Life, Love and Dance
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In My Opinion

Life, Love and Dance

How bharata natyam brought me close to God

Bhadra Sinha

I was four when I started my sojourn into this beautiful aspect of life. Dance was my mother's passion, albeit an unfulfilled one. Therefore, I was the lucky one. When I informed my school friends and neighbors, they struck it off as child's play.

"Oh, it is good! Kids should learn something at your age," said the elders, while my contemporaries joked,"What are you learning? Hee, hee!" The snide side remarks did not bother me. With my parents' support and encouragement, I continued my learning avidly. I always looked forward to the classes, conducted twice a week. One miss of a class, on any account, used to be saddening. Hence, all my efforts were concentrated on keeping fit and eating well.

Obviously, this overwhelmed my parents. With God's grace, I have maintained a strict discipline, and all thanks go to the art form of dance. Enacting mythological stories in dance was fun and great to learn. The stories were intriguing, which as a kid, I

used to dream about.

One of the romantic scenes, the Vrindavan episode, where Krishna incarnated himself for every individual gopi, is very common. As kids, my friends and I used to absorb ourselves in performances depicting Krishna--Radha's love for Him, her persistent complaints to her friends about how he left her for another woman and how she loved him anyway. As a dancer performing this drama, I had to act Radha's part, and my guru used to stress: "Feel for him. He is your lover. Do not think about anybody else. Then only will you get the right expression on your face."

We were kids and therefore laughed at such directions. "How is it possible to love God," we thought. "How do you know what he looks like and whether he is good-looking or not?" These were some of the common questions we kids dwelled upon until the day we grew up.

It was difficult acting as Radha longing for her lover, one who is undefinable. It was hard, because an image is a must to love somebody. This practice did not give rise to the right bhava and emotions. It was mechanical and more of an effort. This was not acceptable to my guru. She kept pestering me to love Him. It was a difficult task, but I was determined to succeed.

Imagining Krishna as a lover was definitely overwhelming. But giving form to him was inappropriate. Therefore, I imagined my lover as a bindu--the point which I had to reach through dance. That became my target. With no image in mind, it was

a simple practice of knowing that bindu better. With the urge increasing, I experienced what it means to long for the Supreme Power, that there is no love better than the love for him. This makes one cheerful, chirpy and complete.

When I spoke about it, people called me mad. It made no difference to me. My dance improved. Expressions came naturally, and I felt close to the Supreme Power. I felt like a being emboldened into a new identity and form. All this happened to me at an early age. Though the conflict of modernity versus traditionalism continued, I learned to acknowledge both. Today I enjoy modern parties but do not forget that I have ideals to follow. All this has happened through dance. If the medium had not been there, I would have grown up to be a confused individual looking for identity.

There is a Kalidasa verse defining Goddess Parvati in Her overwhelming beauty and grace. The poet who wrote this was trying to evoke Her. Whether he could or not is unknown to me, but this effort was brought to my attention through the bharata natyam dance form. Dancing for the past 18 years has aided me to develop my perception as a classical person in this fast-evolving and developing country, where every youth is trying to ape the West. More than that, it has helped me blend my thoughts, both classical and modern. It sounds tough, but, believe me, it is not.

Bhadra Sinha, 22, is a reporter for the National Daily in India. She is the daughter of the late B. M. Sinha, long-time Hinduism Today correspondent in Delhi.