

BHARATNATYAM ARTIST, AUTHOR PROMOTE PERFORMING ART FORMS

Husband-wife duo makes a mark in the world of publishing with their individual skills and tireless efforts

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Vidya Bhavani Suresh's new book 'A Comprehensive Dictionary of Bharatnatyam', published by Skanda Publications, has breathed new life into the art form, offering an extensive resource that both enriches the understanding of traditional dance and inspires a new generation to explore its beauty.

By meticulously documenting the terminology and intricacies of Bharatnatyam, the book focuses on motivating young people to engage with and appreciate this classical dance form.

Skanda Publications was born about 17 years ago to create awareness about various classical, folk, and traditional performing art forms through books and related materials like cards, calendars, and brochures. It is the brainchild of advocate turned media person BA Suresh.

His spouse, Vidya Bhavani Suresh, is a renowned Bharatnatyam exponent and musicologist who gave up her career as a company secretary to devote all her time to Skanda.

Vidya authors the books, while Suresh handles the editing and publishing of the volumes.

In addition to being an author, Vidya is an entrepreneur and a motivational speaker. She regularly conducts workshops on 'Appreciating Indian Heritage' - a message that motivates the couple in everything they do. They strive to preserve Indian heritage in this highly globalised world. Vidya also runs a successful YouTube channel where she explains topics such as Carnatic music and folk arts in detail.

"In today's scenario where all these OTT platforms are streaming content from across the world, I think it's very important that somebody screams from the rooftop that 'this is our heritage'. Otherwise, our folk arts will become like Sanskrit - we will start talking about them in the past tense. Trying to keep your



Vidya Bhavani Suresh and BA Suresh

heritage alive is also your duty to your country," said Vidya.

In the challenging and eventful 22 years, the Skanda catalogue, going strength-to-strength, has touched 43 books encompassing a wide range of performing arts.

"Suresh is an advocate from Trivandrum Law College, and I'm from Pallakad, but we speak Tamil as we live in Chennai.

"I'm a company secretary by profession. Suresh worked with two prominent media houses in the circulation department. I have an MA in folklore, which gives an in-depth reach into culture, sociology, mass communication, and anthropology. I had never dreamt of writing a book."

Talking about how she wrote her first book, which was self-published, Vidya said,

"After my marriage, I used to do a lot of talks with the Rotary Club on Bharatnatyam to take it closer to the user; attendees would ask a lot of questions. After one such particular engaging talk, Suresh told me that, given my expertise, I should write a book on this topic. So that was how our first book, less than 100 pages, 'Appreciating Bharatnatyam', was born."

When asked if she was ever hesitant or regret-

ful as she began this journey, Vidya replied, "When people plunge into something, they rarely think. I can tell you that I was a little afraid at times, but there was this innate sense of confidence that never allowed room for hesitation. Of course, there are days when I have thought that it is too challenging to bring up three kids along with this or days when we don't get any appointments and bills are piling up. But then again, there are days when we get a huge book order unexpectedly. We have seen all kinds of extremes, as is expected in entrepreneurship."

BA Suresh told Pune Times Mirror their mantra: "There was never the question of closing

down shop and going back to our old jobs. We knew what we wanted, and we worked constantly to make that a reality. It seemed to us that God had decided this path for us.

"I always say this: don't review, meaning don't look back. Live in the present and believe that you can achieve what you want."

Vidya added, "Writing that first book set us on the path definitely. It did two things: it gave us the confidence that we were on the right track, and it gave us a lot of visibility as it got tremendously noticed. As they say in our culture, 'A young deer knows no fear'. Just when our first kid was nearing four years, we decided to leave both of our jobs and go into publishing full-time. Looking back, I still cannot believe how courageous we were.

"After we left our jobs, everyone wrote us off, except my mother. The first two years were very hard, and that was also the time of my second pregnancy, which turned out to be twins. Instead of discouraging us, this gave us more confidence. It was the driving force that kept us going. By the third year, we had found our footing, having published 24 booklets that were around 32 pages."

Today, the pair publishes one book a year, with the writing process taking only a month or so.

Talking about the booklets, Suresh explained, "I wanted to make the booklets accessible at a small price. However, owing to demands from corporates and booksellers, we had to scale up from 40 to 400-page books."

Their book launches were of a grand scale, even at the beginning, with chief ministers from Himachal Pradesh to Kerala and personalities such as APJ Abdul Kalam in attendance.

Vidya admits that such publicity and marketing are Suresh's strengths. Their areas of work are defined and aligned with each other but do not overlap. They have been able to draw courage from each other and achieve such success.

Vidya's advice for young aspiring artists: "You need two things: a solid support system and to make the confident decision of being an artist at a young age. Having a support system is extremely important. You should also be confident in your skill set; any idea is workable, no matter how out-of-the-box it looks."

