

## FRIDAY REVIEW

## ‘I am a keeper of art’



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Pali Chandra Photo: Special arrangement | Photo Credit: Special arrangement

**Kathak exponent Pali Chandra finds happiness in sharing the art with the world.**

“I feel incomplete without costumes and ghunghroo...,” says Pali Chandra with a smile as she gives finishing touches to her make-up. The Kathak exponent is all set to shoot a sequence for an upcoming series of online Kathak classes. Later, the dancer who exudes grace and poise in her body language and in her words, talks to the camera about why warm-up sessions and cooling-down sessions are important for a dancer, as the shooting progresses at Velloppilly Samskrithi Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram.

Teaching is something that Pali relishes.

“I am a keeper of art, not its owner. I was trained by gurus who believed in sharing the skill with others. So I think it is my responsibility to take the art to others. Besides, we have lost some of the great exponents of the dance form and not much of their works and contributions have been documented or archived. Greats such as Kapila Raj and Surendra Saikia are among those. So, I felt I should take what they gave us to the new generation.”

She uses Skype to connect with her disciples. “Like you need an expert to learn from, a teacher also needs a good shishya. Since I have been living in different parts of the world, my association with my disciples break after a point of time. So I keep the bond unbroken via online sessions,” says Pali.

Her disciples are in places such as South Africa, Japan, the United Kingdom (U.K.), the United States, Canada and Dubai and all over India. “We meet up at one location at regular intervals. But there are some students whom I haven’t met yet!”

The globetrotting artiste that she has been, Pali cherishes the experiences she has gained over the years. It was 20 years ago that she left India for the U.K. to learn choreography. Her first step in this direction was becoming a “dance journalist.” “I used to attend classical performances and used to write about them. I wanted to know how I could blend Kathak with other dance forms. I understood the similarities and celebrated the differences,” she says. And once she established her credentials as a performer, she blended flamenco, Bharatanatyam, tap dance and ballet with Kathak in various productions. “But I don’t perform any of them. I bring in the best people to do that,” she says.

After a 15-year stay, she left the U.K. for Dubai. Her expertise as a performer, choreographer and teacher saw the birth of Gurukul Dubai where over 200 students are learning Kathak now. “Dubai was glamorous, but it didn’t have the bridges to connect with art. We started a Gurukul to create that,” she says. Now she stays in Switzerland, “thanks to my husband’s transferable job”, where she is planning to set up a studio.

The dancer reaches out to people with special needs, the physically challenged and those in old age homes, something that she isn’t quite comfortable discussing about. “It was a promise that I gave to someone special,” she says.

Pali has also been holding sessions for visually challenged persons across the globe. “I was taught that 74 per cent of learning happens by observation. So, what about those who can’t see? Therefore I thought I should do something for them. When I take classes for them, I wear costumes with beads so that they can touch and feel...I wear glass bangles. But there are moments when you are left helpless. Like when I described the blue costume Rama was wearing, one of the students asked, ‘What is blue?’. I couldn’t say anything...,” her voice trails off.

Even as she juggles her time between her family (comprising husband, Vishal Chandra, and her twins, Arya and Surya) and her art, Pali is happy that she has fulfilled her mother’s dream. “She couldn’t learn dance, so she taught me dance even though I hated it in the beginning. When I was 18 or 19, she said that I had already fulfilled her dream...,” she says.

**The classes**

Pali Chandra’s online classes, conceptualised by Invis Multimedia, a pioneer in developing digital content related to various fields, will be formally launched in October. “Online education is the in thing. We are planning a series on India’s culture and heritage and dance education is the first in that. Pali’s sessions will be divided into three – beginners, intermediate and advanced,” says M.R. Hari, managing director, Invis Multimedia.

**Fact file**

Pali Chandra, a graded member of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, has conducted workshops for Oxford University, Birmingham University, the London School of Contemporary Dance, and Bradford University, and has been honoured at the House of Commons in London as the Best Art Director for her production ‘In the Shadow of the Hills’. Her productions include ‘Sufi Noor’, ‘Rhythm Shift’ and ‘Khamoshi ki Awaaz’ with dancers from India, Canada, the U.K. and Dubai.