



Classical steps for a stress-free life

● Vaishali Vijaykumar

Flipping through the pages of the book *What is Bharathanatyam*, one might wonder how dance can be used as a self-help tool for a stress-free life. As we chat with dancer-turned-author Vidya Bhavani Suresh, the understanding gets simpler. The dancer with a Masters degree in folklore and 32 years of experience in dance quit her job as a company secretary 19 years back. Since then, she has been authoring books on Indian classical dance and music with the aim of taking the performing art traditions to the reader in a simple and understandable format. The series is titled 'Demystifying Fine Arts' and she initially started with around 25 monographs. Later, she moved on to large volumes of 300 to 400 pages, covering the subject in depth. Around a dozen such volumes have now been released.

In her latest book, *What is Bharathanatyam*, she has tried to bring the best of both worlds — dance and life lessons. The first half introduces the reader to the basic concepts of Bharatanatyam while the second half — *Life Lessons through Bharatanatyam* — focuses on how ten concepts of Bharatan-



What is Bharatanatyam is available in book stores for around ₹1,200

atyam can be used in daily life to infuse positivity.

The daily experiences of the dancer triggered the idea for this book. "I've begun the book with *Navarasas* — the nine basic emotions — and the situations arousing them. The reader, who need not be a dancer, will be exposed to components of the dance forms like *adavu*, *bhava*, *jathi*, *abhinaya*, *margam*, and *mudra*," says Vidya who is thankful to her daughters Harshitha and Mahitha, who depict the dance movements through photos featured in the book. The basic introduction of the dance form is for people to understand the outline of the subject before getting into concepts and

meanings. The chapters in the second half of the book addresses the question 'How am I a better person because of dance?' "If dance means so much to a dancer, then what does it do to you internally? A student of mine who had to drop dancing because of a change in demography had watched one of my motivational videos. She called me up saying she was going to resume dancing in Rajasthan, where she stays. I was happy that the video was impactful. Dance exposes what the human mind perceives," she says.

In the second half, the author has discussed work-life balance, time management, social comparisons, the art of living, appreciation and joy of little things in 10 essays. Every concept has a moral story to make it relatable to common man. Quoting one of her essays on *Mudra*, she says that in spite of having no solid props on the stage, the Bharatanatyam *mudras* manage to guide the viewer's perceptions towards many things. This highlights the power of perception of human mind and conveys that many aspects of stress ultimately boil down to an individual's perception



of the situation. Recalling a real-life incident where dance helped in her decision-making process, Vidya says, "Twenty years back, I was asked to choreograph for a fusion musical by KJ Yesudas and Ricardo Barantees. The dance team was in its nascent stage and we had only 15 days to prepare. I utilised the dancing expertise and skills of the individual performers and managed to give a different performance. We had two choices — either to back off from the performance or to go ahead with what was available. Choosing the latter was a result of perception."

The images supplementing every essay makes it easy for readers to connect. The dancers have captured the expressions through hand gestures and bodily movements making it visually appealing.

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