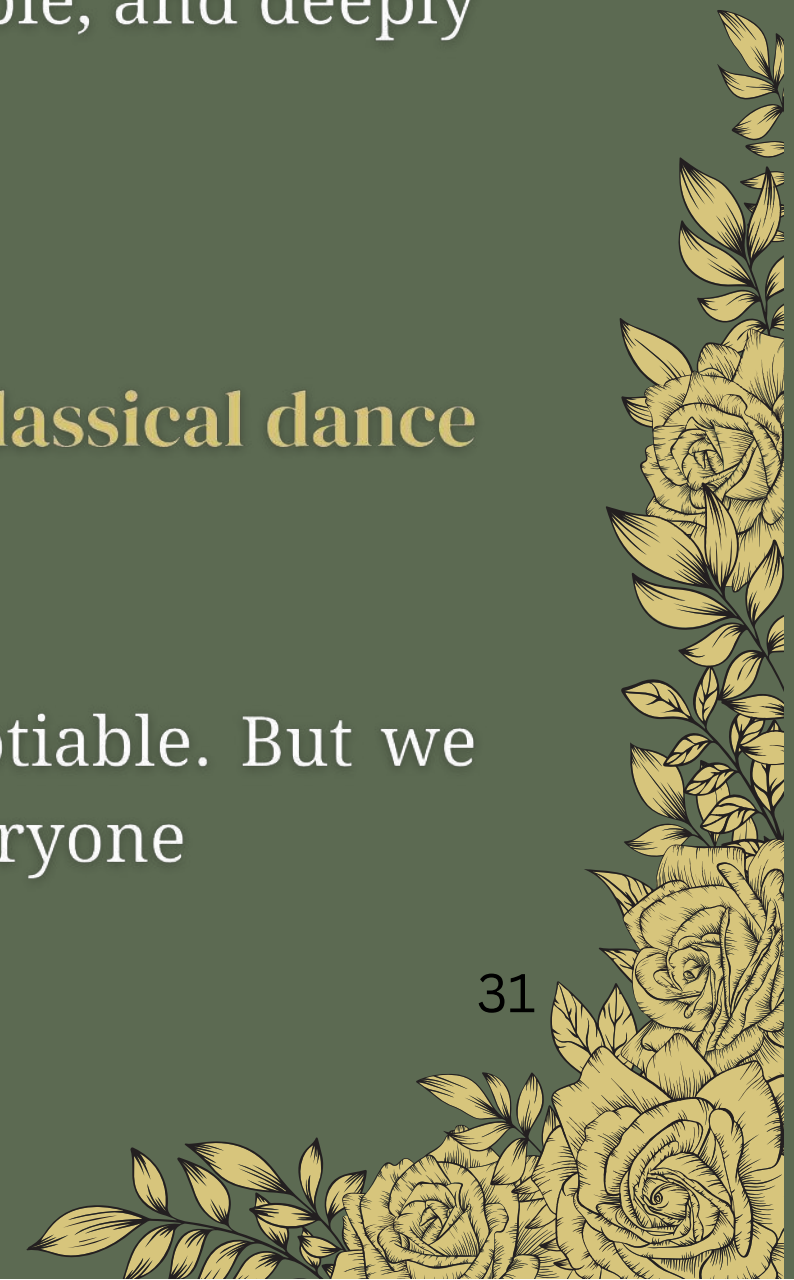
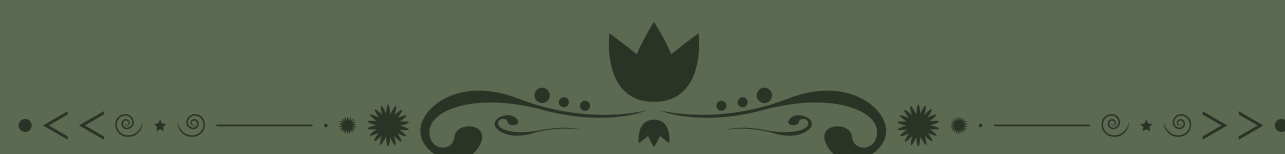
Absolutely. I performed in productions choreographed by Raja Reddy, Sonal Mansingh, and Maharaj Ji. Each of these artists shaped my understanding of group dynamics, musicality, and production aesthetics. We performed in Korea, South America, Kazakhstan... representing India on global stages. These experiences not only built my artistic vocabulary but deeply influenced my work as a teacher and choreographer.

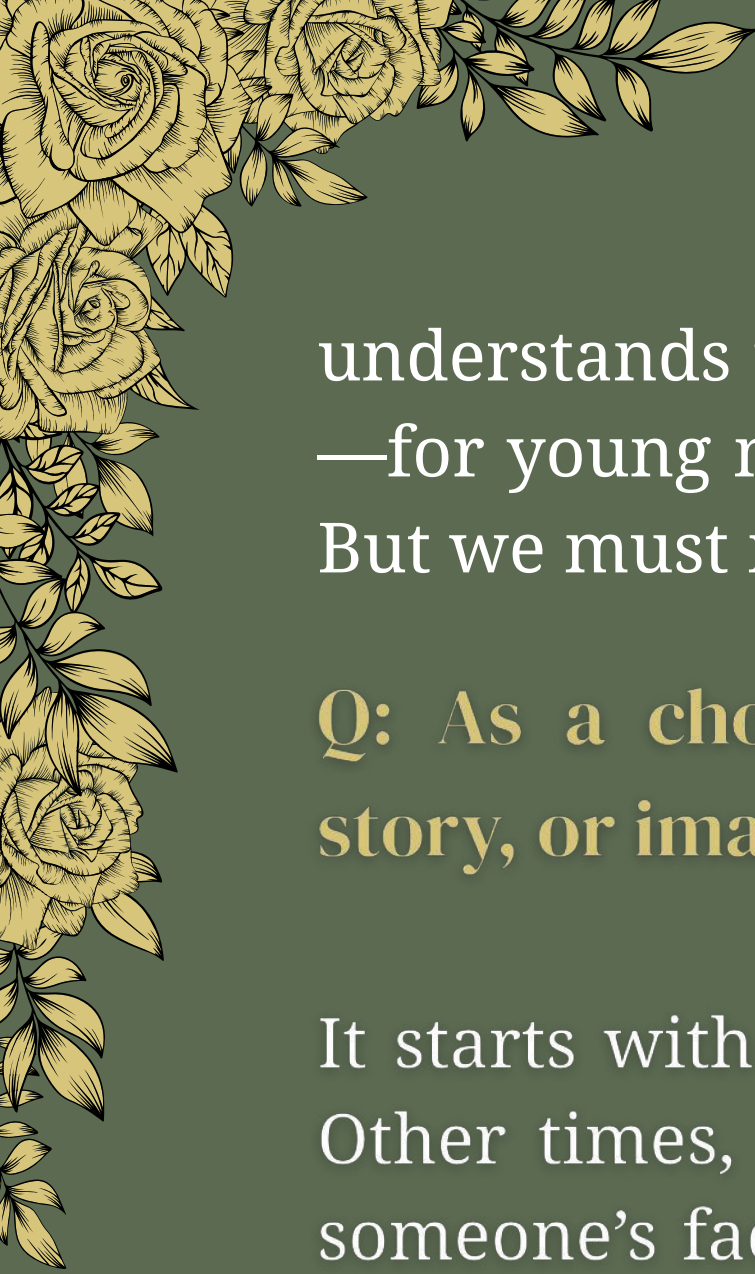
Q: You often speak of Mohiniyattam with spiritual devotion. What makes it so special for you?

I always say—I don't just do Mohiniyattam. I breathe Mohiniyattam. It is in my breath, my body, my thoughts. It has shaped me. Every stage I step on, I try to place Mohiniyattam—even if people ask for something 'modern.' My mission has always been to make Mohiniyattam relevant, visible, and deeply respected.

Q: In this age of short attention spans, how do you make classical dance relevant to new audiences?

We must blend. Not dilute—but relate. Tradition is non-negotiable. But we must pick themes that connect—seasons, nature, emotion. Everyone





understands the monsoon, spring, and longing. I create hooks—entry points—for young minds. Once they're in, the music and the form will do the rest. But we must meet them halfway.

Q: As a choreographer, where do your ideas usually begin—music, story, or imagery?

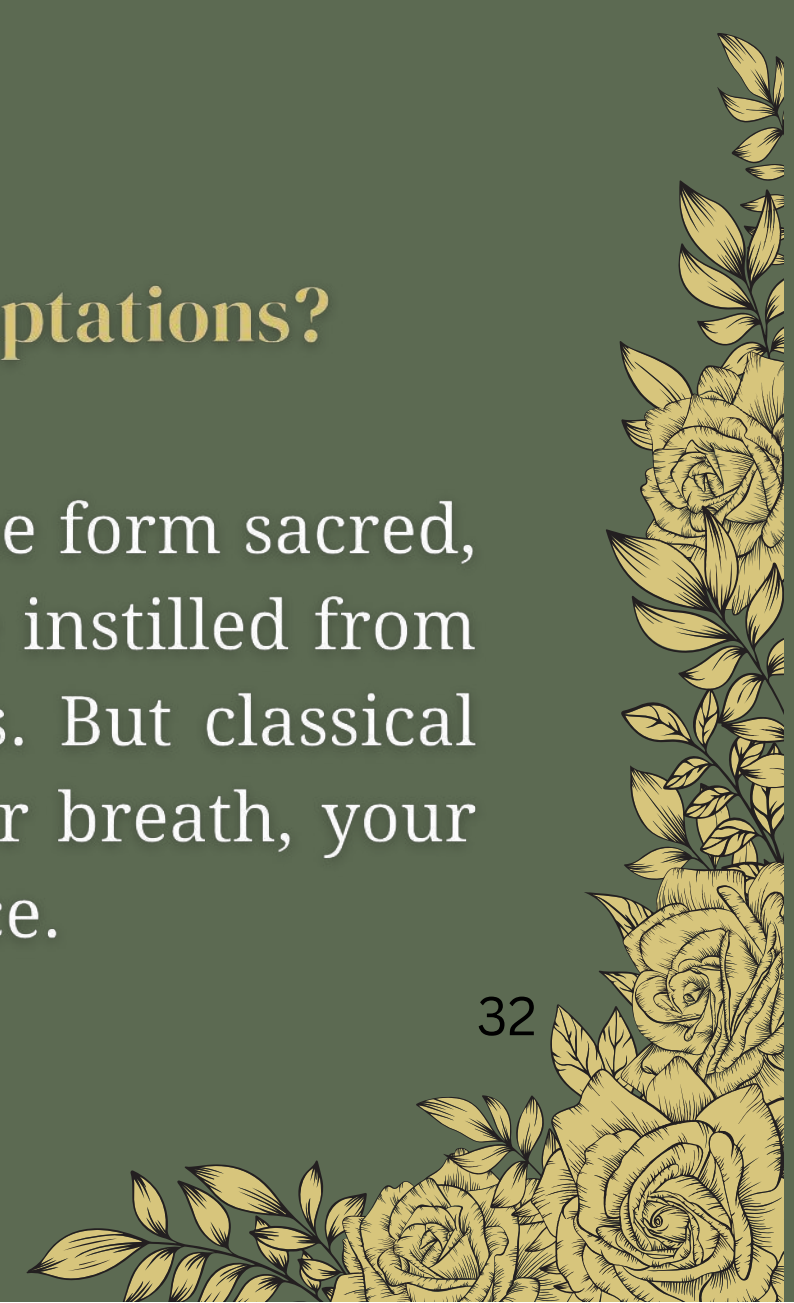
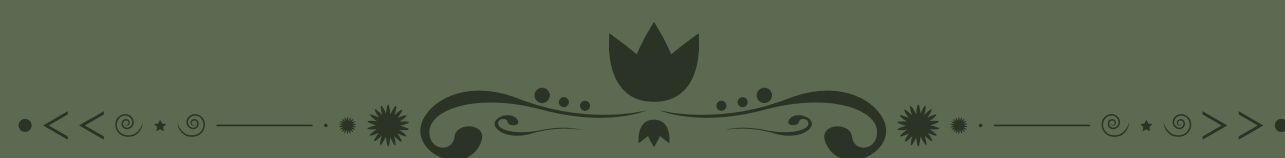
It starts with emotion. Sometimes a raga will evoke a memory or a visual. Other times, I'll hear a poem or even just notice a fleeting expression on someone's face—and I'll know, this needs to be a piece. Once the emotional core is set, I build the narrative by delving into historical texts, folklore, and regional tales to gather authentic narratives, structure the movement, and work on the music with composers and vocalists.

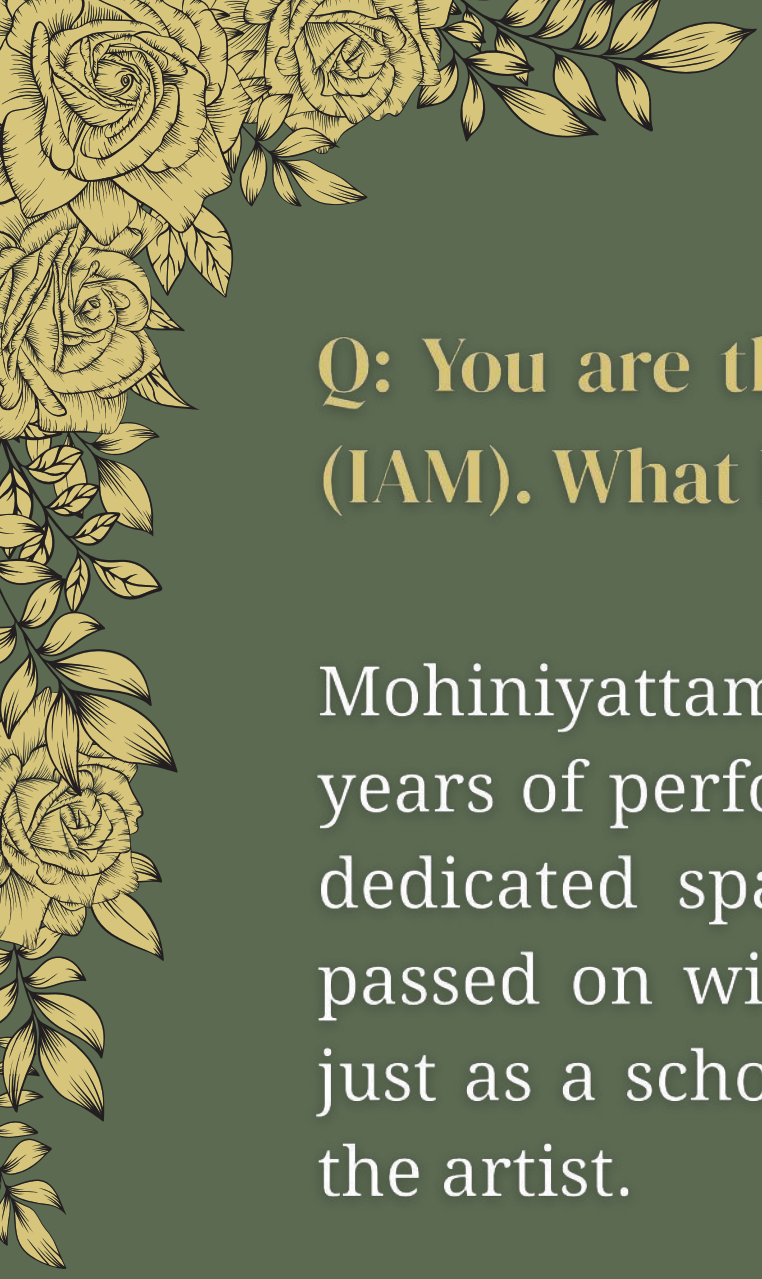
Q: Your production themed around Gaganyaan has garnered significant attention. What inspired you to create a dance piece on India's space mission?

The Gaganyaan mission symbolizes India's aspirations and achievements in space exploration. I was deeply moved by the dedication of our scientists and the nation's collective dream of reaching the stars. This inspired me to translate that journey into the language of dance, capturing the essence of human ambition and the cosmic voyage. Mohiniyattam, with its graceful movements and expressive storytelling, offers a unique medium to convey complex narratives. I focused on the emotional and philosophical aspects of space exploration—the curiosity, the courage, the solitude of space, and the connection between the cosmos and human consciousness. By integrating traditional motifs with innovative interpretations, I aimed to bridge the gap between ancient art and modern science.

Q: Do you worry about preserving authenticity in such adaptations?

Authenticity comes from the Guru. If the Guru doesn't hold the form sacred, it slips. Anga Shuddha—purity of posture and form—must be instilled from the first day. Today, many students come for “quick” classes. But classical dance is not instant coffee. You need to train your eyes, your breath, your body. It's not about how long you practice, but how you practice.





Q: You are the founder of the International Academy of Mohiniyattam (IAM). What led you to establish it?

Mohiniyattam gave me everything—an identity, a voice, a community. After years of performing, teaching, and traveling, I felt a strong need to create a dedicated space where this art form could be preserved, practiced, and passed on with purity and purpose. IAM was born out of that vision—not just as a school, but as a cultural ecosystem that nurtures both the art and the artist.

CONCLUSION

Jayaprabha Menon's journey is not just a dancer's biography—it is a quiet rebellion against mediocrity. In a time of shortcuts, she stands for depth. In a time of spectacle, she celebrates structure. And in a time of distraction, she calls us back to discipline.

Through her work, Mohiniyattam breathes again—not as a relic of the past, but as a living, evolving art form that touches the soul, one mudra at a time.



Divine Rhythms

The Dance of the Eternal

By Soham Singh



The unheard voice, delivered through the motions.

Buried up sensations, portrayed through expressions.

Weaving a story of love, praised by the devotees.

From gestures of flute to the *tandav* by lord,

Making the plates tremble to dust.

Are the bols just some scripts, uttered to be deciphered?

**Or some sensations,
Meant to be inferred!**

**Accentuating eyes of the moving entity,
Emitting the joy of melody.**

Captivating to the hilt, but cannot be conferred.

Dawn like serenity was what lingered.

The beats are coming to an end,

The heels recreating the trend.

At last the *sam* was taken,

The dancing doll stopped in a wend.





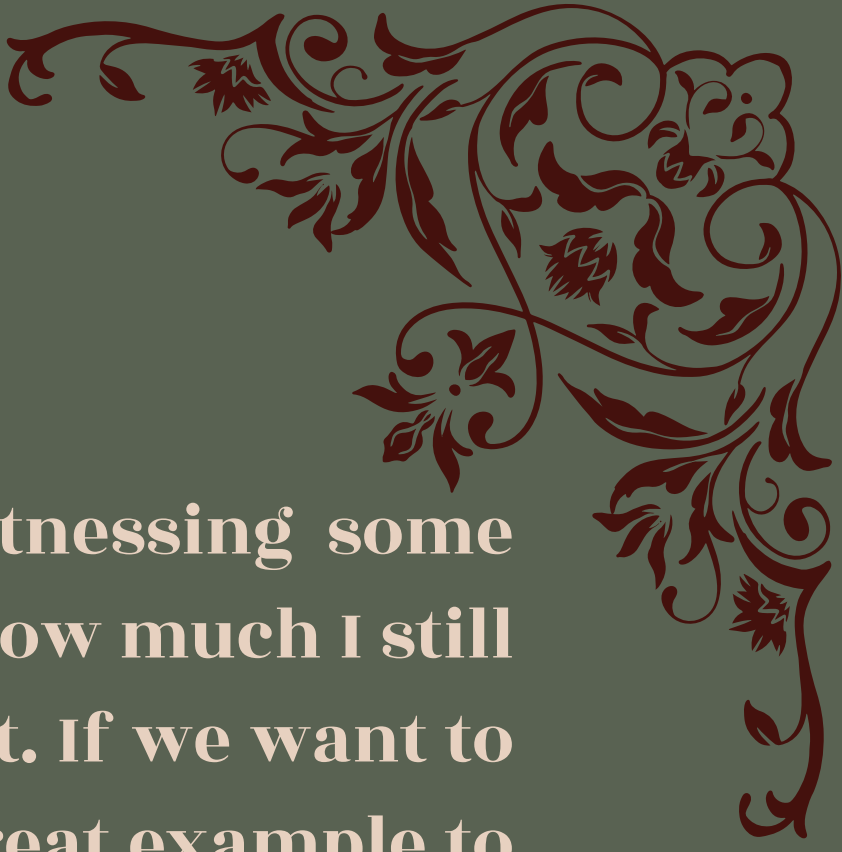
ART IS ALWAYS SUPERIOR

By Nanditha Niranjana


Who am I to talk about this?" you may ask. A few months ago, I might have been a nobody. But after having the privilege of watching several amazing performances across Kerala, Bangalore, and Chennai, I feel I've gained some valuable insights into the world of classical dance. I've learned about how dancers prepare for the stage and how audiences, or rasikas, in different regions, perceive the art form.

The sad reality in Kerala is that people often show more interest in celebrity performances than in the work of accomplished artists who have chosen dance as their profession. This trend seems to undermine the appreciation for the true essence of classical dance. Another aspect of the dance culture in Kerala that troubles me is the prevalence of school competitions. While it's common for every state in India to host classical dance competitions, I've noticed that in Kerala, these contests have almost become a part of our culture. But what's the problem with competitions, you might ask?

There's nothing inherently wrong with competition—until it becomes unhealthy. The issue lies in the corruption of the judging system, where deserving students are denied the recognition they truly deserve. Furthermore, competitions demand that children perform complex pieces, like the Varnam, which is typically a 30-45 minute-long piece but is often shortened to just 10 minutes for these events. This distortion strips the piece of its essence. For young dancers, these performances are a crucial part of their growth. They help build confidence, offer vital practice, and allow the child to better connect with the art. However, the real problem arises when parents start enrolling their children in dance classes solely to prepare them for competitions and prizes, rather than for a deeper connection with the art form.



My view on classical dance in Kerala changed after witnessing some incredible performances in Chennai. It made me realize how much I still have to learn and how small I am in comparison to the art. If we want to develop a strong dance and music culture, Chennai is a great example to follow. Art is woven into the very fabric of the city. People there, unlike in Kerala, have a deep understanding of classical dance. I remember having a cup of chai at Narada Gana Sabha when a lady sitting next to me started talking about various artists. Her knowledge of the art form was impressive. I couldn't help but wish that one day, the audiences in Kerala would be like that too, though I know it might take time.




In places like Chennai and Bangalore, children grow up surrounded by performances. Every day, there's some event happening at one of the sabhas. Watching all these performances from an early age shapes the way people in these cities view and appreciate the art. Many talented dancers from Kerala have moved to Chennai and gained recognition. This shows how important the environment and culture around an art form can be in nurturing talent.

Across India, there are various initiatives and programs aimed at promoting classical dance, but I dream of a society where art itself is the stimulus.

A place where no promotion is needed because the art speaks for itself, drawing people in naturally.

In today's world, many people are more familiar with 30-second reels that are uploaded on social media than the art as a whole. I'm not accusing this of being inherently bad, rather I'm pointing out the drawbacks. Some dancers present their work beautifully in these short clips, but unfortunately, there are others who, in the pursuit of quick views and followers, distort the essence of classical dance. If audiences were exposed to dance in the right way, this wouldn't be a problem. The real issue is that many people only see these short, edited versions, which creates a wrong idea of the art form.



The key is exposure and proper guidance. If a passionate student is taught well by a knowledgeable guru, they will have the opportunity to truly grow in the art. I would like to quote something that the Bharatanatyam artist, Harinie Jeevitha, once said in an interview: “Learning this art form is like being on a beach. At first, we build sandcastles, then slowly, we dip our feet into the water. Once we’re in the water, it’s hard to get out. The deeper you go into the art, the more it will swallow you. You just have to let it engulf you.”

I mention Kerala because it’s where I’m from, and as someone who loves classical dance, I hope to see changes in my society. But I know similar challenges are probably happening in other parts of the country too. Dance is not just about practicing and learning– it’s also about watching others perform and understanding how powerful the art form can be. Watching great artists helps us realize how small we are in front of the art. In the end, there’s no better motivation than the art itself.





It Teaches Patience, Resilience, and Presence

Dance instilled discipline, devotion, and a reverence for tradition that today's world often forgets. — In Conversation with Jyothi Aggarwal
By- Kathvi and Niharika

Q: How did your journey in dance begin? What was your first encounter with it, and how did it evolve?

I was always quick to pick up movements—even as a child, I could replicate steps almost instantly. I remember one instance when my mother was watching a dance show and I casually began copying the choreography. Everyone around me was impressed, and slowly, the encouragement started pouring in. My father noticed it too and enrolled me in dance classes—but his demand was about learning classical dance specifically. I never knew of it as a child. I began training in Bharatanatyam, and as I delved deeper, I fell in love with it. I simply couldn't stop. Over time, I expanded into Kathak and various Indian folk dances as well. Indian culture is incredibly rich, and my love for it only grows stronger with time. My aim has always been to bring these beautiful, traditional forms forward and make them relevant again.

Q: That's such a vibrant and rooted beginning. But managing such intense passion along with the mental and physical demands of everyday life must've been overwhelming. How did you balance it all?

It was all about discipline. I worked a full-time 8-hour job, and dance was non-negotiable—minimum 4 hours of dedicated practice. Being a Chartered Accountant, I had to constantly juggle schedules. Earlier, I used to practice from 9 to 10 every evening, Monday through Friday, but it took a toll eventually. So, I shifted all my sessions to weekends and made up for the entire week then. Any dancer will tell you—it's demanding. But you start glowing from within. I remember a time I could only solve two math problems in an hour. But after a dance session? I could do five. It energizes you. I would dance, do my job, and still manage household chores without feeling drained.





Q: So in a way, dance became your therapy?

Absolutely. While others often look tired or drained, I feel alive. Even if I haven't slept, I never lose that spark. My days would start early in the morning and end late at night, packed with responsibilities—but it made me feel complete. My job helps me earn a living. But dance? Dance is what feeds my soul. It molds you as a person—it teaches patience, resilience, and presence

Q: Did dance influence your eating habits or your lifestyle?

Yes, initially, there were a lot of changes. But over time, I disciplined myself around my meals too. Dance teaches you to respect not just your body but also traditions. Today's generation often overlooks that. Back then, we used to worship our gurus. We celebrated Guru Purnima with great devotion. Our gurus often knew us better than our parents. Even today, I can walk up to my guru and, with just one comforting word from her, everything feels right again.

Q: That's so moving. Even just speaking to you, I can sense how expressive and connected you are to your art. It's not just something you do—it's who you are.

JThank you. I remember once after a performance, an elderly woman came up to me, deeply moved by my expressions. That moment meant a lot to me. I've realized I can emote entire stories without uttering a single word. Bollywood can be entertaining, yes—but classical dance? It teaches you to communicate with your entire being.





Q: Wow, that is actually very deep. Continuing with this can you please tell us about your journey—how much of a role did your parents play in shaping it?

Honestly, without the unwavering support of my parents, none of this would have been possible. From a very young age, they ensured I had the right exposure and opportunities. My father, in particular, was instrumental—he made sure I was introduced to both Bollywood and classical forms of dance. I genuinely cannot imagine my journey without that foundation.

Q: That's truly inspiring. How important do you think it is for children to begin learning at a young age?

It's incredibly important. Although I didn't realize the full impact at the time, my father had the foresight to enroll me early on. Starting young made a tremendous difference. Children absorb things faster—be it movement, rhythm, or expression—and it becomes ingrained in them. It shapes not just their dance, but their discipline and mindset.

Q: If you could give one piece of advice to your younger self, what would it be?

I would tell myself—if you love it, start early, and never stop. Especially with classical dance, staying rooted in at least one form is essential. Keep updating yourself, but don't get swept away by fleeting trends on social media. Dedicate yourself completely to your art, but also pursue formal education. Have a degree to fall back on, because in competitive spaces like Mumbai, having alternative sources of income can be crucial. Passion and profession must co-exist.





Q: That's extremely well said. Is there anything on your dance-related bucket list that you want to add or remove?

I would love to learn Odissi. I strongly believe that dance has no age barrier, and I want to continue performing—not just teaching workshops. My aim is to bring classical dance to Gen Z in a way that's accessible and inspiring—not limited to classrooms, but alive on stage.

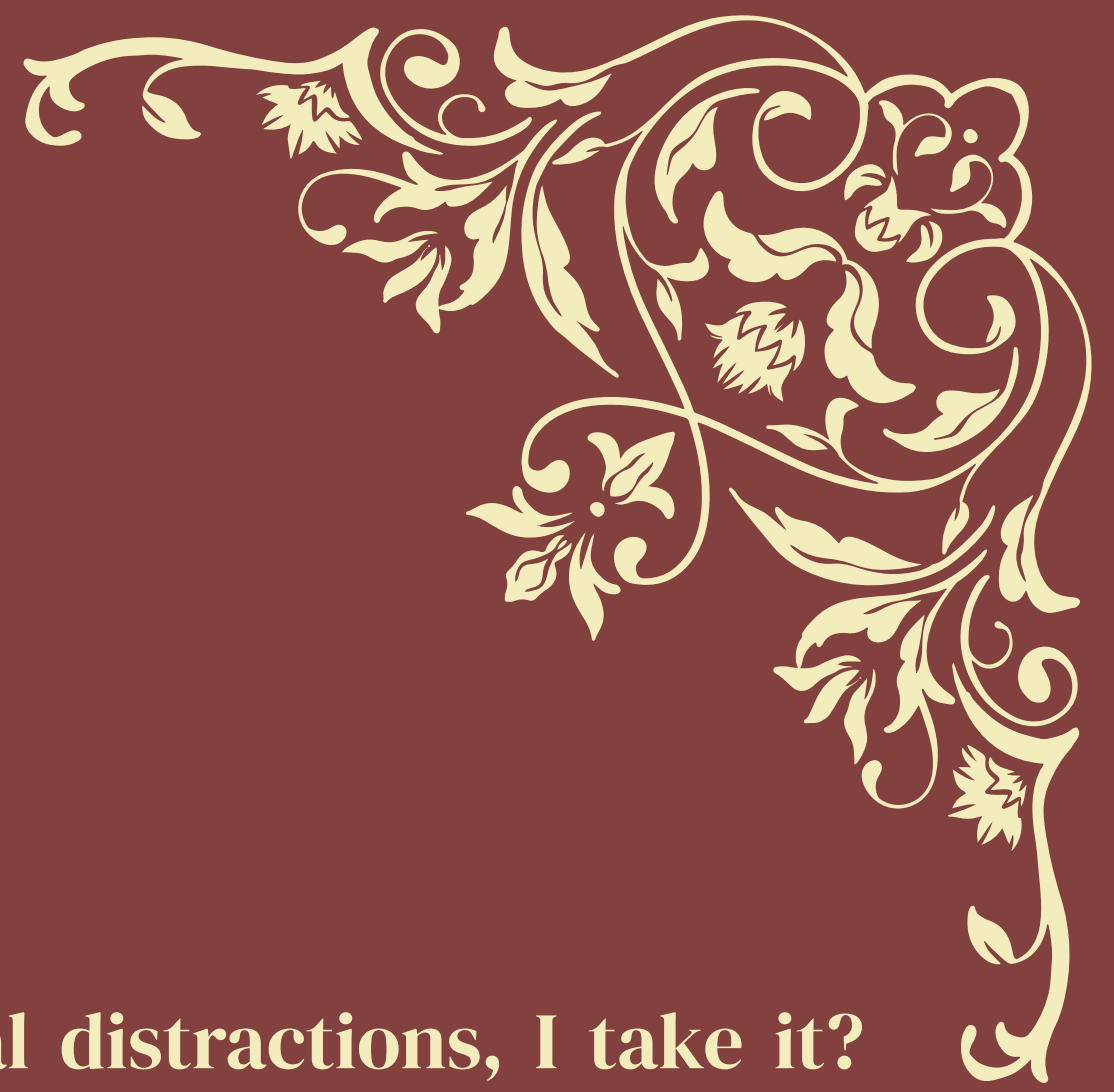
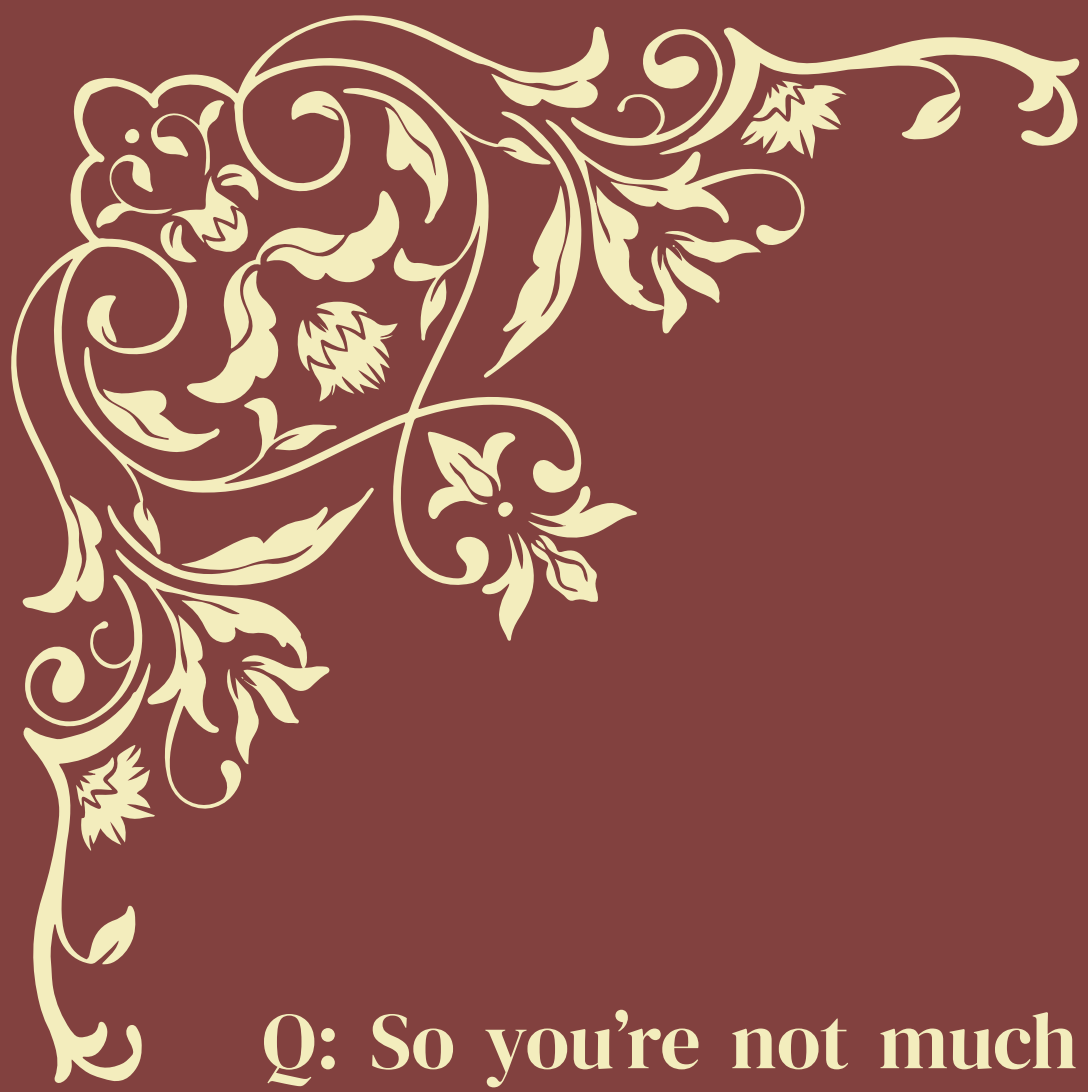
Q: I feel like the newer generations need a stronger, more centralized motivation to even consider classical or folk forms.

Exactly. These days, it's quite common to see very young children dancing to inappropriate songs, and it's disheartening. I remember when I was asked to teach Terah Taali, a rare and traditional folk dance—I was pleasantly surprised. Opportunities to teach or learn such forms have become so scarce.

Q: On a different note—you mentioned you pursued Chartered Accountancy alongside dance. How did you manage both?

It wasn't easy, to be honest. There were days I wasn't even home. I'd have my laptop in one hand while practicing steps in front of a mirror. My routine often stretched from 9 a.m. to 1 a.m. the next day. It was exhausting, yes, but also deeply fulfilling. Monday to Friday was dedicated to work, while weekends were solely for dance. When you're truly passionate, the exhaustion transforms into energy. People often complain about feeling too tired to wake up—but that's because they haven't found what lights them up. For me, life wasn't just about work, marriage, and children. I wanted something more. I remember once when a friend suggested to me a movie to watch and relax—I ended up crying afterward because I felt like I'd wasted an entire day.





Q: So you're not much into screens and digital distractions, I take it? How do you find time for friends, family, and social life? Anything you would want to change?

Not at all. There is so much to life than that. It never amused me. I can not afford to live my life being trapped in this era of screens. And honestly, I don't have much of a social life. Sometimes, I don't even know what to order when I go out—I'm that out of sync. I forget birthdays at times too. About changing, No. I am genuinely happy. Nothing gives me the peace that dance and my faith in Ganpati Bappa give me. That's where my soul feels at home.

Q: What is your view on the current state of folk dances? What can be done to make folk dance more appealing to the youth?

Unfortunately, folk dance is seeing a steady decline. Workshops happen, yes, but often they are just for the sake of it. On social media, people post videos but don't even execute basic movements properly. In my workshops, when I ask who comes from a non-Bollywood background, very few raise their hands. I'm not against Bollywood—it's vibrant and fun—but classical and folk forms offer depth and technique that elevate all other dance styles.

About making the folk dance appealing, one way is through smart fusion. For example, you could balance a traditional Divli on your head and dance to a contemporary song. The style can still be respected while engaging modern audiences. Even Terah Taali can be presented in innovative ways. People don't realize how much Bollywood is actually rooted in classical rhythms—take Tune Kya Kiya, for instance, which has beats inspired by Kathak.





Q: You've performed extensively across India and abroad. Could you share what that's been like?

Performing at venues like NCPA, NAMCC, Bandra Fest, and across many colleges has been life changing. Each performance brings a different kind of nervous energy and teaches you something new. I remember once, during a performance at NAMCC, I tore a ligament in my leg. It took six months to recover. Yet, I performed two shows even during that time—seated, performing Terah Taali. I've done rare forms like Khori from Haryana. There were moments I questioned everything—waking up exhausted, doubting myself. But when you're abroad and the only one holding the Indian flag, a surge of pride carries you forward. Once in Croatia, I lost all my luggage in transit. I had none of my costumes or props. I had to borrow a Divli that didn't even fit right, filled it with cement and water, and performed three hours later. In the end, everything somehow works out.

Q: Wow, that's huge. How many dance forms are you trained in? What message would you give to children or young dancers?

Quite a few—Margamkali, Terah Taali, Kodia, Divli, Zojagiri, Kathak with its different adaptations, Bharatnatyam, Chiram, Bihu, Gidda, Chari, and many others.

As for the message, keep practicing—don't expect instant results. Discipline is everything. There were days I'd perform, then continue rehearsing for another four hours. Even with my analyst job, I'd finish my work, then go straight into collaborations or rehearsals. Your body knows when it's tired, but until then, keep pushing. I've deadlifted 50 kg despite a bad back and still gone on stage to perform. I rehearsed from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m., went sightseeing, and danced again at 2 p.m.





Q: You seem like someone who doesn't believe in breaking routine.

Absolutely. I only rest when it's absolutely necessary. Once I had severe tonsillitis and slept early—that was the only time I missed a day of practice. Life is unpredictable. You cannot afford to let today slip away assuming there's always tomorrow.

We're genuinely honored to have had this conversation with someone so devoted, passionate, and inspiring. Your journey and energy are truly remarkable. Can't just put it into words as to how much this interview has single handedly changed our perspectives! Thank you so much for your time, Jyoti ma'am. You are a beacon of inspiration for all of us.



The Moment I Dance

By Tanushka Pandey

The moment I dance
Everything awakens even in the middle of the night,
The world somehow seems to glow
And the moon fills my heart with silvery light

The moment I dance
I see the leaves rustling with the wind
I see the butterflies swaying with the flowers
Suddenly this chaotic world appears very well-aligned.

The moment I dance
I feel the world is under my feet
That I can do anything I want
And hear nothing but the beat.

The moment I dance
I perceive that mercy has won over violence
The hearts have moved from hate to love
and I hear music rising from the silence.

The moment I dance
worries fade like frightening dreams
the clock stops striking ahead
and rhythm is where my spirit redeems.

PRODUCTION

TERAH-TAALI

Rajasthan is a wonderous place known as the land of kings, with its folk art and culture being just as captivating. Even though lesser-known, the traditional practices of dancing Terah Taali captures the beauty of rhythm, elegance and devotion through dance.

Roots and Importance in Culture

Performed by the Kamar or Kamar Kalbeliya community women of Rajasthan, Terah Taali which is a combination of “thirteen claps” or “thirteen beats”. This holy dance aims to worship local deities, primarily Baba Ramdevji. Being a folk saint, he is said to bless followers with powerful magic, heal them from their ailments, and is also believed to be Lord Krishna in human form.

Beyond a mere dance, Terah Taali embodies devotion (bhakti) to great saints, taking the form of rhythmic celebrations through movement. The dance is offered as a gift during religious fairs and festivals.

The Performance

Unlike other folk dances, Terah Taali is known for the use of manjeeras (small brass cymbals). By the time the dancer sits cross-legged on the floor, she ties thirteen of these cymbals to different parts of her body — mostly on the arms, legs, and occasionally the waist. The dancer accompanies the cymbals with devotional songs, and the melodious sounds of instruments such as the ektara, dholak and sarangi, and strikes the cymbals in complex rhythmic pattern.

It also includes the display of great concentration and skill by dancers balancing decorated pots, swords, or even lighted lamps on their heads. Male singers who can narrate the story of saints and gods with the help of soulful renditions are often used to support the performance.

In a touching tribute to India's glorious cultural heritage, Adhrita – The Dance Society had the vision to create a stirring performance of Terah Taali in their annual production this year. Their shows are both an aesthetic spectacle and an emotional oblation to one of Rajasthan's most unique devotional dance forms.

By incorporating Terah Taali in their annual production, Adhrita has done much to revive and celebrate lesser-known Indian folk traditions. In a time when classical and Western ones have a tendency to overshadow others, this production acts as a reminder of the beauty and depth that this folk heritage of our own culture has to offer.

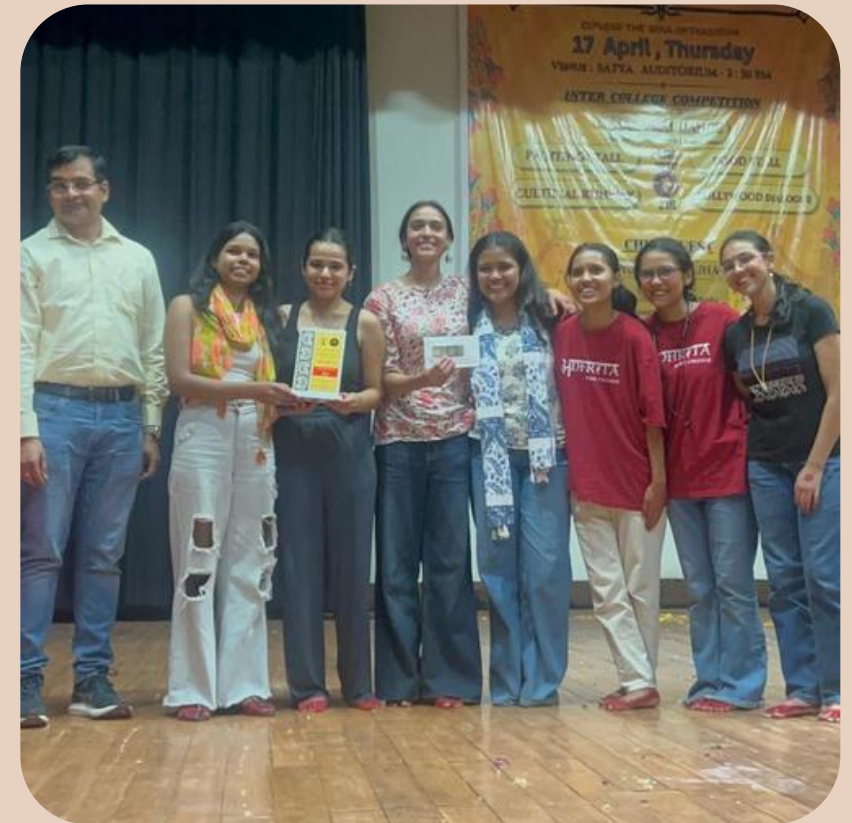
Terah Taali is a spiritual discipline rather than just a show. It is the idea of harmony between the body, soul, and divine is reflected in each beat or taali. This auspicious dance is a form of meditation in which rhythm serves as a conduit to the divine and movement as prayer.

ACHIEVEMENTS

This year has been a vibrant celebration of rhythm, grace, and cultural expression for Adhrita. Our journey through various prestigious platforms has been marked by accolades and appreciation. Here are some of the proud milestones we achieved during the academic year 2024–25:

01

ADHRITA SECURED THE 1ST POSITION AT KALA KUMBH'25 – HOSTED BY SATYAWATI COLLEGE



02

OUR TEAM SECURED THE 2ND POSITION AT FOLK FUSION FIESTA HELD UNDER THE BANNER OF ZENITH'25, ORGANIZED BY GIBS



03

AT NRITYASANGHAM, THE INTER-COLLEGE FOLK DANCE COMPETITION ORGANIZED BY LADY IRWIN COLLEGE, ADHRITA RECEIVED A SPECIAL MENTION



04

VIRASAT HELD UNDER THE AEGIS OF BREEZE'25, ORGANISED BY SHIV NADAR UNIVERSITY, THE TEAM WAS AWARDED A SPECIAL MENTION



05

AT ITHLAATI, THE FOLK DUET DANCE COMPETITION, HELD UNDER THE EVENT OF KALAKRITI 2025 AT SHYAM LAL COLLEGE, OUR MEMBERS; NAINA SINGH AND ARCHISHA ARYA, DELIVERED A COMPELLING TERATAALI DUET PERFORMANCE EARNING THE 1ST POSITION.



06

ADHRITA HAD THE HONOR OF PERFORMING TWICE AT THE NEW ZEALAND HIGH COMMISSION, REFLECTING OUR COMMITMENT TO REPRESENTING INDIAN DANCE ON GLOBAL PLATFORMS AND GRACEFULLY ACCEPTING THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT COME OUR WAY.

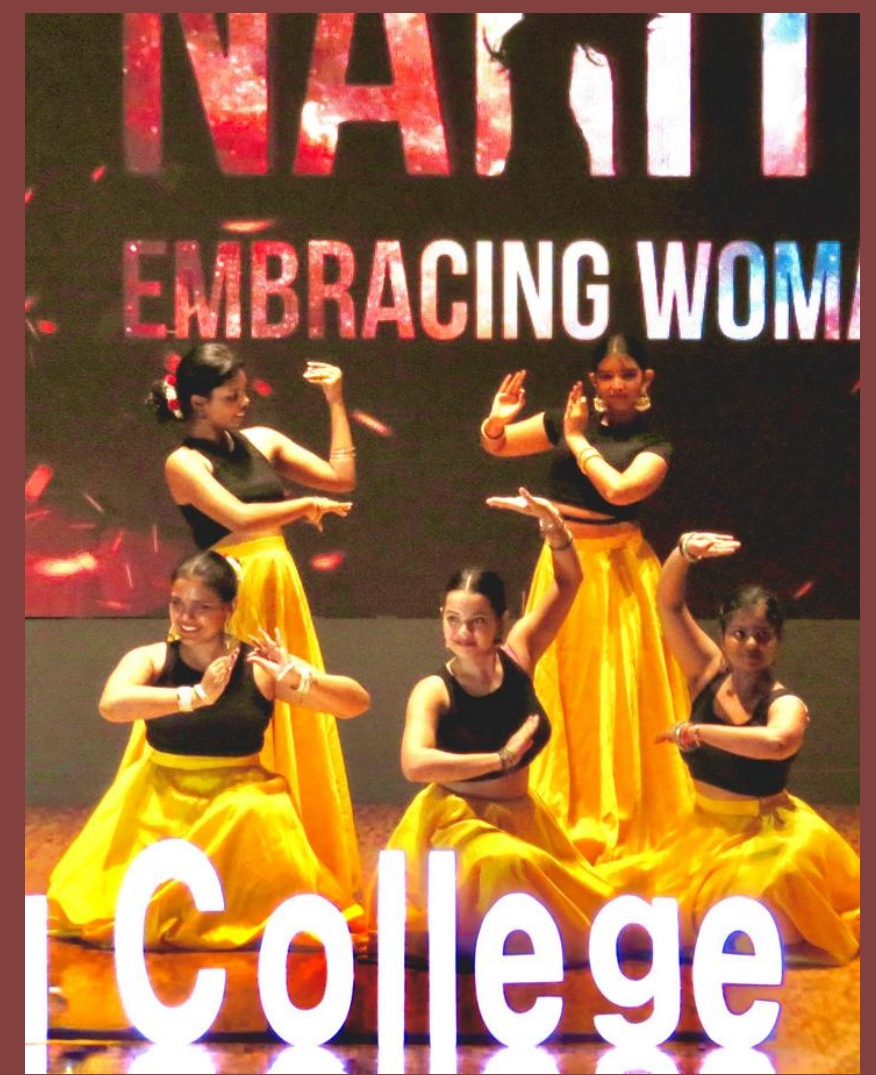


07

WE WERE ALSO PRIVILEGED TO PERFORM AT BAIN & COMPANY, GURGAON, DURING THEIR REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATION, BRINGING A TOUCH OF TRADITION AND FESTIVITY TO THE OCCASION.



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Logistics Head



DEAR CONTRIBUTORS,
THE ENTIRE TEAM AT NRTYANUBHUTI MAGAZINE, EXTENDS OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO EACH ONE OF YOU WHO TOOK THE TIME, EFFORT, AND HEART TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK TO US. YOUR ART, EXPERIENCES AND IDEAS HAVE NOT ONLY ENRICHED THIS EDITION BUT ALSO SHAPED IT INTO SOMETHING TRULY POWERFUL. EACH SUBMISSION CARRIED A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE, AND TOGETHER, THEY WOVE A VIBRANT TAPESTRY OF EXPRESSION, TALENT AND CREATIVITY. THANK YOU FOR TRUSTING US WITH YOUR WORDS AND YOUR VISION. IT IS YOUR PASSION THAT KEEPS THIS MAGAZINE ALIVE AND BEAUTIFUL. SPECIAL CREDITS TO THE OWNERS OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND ART INCLUDED IN THE MAGAZINE. WE'RE INCREDIBLY PROUD TO FEATURE YOUR WORK AND SO EXCITED TO SHARE IT WITH THE WORLD THIS EDITION BELONGS TO ALL OF YOU.

**WITH LOVE AND APPRECIATION,
TEAM NRTYANUBHUTI**

"WE DANCE FOR LAUGHTER, WE DANCE FOR
TEARS, WE DANCE FOR MADNESS, WE DANCE
FOR FEARS, WE DANCE FOR HOPES, WE DANCE
FOR SCREAMS—WE ARE THE DANCERS, WE
CREATE THE DREAMS."



1ST EDITION
(2024-2025)



ISSUED BY
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HINDU COLLEGE