

# RHYTHM OF LIFE

*When movements are as eloquent as words, they translate into DANCE. Five women talk about how this art form helps them express, escape and DEFINE themselves*

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company (in 2001) after talking about it for three years. Every individual here has a well-defined role, depending on his or her skill and interest.

WE WANT TO EMPOWER dancers to pursue it as a profession. It is important for an artist to know and understand the business side of things. Otherwise artists tend to be lost in their own worlds.

“To be a good dancer, you need to be able to say, **NOTHING** comes before dance”

DANCE IS LIKE A JEALOUS HUSBAND, demanding all your time and attention. It is challenging and stressful and there are no fixed hours of work. To be a good dancer, you need to be able to say, ‘nothing comes before dance’.

THE ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE are extremely traditional and Indian. It is merely a modern representation of our Indian aesthetics. In my choreography, I borrow from various other fields like classical dance and martial arts.

CHOREOGRAPHY IS WHERE I BELONG. I love designing the dance, putting together various elements and seeing them come to life. I have a good visual sense and when I start a project, I can paint the whole picture in my mind. And I can communicate that in a simple manner to my team.

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## | Mayuri Upadhya, 30 |

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND PRINCIPAL CHOREOGRAPHER, NRITARUTYA

I AM A DANCER BY CHOICE, not by chance. Even before I was born, my mother had decided that her daughter would be a dancer. I started learning Bharatanatyam at the age of six, but there was never any pressure.

NRITARUTYA MEANS ‘DANCING TREE’. We are a group of friends who set up the

I WAS AWARDED the bronze medal last December at the International Competition for Choreography Plan organised by the Asian Dance Committee in Seoul, where I represented India among choreographers from 30 countries.

MY TEAM NRITARUTYA has performed recently at the DanSe Dialogue: Indo-French Contemporary Dance Festival in Bengaluru and ventured into acting with the English experimental dance film *Item Girl* directed by Oliver Husain.

## | Priyanka Pai, 34 |

DANCE THERAPIST

I HAD TWO SMALL DAUGHTERS when I first started learning contemporary dance from Brinda Jacob in Bengaluru. For the first time, I was able to give expression to who I am as a person. Even though I had learned Bharatanatyam as a child, I had never felt as liberated before.

I WAS A NATIONAL LEVEL SWIMMER I started learning everything I could – yoga, Pilates, Kalaripayattu.

PERFORMANCE IS SECONDARY in our studio SMART [Studio for Movement Arts and Therapies, set up in 2008].

I am more involved in dance as therapy. Here, you express what is inside you through movement, without talking about it.

“Here, you express what is inside you through MOVEMENT, without talking about it”

I HAVE SEEN HOW IT WORKS, how it brings about an overall change, especially in children – their personality, learning skills, attention levels. It is very satisfying when parents tell us that they can see significant improvement in their child, sometimes just after a couple of weeks.

CHILDREN IMITATE BETTER THAN THEY LISTEN so we start with basic movements. After that, there is no stress of performing to any expectations. The child is encouraged to express himself through his own movements.

IT IS VERY EFFECTIVE for children with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). They slowly settle down, get more involved in the sessions and over time, their destructive behaviour can be controlled.

WORKING WITH AUTISTIC CHILDREN needs a lot of patience. I have to repeat the same movements for months to make any impact. Then suddenly one day, there may be eye contact or a sign of interest. That feels like an achievement.

‘DANCE STORIES’ IS THE CLASS that I started in 2011, apart from handling SMART. Inspired by Eurythmy, the classes are for three and four year-olds, designed in keeping with their short attention spans. ▶



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I HAVE BEEN WORKING with French choreographer Michel Casanovas on a project called *Beyond the Mirror*, which is an expression of personal journeys of five artists presented in solos. I also presented my work at Festival Trobades 2011 in France.

## | Parinda Singh, 33 and Megha D'Souza, 31 |

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN DANCE INSTRUCTORS, TRIBE OF TAAL

WE MET AT NM COLLEGE, Mumbai.

[Megha] There was great chemistry from day one.

[Parinda] A choreographer taught us a mix of folk and classical, and we learnt Indian contemporary from her.

OUR FRIENDS REMEMBER US always running from one rehearsal to another.

[Parinda] After an MBA, I worked in advertising and still work in the television industry. Dancing is a great way to de-stress.

[Megha] I quit my job to concentrate on Tribe Of Taal.

WE FORMED OUR DANCE COMPANY Tribe Of Taal in January 2011.

[Megha] Recently we started Level 2 of our batch and Dance Fitness sessions for women. We also do workshops for children, our most recent being one for kids from the Salaam Baalak Trust.

INDIAN CONTEMPORARY DANCE

IS about coming out of the mould.

[Parinda] It is the rigidity of tradition meeting the flexibility of a non-conformist philosophy.

[Megha] It's upsetting that people aren't exploring what's out there because Bollywood has taken over.

WE ARE STILL LEARNING Kathak under Pandit Birju Maharaj. We've also trained with Indumati Lele, an authority in Indian folk dance.



“It's upsetting that people aren't exploring what's out there because BOLLYWOOD has taken over”

MEGHA

THREE QUALITIES A GOOD DANCER NEEDS ARE

[Megha] Fearlessness, passion and commitment.

[Parinda] An Indian contemporary dancer should be open to learning.

OUR DREAM IS TO Make Tribe of Taal a residential dance academy and platform to experiment with other dance forms.

[Parinda] We want to do for dance what Prithvi did for theatre.

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[Megha] I would love to present a stage musical of the *Mahabharata*.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WE FACE IS Training people to shed their inhibitions.

[Megha] When I was a teenager, a choreographer kept asking me to “push my chest out”. That’s when I realised the more awkward I felt, the worse I looked.

[Parinda] Explaining rhythm is hard – there are people born with it, and for some, it is a challenge.

## | Miti Desai, 31 |

MOHINIYATTAM SOLOIST

I COME FROM A FAMILY OF ARCHITECTS so there’s always been creativity in the family. I started learning Bharatanatyam at a young age.

APPLIED ART IS WHAT I STUDIED at Mumbai’s Sophia College for five years. Upon graduating, I was dissatisfied with the commercial art scenario.

I STUMBLED UPON A DESIGN PROGRAM in the US and enrolled at the Portfolio Center, Atlanta. But at 21, I had the urge to return to India. I asked my parents to find me a dance teacher and my mother located Mandakini Trivedi in Mumbai. Later I found out that she teaches a completely different dance form – Mohiniyattam. But I connected with her, and trained intensively for eight years.

MASTERING MOHINIYATTAM is different to Bharatanatyam. The latter is more outward, with dynamic lines. Mohiniyattam is soft and introverted – with a lot of swaying and circling movements. It’s all about mime, expression and theatrical storytelling, which I love to do.

“Walking away from the tide can be DIFFICULT, but it’s worth it”

DANCE IS AN EDUCATION and you’re never ‘done’ with training. I’ve also studied theatre at the Bauhaus School of Design in Germany.

DESIGN AND DANCE ARE TWO SIDES OF A COIN. It’s just a different medium of expression. My design background is contemporary, but I practise a traditional dance form. I founded my consultancy, Miti Design Lab, in 2009 and am currently pursuing an MA in Design Education from Goldsmiths, University of London.

I WILL PERFORM ON THE RUNWAY as part of The Good Fashion Show, which is on the off-schedule of London Fashion Week 2012. Later this month, I have a lecture-performance at the Royal College of Art called The Design of Dance.

I’M VERY THANKFUL FOR this way of life. I like to balance dance and design – even if it means earning less. Walking away from the tide can be difficult, but it’s worth it. ■

PHOTOGRAPHER ARJUN MARK; MAKE-UP AND HAIRSTYLISTS SANDHYA SHEKAR, NENG CHONG AND SANTOSH VELU FOR JEAN-CLAUDE BIGUINE, BENGALURU  
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