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Beyond the rigours of training that Bharatanatyam entails lie lessons that can help you deal with the pressures of daily life, gracefully

Vidya Bhavani Suresh

**A**s I was waiting outside the lift of a corporate building one day, I saw a young girl getting out of a cab and rushing towards the lift with wet hair. It was 10 am in the morning, and from the laptop and lunch bags that she was holding, it was obvious that she was going for work. As we got into the lift, I noticed that she was trying to dry her hair by running her fingers through it. While I felt sorry to see that she was hard-pressed for time, I also started to wonder as to how we dancers managed to get ready for performances that call for systematic two-and-a-half hours of make-up. The preparation time for Kathakali is six hours. Why is it that most people find it difficult to allot 10 minutes per day to getting ready comfortably? By that evening, I started to wonder if my being systematic and organized was thanks to the disciplining that Bharatanatyam had inculcated in me. This thought really surprised me because I had never thought about it so far. I started to think of concepts of Bharatanatyam from where one could draw inspiration to make life positive and less stressful. Here are seven concepts of Bharatanatyam that contain life lessons.

#### A PADAM TO HANDLE SOCIAL MEDIA

Padam is a type of composition in Bharatanatyam. There's a traditionally popular padam called Aduvum Solluval, which holds a big message for us. The composition elaborates the state of mind of a lady who is extremely angry and jealous at the riches, jewellery and silks of her competitor. The padam shows one how negative, agonizing, and heart-breaking jealousy can be. If you were to apply the example to life today, you don't have to look further than how social media has people in tremendous heartache for comparing themselves with the seemingly perfect lives of others. Pictures and updates of exotic holidays, lunches and what not make others feel less lucky, and we almost thought that such distress was a new-fangled issue! If there is one lesson Aduvum Sol-



# LIFE LESSONS FROM BHARATANATYAM



**IN FORM:** Holistic in their approach, Indian classical dance forms help young students balance studies and nurture creativity

lval teaches you it's that there's no need for you to be jealous of others because you have no idea of what distress they are facing under their perfect exteriors.

#### NRITTA, ABHINAYA AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Is it one's professional or personal life that should take precedence? This is a constant tussle for many. Bharatanatyam is a true celebration of duality. Nritta (pure dance) and abhinaya (communication) blend beautifully to create the splendorous visual that Bharatanatyam is. One to the exclusion of the other

would lead to a very drab viewing experience. Similarly, in life too, if we can blend our personal and professional lives without trying to excel in one and compromising on the other, our lives would become so much more wholesome and zestful. Like Nritta and abhinaya, personal and professional lives are but two sides of the same coin.

#### THALA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIORITISING TIME

The entire visual beauty of Bharatanatyam is built on a perfectly logical, mathematical, no-nonsense concept – tha-

la, the rhythmic indicator. Bharatanatyam trains the mind to fit any elaboration or any pure dance sequence within correct time cycles, for non-adherence leaves the visual looking very slipshod. If we similarly train our minds to work in a way where we have our pulse on the undercurrent of time, we will eliminate a lot of stressful situations. It's just mental training to allot sufficient, realistic time slots for each activity and work towards finishing them without any spill-over, just as the thala guides us.

#### SANCHARI AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Sanchari is the art of elaborating a story or an idea. A good sanchari is created only if minute details are effectively presented. In Bharatanatyam especially, where there are no props, it is this detailing that makes the viewing meaningful and interesting. For example, a dancer portraying Krishna has to look sufficiently upwards to notice the pot of butter hanging to enable the viewer to exactly place the pot from which Krishna tries to

steal butter. Let's come to real life. Amidst the rush and grind of life, little joys and details are often forgotten. Minute and minor details which look insignificant in the larger scheme of things many a time assume a lot of importance. If we think about it, every day is nothing but a string of many such moments, which go perfectly but we gloss over their goodness. The piping-hot coffee in the morning, being able to catch the metro to work, the traffic-free drive, getting the weekend movie tickets for the entire family in the preferred row, bumping into an old colleague at a mall and unexpectedly bonding... the concept of Sanchari helps us understand the importance of every little detail which helps us realise that life is so much more enriching on a daily basis than we thought it is.

#### MARGAM AND THE NEED TO ABIDE

A core feature of the dance form, Margam delineates the path of a Bharatanatyam performance. Though many regard the margam as inflexible, it can in fact very beautifully be treated as a boundary or a directive within which new ideas and elements can be infused while remaining well within the realm of tradition. Your job can be perceived this way too. Though many of us wrongly wonder – Am I forced to go the beaten track? Is my job snipping away at my individuality? – margam tells us that one's job may not be such a rigid path and may, in fact, be a workable template.

#### RECOGNITION AND BHAVA & SATHVIKA ABHINAYA

Am I appreciated, noticed and understood at my place of work or by my family? Most of us ponder over this question, wondering if our heartfelt actions go unnoticed and unacknowledged. The concept of Bhava and Sathvika Abhinaya help us understand that it is not so. Bhava is emotion while Sathvika abhinaya, a type of abhinaya, encompasses all the involuntary expressions that are caused by deep feelings. Such depth of expression is always perceived and appreciated by viewers. Similarly, in life too, any gesture done with feeling is noticed by everyone around.

The writer is a Bharatanatyam exponent, musician and author of books on Indian performing arts

#### MUDRA AND PERCEPTION

In spite of being the sole point of communication with the audience, mudras in Bharatanatyam manage to guide viewers' perceptions towards many things. This is achieved even when the same mudra has multiple meanings. Mudras teach us the power of perception of the human mind and convey the message that many aspects of stress ultimately boil down to the individual's perception of the situation. Similarly, we need to train our minds to perceive stressful situations as opportunities to sharpen our crisis-management skills. Even trying moments, in their odd ways, can have us feeling victorious about how we wriggled successfully out of a complex issue. It all lies in perception, after all.

