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Nurture art to set apart

By Ananda Shankar Jayant | Published: 01st October 2016 12:00 AM | Last Updated: 03rd October 2016 04:41 PM | A+ A- |



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Guru—the Sanskrit word for teacher, who dispels the darkness of ignorance from the students' minds with light of knowledge.

In pan-Indian traditions, a guru is interpreted as an expert, master, a life coach, a spiritual guide and the one who imparts knowledge to the student or shishya.

In the world of Indian arts, this practice of passing on an art form from a teacher to a disciple is called the guru-shishya parampara, an exquisite tradition where a student spends years, learning and honing talent under a guru.

In the 70s, I spent an immersive six years at Kalakshetra, learning Bharatanatyam, music, and philosophy.

While popular descriptions portray a guru as someone senior, and mature; today, a classical dance guru can be as young as 20 years old.

While traditionalists balk at this and are derisive about the young brigade as gurus, I beg to differ and am all for young teachers of dance. I encourage all my senior students to teach because when you teach, you learn more.

Let's call out the elephant in the room. Dance is an expensive art form. Too much outflow and very little inflow, at least when a dancer is up and coming. Costumes, orchestra, recording, lights, stage and brochures, all demanding NEFT transfer like right now.

So how can a budding, young dancer—without an inheritance overflow, a wealthy background or patronage—support his/her art? Teaching is the best way forward. Teaching dance is truly the professional equivalent to a paying career in dance, which in turn can nurture the performance aspirations of a dancer without compromise, and not be at the mercy of patrons, impresarios or the bounced cheque. Teaching will not only nurture wallets, but will also enrich creativity. And if a young teacher is teaching, so that it enables her to perform, that's even better. The traditionalist disdain further encompasses those, who may choose not to continue classical dance to become only performing artists.

In the absence of a structured career in dance, is it even right to expect the young of today to choose only dance as a career? Why can it not be an alternate career or a passion pursued alongside any other more structured career option? It's time we redefined dance beyond only performance. Not everyone can or will or wants to be only a performing dancer. Let as many children learn. Let as many young dancers teach. I started teaching when I was 17.

Dance or any other art teaches children focus, dedication, grace, sharing, sense of community and more. These are the tools that will make them better humans.

Let us lobby for the vertical and horizontal spread of the classical arts with widespread accessibility provided for in schools, alongside dance and music classes.

Let us as civil society invest in an engagement with arts, thereby offering the blessing of arts in the lives we touch.

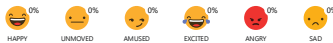
To me that is the purpose of all art—beyond performance, beyond career, and beyond all materialistic traps. Art is to elevate us and help us become better human beings. And the more art we expose our youth to, the more we make the planet a better place.

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