

When art teaches you how to live

A book on Bharatnatyam draws on concepts from dance form for inspiration to make life less stressful

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MUMBAI

An everyday event such as entering the lift of a corporate office sparked an idea for a book on Bharatnatyam.

On one such occasion, Vidya Suresh saw a young girl getting out of a taxi and rushing towards the lift with wet hair. "It was 10 am, and from the laptop and lunch bags she was holding, it was obvious that she was going to work," she recalled. As they got into the lift, Ms. Suresh noticed the girl drying her hair by running her fingers through it. "While I felt extremely sorry that she was

hard-pressed for time, I also started to wonder how dancers manage to get ready for performances calling for two-and-a-half hours of make-up. The preparation time for Kathakali is six

hours. Why do most people find it difficult to allot 10 minutes a day to getting ready comfortably?"

By late that evening, Ms. Suresh began to write about Aharya Abhinaya, the right persona. And the next day, she started to think of more concepts from Bharatnatyam for inspiration to make life less stressful. Her book, *What is Bharatnatyam*, looks at gaining deeper insights into life through the dance form. The book draws upon legends, anecdotes and folklore for insights into the art form as well.

This book blends two seemingly unconnected streams: a traditional art form and contemporary life. The first segment of the book is dedicated to explaining the basic concepts of the art form. "I wanted the book to



Stress buster: Vidya Suresh started learning Bharatnatyam at the age of five. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

be understood even by people who have no knowledge of Bharatanatyam," Ms. Suresh said.

She started learning Bharatnatyam at the age of five

from the dance couple V.P. Dhnanjayan and Shanta Dhnanjayan. At 12, she started learning from K.J. Sarasa, performing her *arange-tram* at 16. She went on to do interpretative and research-oriented performances, which she continues till date.

Apart from integrating principles of Bharatnatyam in today's stressful existence, she has a word of advice for young dancers wanting to take forward their journey. "Once a young dancer starts out as a performer, it's important to remember that the medium should evolve as an expression of one's innermost convictions and creativity." Dancers must move beyond what is taught to them, and introduce their own choreography. "This will take them to a totally different level of performing."

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