

DANCE

Quest for a higher meaning



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Rama Vaidyanathan performing Bharatanatyam | Photo Credit: [M. Vedhan](#)

Rama Vaidyanathan reflects on her approach to Bharatanatyam as a dancer and choreographer and explains what will be the focus of her online lessons

Rama Vaidyanathan celebrates Bharatanatyam. For her, personally, Bharatanatyam has been a joyful, liberating experience for the 30-plus years that she has been dancing. And at this juncture she wishes to share with the world, some of what she has learned, gained and evolved, especially with the new generation of serious students of Bharatanatyam.

It was thus that Rama was in Thiruvananthapuram to shoot for her project ‘Celebrate Bharatanatyam’ – online dance tutorials, in association with Invis Multimedia. In an interview with *FridayReview*, she spoke about the venture, her insights and experiences, as she continues her journey in the world of Bharatanatyam.

“The online classes are meant to provide access to advanced students all over the world, to help them create their own compositions and to groom them to become soloists. The accent is on choreography and I will be presenting some of my original choreographic work,” says Rama, elaborating on how these classes will be different from the usual.

It starts from deconstructing the whole process of choreography – from selecting lyrics or the poetry, setting it to music and rhythm, developing on the theme and so on. The format will be like a regular classroom, with Rama imparting lessons to her student. The whole composition with all its various aspects will be taught over a few sessions.

Contributing to the dance form

“I am conscious that the body of work in Bharatanatyam is huge, with significant contributions added over the centuries. Yet this is my minuscule contribution, my offering to the world. It reflects my experience with the traditional, timeless dance form as one that liberates, not restricts and providing an expansive scope to express or improvise,” says Rama with conviction.

Rama’s choreography bears the imprint of her intimate association with the dance form of Bharatanatyam, one that she breathes and lives. “At some point I asked myself the reason why I was dancing. Beyond wearing gorgeous costumes, beyond facing the limelight and adoration, I came to recognise it as a means to seek a higher meaning, to realise my inner spirit. My composition *Shivoham*, for instance, reflects this perspective – which is why the choreography is meditative and vibrant at the same time.”



Rama Vaidyanathan performing Bharatanatyam | Photo Credit: [M. VEDHAN](#)

Based on a mantra from the Skanda Purana, *Shivoham* points towards the divinity in each one of us. The deep insights that Rama translates into dance, come from the fact that she was born into a family well-versed in the scriptures and sacred texts.

Her mother, Madhavi Gopalakrishnan, was a scholar and a spiritual speaker. Her dream to groom her daughter into a Bharatanatyam dancer was on the path to fulfillment when she placed Rama under the tutelage of Guru Yamini Krishnamoorthy.

And as if by divine design, the rising star was married at 19 to become the daughter-in-law of Saroja Vaidyanathan, veteran Bharatanatyam exponent. “It was

my mother in law who guided me into becoming a professional. She advised me on presentation and costume and introduced me to a whole set of skills that are so important for a performer,” says Rama. The rich legacy that Rama bears has been passed down to her daughters, Dakshina and Sannidhi. “However, I do not want them to be clones of myself,” laughs Rama.

Passing on the legacy

Dakshina is an acclaimed soloist in her own right, while Sannidhi, adept on the mridangam, is well on her way to making a name for herself and often accompanies her mother and sister at their performances. “It is a privilege and a rare pleasure to be performing alongside my daughters,” admits Rama.

Her popular composition titled ‘Dwitha’, which she performs with her daughters, showcases aspects of duality that we see around us and touches upon the mother-daughter relationship as one of those.

With family roots in Palakkad, Rama is familiar with the cultural scenario in Kerala. “I am amazed at the abundance of talent here. Perhaps it is but natural to Kerala, home to three of the Indian classical dance forms. Aspirants are plenty and there is no dearth of dedicated gurus, too,” she notices.

However she does observe that there is a tendency among students to learn many dance forms all at once, instead of trying to master any one. “Hard work and consistency should be the watchwords, rather than winning competitions. Ultimately one has to realise that the competition is against oneself only,” concludes Rama.