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Spotlight

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Conversation with Ramji, Secretary Music Academy, Chennai

Prakṛti and Creativity:

Finding Balance in the Way We Create

Health

Strong, Graceful, Unstoppable:
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CREATIVE LIVING

Arts and Features

Mesma Belsaré

A Life built on courage, vulnerability and creative living.

Photo Credit: *Paul Herb*



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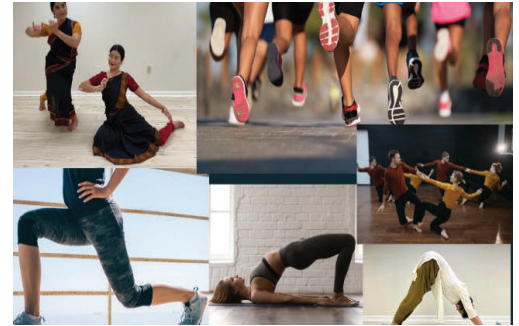
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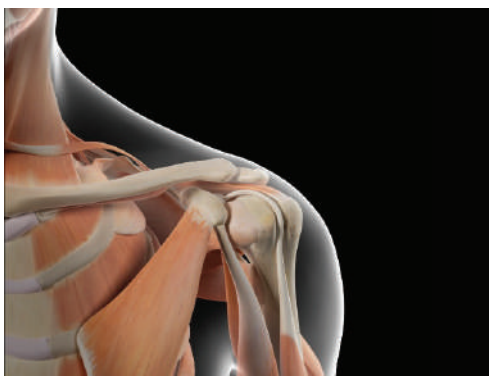
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Editorial



The Art of Creative Living

**Finding possibility in the ordinary!
*A lesson from Lagaan.***

One of my all-time favorite movies is Aamir Khan's *Lagaan*. The Oscar-nominated film unfolds in an impoverished, drought-ridden province under British colonial rule. When the British double the annual land tax, the desperate villagers plead for relief. Instead, Captain Russell issues an audacious challenge: if the villagers can defeat the British at cricket — a game they have never played — their taxes will be waived for three years; if they refuse or lose, the tax will triple.

At first, the villagers turn against Bhuvan, the protagonist who accepts the bet. But Bhuvan sees opportunity where others see only

This is creative living — the quiet, everyday power to respond, adapt, and imagine something new with what we have.

despair — a chance to free the village from crushing taxes and reclaim dignity. Patiently,

he assembles a team, recognizing latent strengths in everyday lives: a chicken farmer's quick reflexes become fielding skill, the village drummer's powerful arms hold batting promise, and even a so-called "untouchable" discovers spin bowling through the unsteady turn of his wrist. Through this process, differences dissolve and a collective goal ignites hope in the community.

On the day of the match, neighbor-

ing villages gather, aware their own future is tied to the game's outcome. Against all odds and after a tense, unpredictable match, the villagers triumph.

This is creative living. The quiet, everyday power to respond, adapt, and imagine something new with what we have. It's not only for artists or inventors; it's for everyone — weighing choices, making decisions, taking action — who meet challenges with curiosity and courage. Whether or not we claim creativity, the impulse to imagine and create lives at the heart of being human.

As you turn these pages, you'll meet artists and educators who embody this spirit of creative living — finding meaning through movement and mindfulness.

As we look ahead to 2026, may we develop a "stretch mindset" and focus on being creative with what we have.

We wish you all a merry Christmas and a very creative New Year!

Founder & Editorial Curator, Global Indian Artist LLC

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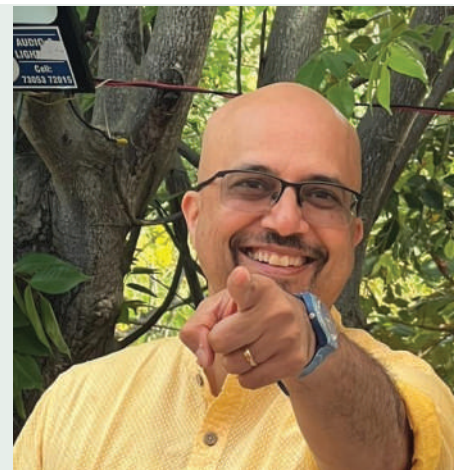
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Cover Story

Arts & Features



Mesma Belsaré

A Life in Art - Vulnerability. Courage. Creative Living.

By Anita Vallabh, Ph.D.



Photo Credit: Paul Herb.

Dance and painting are like two limbs of the same body. When one gets tired, the other takes over.

There is no mistaking Mesma Belsaré's warmth and intelligence. I first met her in 2023 at the University of Hawai'i, where she was in residence on a Dance/USA Fellowship and I was serving as visiting faculty. Even in that brief encounter, her clarity of purpose and quiet radiance left a lasting impression. When we reconnected in early 2025, she invited me into her home. Stepping inside her home felt like entering a space alive with art — where every wall seemed to breathe color, memory, and meaning.

Belsaré's art, much like her dance, moves between devotion and daring — a dialogue between discipline and the freedom to feel. In this conversation for Global Indian Artist, she reflects on her early years, her dual practice of dance and painting, the transformative arc of her transition, and her groundbreaking museum work that has redefined Indian American representation in the arts.

Tell us about your early years, the moments and influences that first drew you toward dance and painting.

I come from a family of scientists. My parents were supportive, but art was unfamiliar territory for them. My elder sister attended Shri Shankar Hombal's Bharatanatyam classes at Kalapadma Dance Academy in Bhopal, and when I was seven, I insisted on joining her. I used to hide dance clothes in my school bag and make excuses to sneak away to class. Years later, when I left medical school to pursue art, I knew I was choosing a difficult path — one with no clear promise of stability. There was no arangetram, no family legacy, no influence or connections in the art world. But I still wanted to fly.

What kept me going was a mix of stubborn conviction and the generosity of my gurus. Geeta akka (Padmashri Geeta Chandran) never demanded fees when I couldn't pay — and that happened many times.

She gave freely, without in judgment. That kind of grace is rare. I've been lucky to have teachers like her, Shri Shankar Hombal and Dr. Maya Kulkarni, who shared their knowledge with immense generosity, care and faithmy ability to carry it forward.

Painting was a safe solace for a shy child escaping expectations. I painted in solitude during the long summer vacations. My mother, who worked full-time at the university, would leave simple line drawings of flowers to keep me occupied. I was four or five years old. I'd try to copy them, always frustrated that I couldn't capture her fluid, confident lines. Later, my father's travels brought home catalogues of paintings by Rembrandt and Raphael. I didn't know who they were — I just loved looking at them and trying to paint them in my own naïve way. Like many Indian artists, I was deeply influenced by the bhitti-chitra of Ajanta and Thanjavur, and later by modernists like A. Ramachandran, Anjolie Ela Menon, Gogi Saroj Pal and H.S. Raza, who showed me how our visual traditions can flow into the contemporary.



Photo Credit: Prachi Dalal.

I have seen your performance as well as your paintings. They are both intense. How do you sustain two emotionally demanding, visually intense art forms, and how does each one creatively inform or challenge the other?

I am not sure if intensity is something you manage or moderate. It's something you learn to ride, like learning to stay on a horse that's already galloping. Intensity will sustain you. We don't need to sustain it. When you ask how I sustain two emotionally demanding forms, you might be thinking that they're draining me. But they're not. They're drawing me toward each other, creating a circulation system.

Dance and Painting are like two limbs of the same body. When one gets tired, the other takes over. Painting teaches me patience that dance won't tolerate. I follow the old masters' techniques of working through studies, sketches, preparing the ground and the mediums, grinding earth pigments, layering thin, translucent paint. This teaches me to wait, to let time do its mysterious work.

When I'm staring at a canvas that refuses to cooperate, I go to the dance floor. Dance, the art of the instant, masks this waiting stretched over long decades of working. But in that moment of dance, your body either knows the answer or it doesn't. This back-and-forth between waiting and immediacy keeps me from calcifying in either direction.

From the point of view of directive literature/shastra— the Natyashastra, Chitrastutra, Shilpashastra – cross referencing across various artistic disciplines is required, not just recommended. The lesson on kakshā-vibhāg in the Chitrastutra, for instance, teaches how to create variations in spacetime on a flat surface. This is exactly what we do on stage in dance. We have to only look at the stage as a two-dimensional plane from a higher vantage! Varna (color), pramāna (proportion), sthāna (posture/-placement) etc. are interchangeable terms between so-called static and kinetic arts. The dancing and the painted body are both governed by māna (measure) and sthiti (stability). Thus we consider the kinetic (dance) and spatial arts (painting) in an elastic concert with one another. That is what lends each its vitality and the quality of “chaitanya” or “alive-ness”.

Dance without painting would become too caught up in the moment's urgency. Painting without dance would become too static, strangled by its own deliberation. Together, they create a continuous flow like breathing—expansion and contraction, the rhythm of being alive.

People assume intensity burns you out. But I've found the opposite is true. Intensity, when it flows between forms, becomes renewable. Moments of despair in one are immediately metabolised by the other. The refusal to keep things neatly in categories is where the interesting discoveries happen.

How did your early experiences in the U.S.—both within the Indian American community and beyond—shape your sense of belonging and creative path as an artist?



Submission, oil on canvas.



Symphony of Dancers, oil on canvas.

Art had taught me that identity was creative work.



Photo Credit: Paul Herb.

When I migrated to the U.S., the Indian American community embraced me with extraordinary warmth. People drove me to grocery stores, opened their hearts and homes, and offered kindness with no expectation of return. These gestures may be commonly experienced by many students and immigrants, but that doesn't diminish their beauty or impact. My first public performance in Boston — at the India Independence Day celebration at the Hatch Shell — came through the invitation of Ranjani Saigal, whose belief in me was both grounding and joyous. Later, the curators of the Indo-American Arts Council's Erasing Borders festival — Prachi Dalal, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, Aroon Shivdasani, and Rajika Puri — extended that same spirit of trust and generosity. No artist thrives alone; I am here because a community opened its arms.

And then there is Robert, my partner. We met before my transition, and his steadfastness through that journey has been one of the deepest acts of love I've known. Many lose their companions in such moments; I did not. His compassion and courage carried me through the darkest phases, and his love opened new worlds of music from the opera and European classical traditions— music of resilience and passion that found echoes in my own art. All these streams—

the community that held me, the mentors who guided me, the love that endured —fused into an alchemy of desire: to create from a place of truth, tenderness, and wonder.

How has your experience of moving from one gender identity to another informed the direction and expression of your art?

I never thought my transition extraordinary, but a necessary alignment between inner truth and outer expression. It was neither political statement nor social assertion, but a quiet rearrangement that allowed me to move through the world with greater harmony.

Yet this apparent simplicity masked enormous complexity. As a dancer in my prime, I had to rebuild my instrument completely. The body I had trained for years changed, requiring me to rediscover how to inhabit and express through this new form. I had to reinvent not only my relationship to my art but my entire professional identity.

On the other side an enormous reward came with my transition: the internal discord resolved, freeing energy that could flow into creative work rather than being consumed by the exhaustion of pretense.

Perhaps more significantly, I learned to extend patience and grace toward others as they adjusted. We often overlook this in contemporary discourse about trans experience. We forget that our changes require emotional adjustment from people who care about us. Their lives, too, are touched by our transformations.

During my student years I worked as a nude model for life drawing classes at Mass College of Art and Design. It was a hard job for little money. But holding poses in the nude for hours taught me that my body could speak even when stripped of clothes. Martha Graham said "movement never lies." I discovered my body couldn't lie either. Then came the nightclub dancing gigs—sequined and feathered clothes, splintered floors, dark hours, trying to make rent. It was risky work. But it also made me fearless.

So transitioning, in fact, aligned with my artistic trajectory. It was perhaps the most complete artistic act I'd undertaken. Like in any creative process, much had to be discarded in the editing act of crafting a new identity—every program brochure, press review, public acknowledgment. Like Sisyphus at the bottom of the hill, I started to roll that rock up again.

Art had shown me that change was possible. Imagination let me envision a version of myself that aligned with my inner truth before the external world could accommodate it. Art had taught me that identity was creative work. Each day, we compose ourselves anew through countless small choices. Understanding this fluidity has deepened both my art and my spiritual practice, revealing the malleable nature of what we assume is fixed.



Shiva's Procession, oil on canvas.



Photo Credit: Prachi Dalal.

The work that emerged afterward—SIREN, Plato, Medea, Carmine Bees, Vermin's Will, Jatayu—wasn't about transition. These pieces emerged from what becomes possible when an artist drops the veil of pretense and becomes truly vulnerable. There is freedom and beauty in that kind of surrender. And once I understood that, I was free to throw caution to the wind and embrace creativity in an authentic way.

You spent a decade at the Peabody Essex Museum before moving to MassArt Art Museum as Curator of Education. Help me understand that arc. What were you building? And what impact did your work have on establishing Indian American cultural presence in museums of national significance?

My museum work emerged from a conviction that art galleries are living, breathing spaces where cultural memory and contemporary imagination meet. After earning my Masters in Art Education from Massachusetts College of Art and Design in 2004, I spent a decade at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, later moving to MassArt Art Museum as Curator of Education. I now see them as platforms from which I could amplify voices that were somewhat muted in America's cultural landscape.

At the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM), I encountered the extraordinary Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection—over 1,200 works by 70 of India's leading modern artists, including M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, Manjit Bawa, Tyeb Mehta, Ganesh Pyne, Nalini Malani, Bhupen Khakhar, Gieve Patel, and Arpita Singh. The museum had opened the first American gallery devoted to India's modern and contemporary art in

For the first time, the Indian diaspora had agency within a major art museum.



Photo Credit: Gajen Sunthara.

2003; I arrived soon after, working to activate that space and make it pulse with life beyond the gallery walls.

Over the next decade, my focus was on what I call “looking and learning” through objects—creating educational experiences as diverse as the visitors themselves. I developed programs for adults, families, and students; designed guides and interpretation tools; and mentored more than 400 young people through a federal internship initiative.

My most significant contribution came through co-creating Sensational India! with mentors Ray Williams and Vas Prabhu. Launched in 2005, the festival transformed PEM's relationship with the Indian American community and became a national model for presenting contemporary Indian art—drawing thousands each year and earning the full sponsorship of the diaspora itself.

That last point matters deeply. For the first time, the Indian diaspora had agency within a major art museum of historic and national significance. We partnered with MITHAS, Learn Quest Academy, New England Malayalee Association, New England Telugu Association of Greater Boston, universities, and numerous community groups. These were genuine collaborations, and not token gestures, that gave the diaspora

ownership over how their culture was presented and celebrated.

Our programming was intentionally sophisticated and varied, featuring luminaries such as Shashi Tharoor, Madhur Jaffrey, Mira Nair, and authors Bharati Mukherjee and Amitav Ghosh. Dance presentations included Raja and Radha Reddy's *Natya Tarangini*, *Nrityagram*, Anita Ratnam's *Neo Bharatam*, Lakshmi Vishwanathan, Geeta Chandran, Chitresh Das, Rama Vaidyanathan, and a *Kudiyattam* troupe from Kerala. U.S.-based companies such as Hema Rajagopalan's *Natya Dance Theater*, *Dakshina*, *Parul Shah Dance Company*, *Sa Dance Company*, and *Chitresh Das Dance Company*, along with sitar maestro Kartik Seshadri, drew packed audiences.

We screened Merchant Ivory classics (*Shakespeare Wallah*, *Autobiography of a Princess*) with Ty Burr in conversation with James Ivory, and premiered Shirish Korde's chamber opera on *Phoolan Devi*. We offered hands-on workshops: rangoli floor decorations, henna application, Madhubani folk painting workshops, kite-making, and storytelling sessions.

I also designed *Art360*, a learning series for adults that offered deeper, multi-perspective gallery experiences through three-part classes on photography exhibitions featuring Jerry Uelsmann, Barbara Bosworth, and Ansel Adams, as well as Hudson River School landscape paintings. Each series brought in art professors, artists, photographers, photojournalists—voices that could illuminate the work from unexpected angles. I coordinated *PEM/PM: Unconventional Gatherings for Creative Minds*, informal evening events featuring contemporary visual and performance artists, speakers, photographers, jugglers, street artists, musicians, chefs, plus art-making activities for adults. We were reaching young professionals, showing them the museum could be their space too.

My work extended beyond PEM's walls. I taught portfolio enrichment at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, symbolism in Indian art and architecture at Tufts University's Experimental College. During this period I was twice nominated for the Boston Foundation's Brother Thomas Fellowship award, and received an Artist Grant from the Cambridge Arts Council.

Throughout, my approach was interdisciplinary, multi-sensory, multidimensional. I worked across departments—curatorial, marketing, public relations, integrated media, creative services, development, membership, collections management. I conducted community outreach to cultural organizations, artists, and traditionally underrepresented communities.

When I moved to the MassArt Art Museum as Curator of Education, I carried forward this philosophy: that contemporary art spaces must be democratic, accessible, and alive. That education and curation are acts of care, of bridge-building, of honoring both the art and the people who encounter it.



Mesma Belsare and Ramya Shankaran.
Photo Credit: Nabil Kapasi.

Mesma Belsaré is a fascinating confluence of intellect and intuition, rigor and grace. Her art—whether danced or painted—reveals how living by what feels right is, in itself, the truest form of creative living.



Split, oil on canvas.

Music, Mind and Emotion:

The Resonant Bridge Between Sound, Self, and Beyond.

By Geetha R. Bhat



Nearly two decades ago, I initiated Hamsakutira with a simple intention: to connect people through music and take its power beyond performance spaces. What began as a passion has grown into a journey where healing has flowed both ways. While music has supported individuals with neurodiverse needs, the mutual exchange of emotion, trust, and connection has strengthened my own resilience as well. Over the years, I have worked closely with children and young adults with cognitive impairments, behavioural issues, sensory processing challenges, socio-emotional reciprocity difficulties and memory-related disorders. For many of these children, spoken language poses a daily challenge due to communication deficits or auditory language-processing difficulties. Some cannot reliably retrieve or produce speech, while others struggle to interpret the continuous stream of verbal input around them.

Clinically, I often think about how overwhelming it must feel to have limited speech abilities yet be surrounded by constant conversation. This awareness becomes especially important when I make music with a nonverbal child. In these sessions, communication shifts from words to shared sounds, rhythms, and emotional cues. The connection built through music often feels stronger and more meaningful than spoken language. For many children, this nonverbal space provides relief because it allows them to engage, express, and connect without the pressure of using or understanding words, creating a more comfortable and supportive therapeutic environment. The following article explores the connection between Indian classical music, the mind, and emotion, and how this relationship can support engagement and well-being.

Indian classical music is one of the world's oldest and most sophisticated musical systems. It is built on a philosophy in which art, ethics, and spirituality are closely connected. In this tradition, nāda (sound) is not just a form of artistic expression; it is seen as a path to understanding oneself. Grounded in the ideas of Nāda Yoga and bhakti, Indian classical music functions as a disciplined practice, a reflective experience, and a means for personal growth (ātma-vikāsa). The way rāgas and tālas are explored through improvisation naturally encourages deep concentration and mental absorption, similar to what modern psychology refers to as a "flow state" (Misra, 2017). For saint-composers such as the Trinity (Śrī Tyāgarāja, Śrī Śyāma Śāstri, and Śrī Muttusvāmi Dīksitar), Purandara Dāsa, and other contributors to the Bhakti movement, music was both devotion and communication, a way to express emotion, faith, and introspection.

Scientific research increasingly confirms what Indian aesthetics has intuited for centuries, that rāga-based music can influence both emotional and physiological states. Studies using electroencephalography (EEG) have shown that listening to classical compositions alters patterns of brain activity associated with relaxation and alertness. Sanyal and colleagues (2023) found that rāgas expressing different emotions affect arousal levels in listeners. Geethanjali et al. (2012) reported that both jazz and Carnatic music improve cognitive performance compared to hard rock, while Kumar et al. (2017) observed increases in alpha brain-wave activity, associated with calmness and concentration, when participants listened to Indian classical music. Furthermore, the aesthetic idea of rasa, first articulated in Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra, lies at the heart of this emotional connection. Each rāga evokes a specific bhāva, such as love, devotion, sorrow, or heroism, inviting both the performer and the listener into a shared emotional universe (rasānubhava). In psychological terms, this process refines empathy, emotional awareness, and self-regulation. Through the language of sound, emotion becomes art, and art becomes a means of transformation.

Neuroscientists have long noted that music is a powerful trigger of emotion. It activates brain regions such as the amygdala and limbic system, which regulate emotional responses, and it influences heart rate and hormone release (Hodges, 2010). Although music does not refer to real world events, it can evoke emotions as intense as those produced by actual experiences, highlighting its unique psychological impact (Scherer, 2009). Krumhansl (2002) explained that musical emotion often arises from tension and resolution built into the music's structure, where our feelings emerge from the balance between expectation and fulfillment. Earlier theorists like Meyer (1956) argued that music simply represents emotion rather than truly evokes it. However, research and lived experience suggest otherwise. Listeners consistently report joy, calmness, or sadness in response to music, and physiological markers support these reactions (Evans et al., 2008). Thus, the emotional power of music is both universal and deeply personal.



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The connection built through music often feels stronger and more meaningful than spoken language. For many children, this nonverbal space provides relief because it allows them to engage, express, and connect without the pressure of using or understanding words, creating a more comfortable and supportive therapeutic environment.



Empathy plays a central role in how we experience music. Individuals who are naturally more empathic tend to respond more strongly to the emotions expressed in musical passages (Egermann et al., 2013; Tabak, 2022). Shared musical experiences, such as concerts, rituals, or group singing, create collective emotional states that strengthen social connection (Liljestrom et al., 2013). Research also shows that developing empathy through musical engagement is associated with reduced aggression and improved social functioning (Eisenberg et al., 2001). Juslin and Västfjäll (2008) identified several ways music evokes emotion. Some responses are automatic, like startling sounds, while others link melodies to memories or imagery. Emotional contagion happens when listeners mirror the performer's feelings, and expectations in rhythm or harmony create surprise or relief. These processes combine biological and psychological factors, making musical emotion unique. Music also supports pleasure and relaxation (hedonic well-being) as well as meaning and purpose (eudaimonic well-being) (Ryff, 2008). In this way, music becomes both a mirror and a mediator, helping people understand emotional worlds beyond language.

Musical training, especially in childhood, enhances attention, memory, and emotional sensitivity (Moreno, 2009). Neuroimaging studies show that long-term musical involvement reshapes the brain (Gaser, 2003; Hyde et al., 2009). Regions such as the auditory cortex, corpus callosum, and inferior frontal cortex become increasingly interconnected, supporting creativity, coordination, and emotional regulation (Zatorre et al., 2007). The limbic system integrates emotional and memory-related responses to music (Zatorre, 2001), showing that understanding a melody and feeling it emotionally involve related but distinct processes.

Music's connection to memory adds another dimension to its emotional impact. Familiar songs can instantly transport listeners to specific moments, evoking vivid emotions and sensory memories. This occurs because music activates the hippocampus and other regions involved in autobiographical memory (Baumgartner et al., 2006). Janata et al. (2006) found that about one-third of familiar songs evoke personal memories, most of them associated with positive emotions such as nostalgia. The cyclical patterns and time-bound associations of Indian rāgas, linked to particular hours, seasons, or moods, intensify this effect, weaving together personal experience and cultural identity (Jairazbhoy, 1995; Levitin, 2006). This relationship between sound and memory has deep roots in India's oral tradition. The hymns from Sāmaveda and Rigveda, which are melodic recitations, support memorization and reflection (Staal, 1989). Their long oral transmission shows how pitch and rhythm strengthen memory.

Modern studies also find that Vedic chanting promotes calmness and emotional stability by activating brain networks linked to attention and regulation (Nagendra et al., 2014).

This connection between music, emotion, and memory holds special significance for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Many exhibit heightened musical sensitivity and strong perceptual abilities (Heaton, 2009). Music activates the same limbic regions involved in emotional and memory processing (Koelsch, 2010), offering a nonverbal channel for communication and self-expression (Geretsegger et al., 2014). Structured music-based interventions improve emotional recognition and social interaction (Sharda et al., 2018). Since many individuals with autism experience alexithymia, or difficulty identifying and expressing feelings (Hill et al., 2004), music can serve as a bridge between emotion and expression. Although music's capacity to evoke emotion is universal, personal and cultural contexts shape individual responses. A listener's emotional state influences the music they choose, and the music they engage which reshapes how they feel (Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2015).

Additionally, music has gained increasing recognition as an effective nonpharmacological intervention for individuals with Alzheimer's dementia, with evidence suggesting its potential to prevent or delay deterioration in quality of life (Popa et al., 2021). Research indicates that musical engagement can mitigate age-related cognitive decline, as the brain's capacity to retain and respond to music remains relatively preserved in Alzheimer's disease (Särkämö et al., 2014). Studies have shown that patients with Alzheimer's demonstrate improvements in verbal fluency (Thompson, 2005), autobiographical memory (Irish et al., 2006), and lyric

recall (Simmons-Stern et al., 2010) following exposure to familiar music. Music therapy also enhances caregiver participation, providing opportunities for emotional expression and shared experiences, which contribute to improved well-being and quality of care (Popa et al., 2021).

We are all born musical, and music is a vital part of our biological makeup, one of the core elements that make us human. This innate capacity explains why, across cultures and centuries, music has naturally bridged sound and self, intellect and intuition. It engages brain systems for emotion, memory, and empathy, yet goes beyond biology. Music lets us feel deeply without harm, remember vividly without pain, and find meaning beyond words. Whether in a morning rāga or a grand symphony, it blends structure with spontaneity and emotion with awareness, showing that the language of feeling can be understood without words.



A Doodler's Guide to Creative Living



Chai with
SOUL



CURIOSITY
over control



TIDY MIND
messy art

Creative Living means....



MAGIC
in the mundane



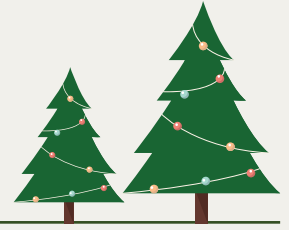
DISCIPLINE
that dances

Sumithra Subramaniam



Spotlight

arts india US



Arts India US is a national initiative dedicated to one clear idea: Indian classical performing arts belong inside the American cultural mainstream—not just at the margins of community life.

Founded by arts leader Vani Krishnamurthy, Arts India US (AIUS) builds infrastructure so that Indian classical artists, and by extension the art forms they represent, can thrive at every stage of their journey in the United States.

Vani brings to this work two decades of experience in consulting, arts management, and nonprofit strategy, along with a long personal engagement with Indian classical arts. With an MBA from Harvard Business School and years spent working with cultural organizations, she has designed AIUS as a bridge between three groups that often operate in parallel: artists, institutions, and audiences.

AIUS organizes its programs around three distinct points in an artist's life in the U.S. landscape:

1. *Serious Student -- Tools and orientation*

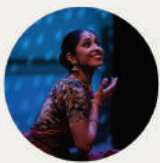
For young artists who have completed an arangetram or equivalent milestone, the question is often: What now? AIUS offers light-touch, accessible support at this stage -- resources that help them understand what opportunities may be available to them or how to further their training.

This includes:

- Resource Hub updated with educational, performance, and funding opportunities
- Tools like the AIUS Bio Builder, which helps artists articulate who they are for grants, presenters, and audiences as they prepare to make their artistic identity more well known

The goal here is not to rush anyone into a career, but to make the path visible.

LOTUS MENTORS



Nadhi Thekkek



Rohan Krishnamurthy



Roopa Mahadevan



Neel Murgai



Samarth Nagarkar



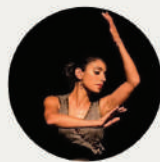
Barkha Patel



Aditya Prakash



Arun Ramamurthy



Parul Shah



Sruti Sarathy

KEYNOTES



Payal Kadakia
Sa Dance
Company/Class
Pass Founder



Preeti Vasudevan
Thresh
Performing Arts
Collective



Aparna Ramaswamy
Ragamala Dance



Mythili Prakash
Bharatanatyam
Dancer/
choreographer

Courtesy: Arts India US

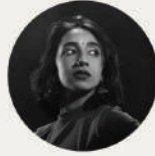
MEET THE 2026 LOTUS FELLOWS



**Antara
Bhattacharya**
Sitar



**Ariaki
Dandawate**
Kathak



**Harini
Nilakantan**
Bharatanatyam



Karthik Iyer
Carnatic Violin



Karun Selvady
Mridangam



Neha Venkatesh
Bharatanatyam



Shalini Basu
Odissi



Shruti De
Sarod



Tarika Nath
Kathak



**Vedya Spurthi
Konda**
Kuchipudi

arts
india US

Courtesy: Arts India US

2. *Emerging Artist -- The Lotus Fellowship, community, and inspiration*

For artists ready to take their work more seriously—to create new pieces, collaborate, and step into a wider field—AIUS has created a number of programs that build community, inspiration, and a holistic network for what can feel like an isolated phase of an artist's life.

The Lotus Fellowship is an application-based program that provides:

- Mentorship from established, nationally recognized practitioners
- Workshops on everything from creative process to working in the U.S. arts ecosystem
- A cohort of peers who can collaborate, challenge, and support one another
- A structured arc that guides Fellows toward a new short work they can share with presenters and audiences

Networks to help connect emerging artists to artists like them and artists who may inspire them.

- Peer Artists – Social media feature of emerging artists around the country
- Mentor Artists – Established and nationally acclaimed artists willing to share their time and expertise through AIUS events and programming

At this stage, AIUS functions as both scaffold and sounding board, helping emerging artists move from “talented and

trained” to “visible, connected and confident.”

3. *Established Professionals-- Curated partnerships with institutions*

For experienced artists who have already built strong practices, the challenge is often access: connecting with mainstream venues that may be unfamiliar with Indian classical forms.

AIUS addresses this through Curated Artist Partnerships, in which the organization:

- Mentorship from established, nationally recognized practitioners
- Recommends artists and ensembles whose work fits the context
- Helps frame performances in ways that support both artistic integrity and audience understanding

In this space, AIUS is amplifying work that is already of a very high caliber and opening doors to new stages and audiences.

Triangulating Artists, Institutions, and Audiences

What makes AIUS distinctive is that it does not focus on artists in isolation. Every program is designed with three interlocking groups in mind:

- Artists – receiving mentorship, tools, a network, and structured opportunities appropriate to their stage so that they can continue to create and sustain new work

- Institutions – getting guidance on how to present Indian classical arts with care, quality, and confidence
- Audiences – being invited in through framing, context, and programming that help them better connect with these art forms

Field Research and Thought Leadership

In addition to its programs and partnerships, Arts India US is informed by ongoing research into how traditional performing arts, especially Indian classical forms, interface with the broader American arts ecosystem. Through her work at Harvard University, Vani Krishnamurthy is contributing to this emerging body of scholarship, examining the perspectives of presenters, institutional leaders, and artists to better understand the structural factors that influence visibility, programming decisions, and long-term sustainability for these art forms in the United States.

Although the research is still in progress, early insights point to several recurring needs: clearer developmental pathways for emerging artists, greater institutional confidence in presenting culturally rooted work, more intentional framing to help audiences enter these forms with openness, and a critical yet often unspoken challenge -- funding structures that do not adequately support traditional artists or the longer arcs of creation these forms require. These findings reinforce the purpose of AIUS and shape its programming: to create scaffolding that reflects the realities artists face and to offer institutions and audiences practical ways to engage more deeply.

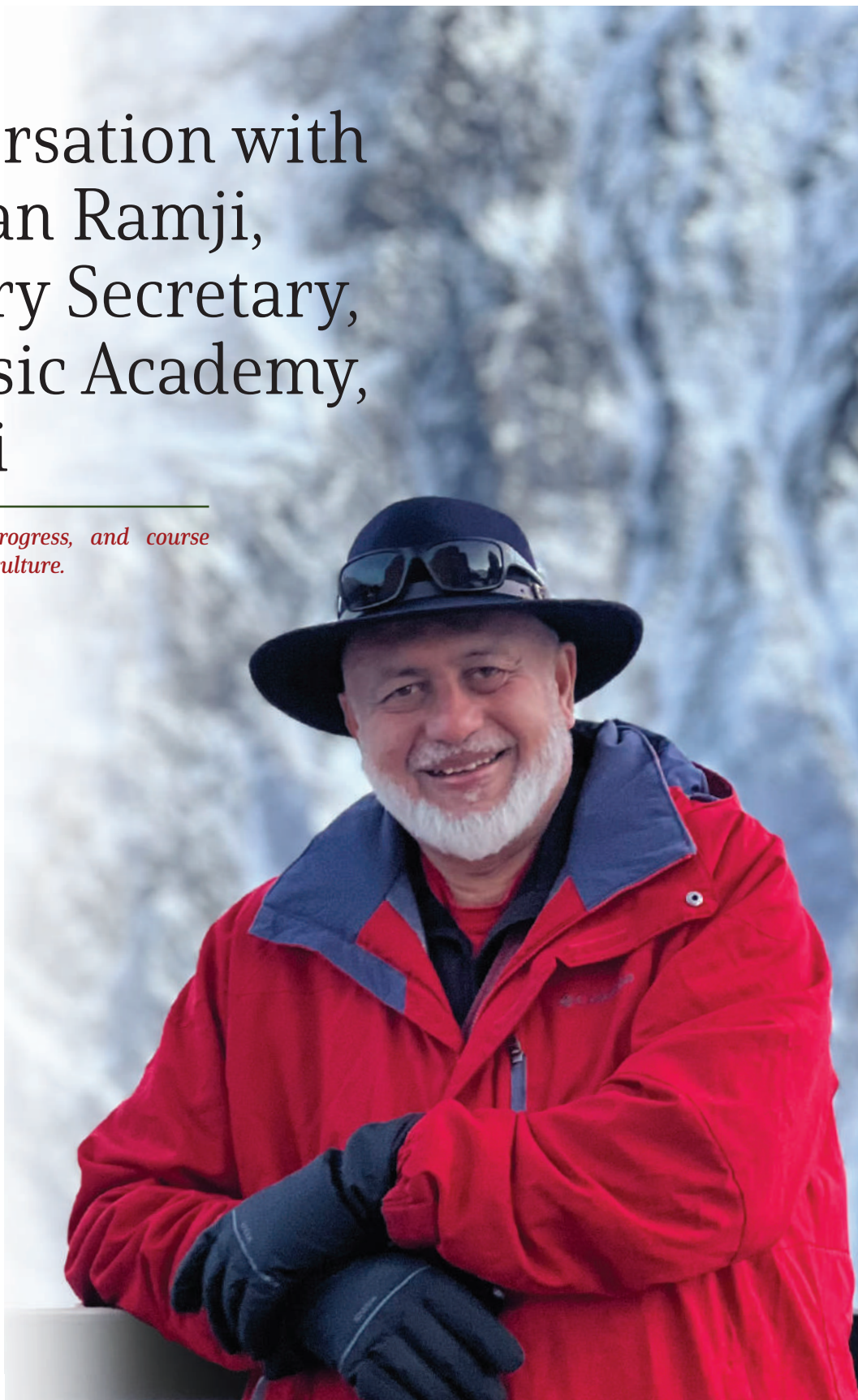
Through this combination of infrastructure-building and research, Arts India US positions itself not only as a support system for artists today, but also as an active participant in a broader national conversation about what it will take for traditional performing arts to thrive in contemporary America.



AIUS functions as both scaffold and sounding board, helping emerging artists move from “talented and trained” to “visible, connected and confident.”

A Conversation with Natarajan Ramji, Honorary Secretary, The Music Academy, Chennai

We are a work in progress, and course correction is part of our culture.



At first glance, Natarajan Ramji, Secretary of The Music Academy, Chennai, might be mistaken for a traveller from Hawaii, with his bohemian shirts and boater hat. But behind that relaxed exterior is a man with many colorful feathers to his cap—a true multi-hyphenate who moves effortlessly between the worlds of music, dance, and film. In this conversation, he speaks candidly about legacy, meritocracy, transparency, and what it takes to curate a festival that remains both rooted and relevant.

Q&A WITH RAMJI

1. How did you come to be the Secretary of The Music Academy—one of India’s most prestigious sabhas?

Ramji: My family has been associated with the Music Academy since its inception. In 1927, during a Congress Party convention presided over by Mahatma Gandhi, a resolution was passed to create an academy that would nurture and support Indian arts. That is how The Music Academy was born.

My maternal grandfather, Dr. E.S. Shankaranarayan, a vageyākāra (an expert who spontaneously writes lyrics and composes music), was on its first expert committee. Later, my father, the late S. Natarajan, became Secretary in 1965 and served until 1994. After his passing, I contested the election and became Secretary in 1995. I’ve continued ever since, crossing even my father’s thirty-year tenure.

2. How involved are you personally in culture and the arts?

Ramji: My work in cinema has taken me to more than 140 countries. Wherever I go, I make it a point to experience the arts—symphonies, ballets, the Bolshoi, the Kirov, folk traditions, theatre.

My profession may be filmmaking, but my passion is culture. Music Academy is where that passion is rooted. Watching a great performance truly lights me up.

3. Many people talk about favoritism or partiality in artist selection. How do you respond?

Ramji: We have a committee of about 25 members who collectively decide the performer list each season. Selections are based solely on merit. With multiple voices and continual course correction, the process remains fair, transparent, and thoughtfully curated.

If you look at our Nritya Kalanidhi awardees, they are not from any particular caste or class—we have no such criteria. What matters is artistic excellence and the willingness to put oneself out there. We honor artists who apply, who are ready to perform, who take risks, and who bring their strongest work to the stage. These are dancers who rise through merit—not background or influence.

The Music Academy is, and has always been, a transparent organization. People may speculate, but unless something is backed by accurate data, it has no value. Our decisions are not dictated by any single person; they are taken collectively, with multiple checks and balances in place. We stay focused on our core purpose: curating a festival that represents excellence. Everything else is just noise.

Let’s just say we are a work in progress, and course correction is built into our culture. That ongoing commitment is what

keeps the system accountable and continually evolving.

4. Why are certain artists featured repeatedly at the Academy’s festivals?

Ramji: Just as our music festival features leading musicians like Sanjay Subrahmanyam, TM Krishna, and Bombay Jayashri year after year—because they represent the highest standard of the form—we must also have the best dancers in the evening slots. What is good for the goose is good for the gander.

At the same time, people do move up the ladder. Dancers begin in the junior or sub-senior slots, and the ones who perform consistently well are gradually placed in higher slots. When the committee feels an artist is ready for the evening stage, they go there. And in rare cases, someone exceptionally brilliant may enter the main festival directly.

So repetition is not favoritism—it reflects sustained excellence. The structure ensures that established artists continue to be presented at the highest level, while emerging dancers have a clear pathway to rise.

5. Is the work at the Music Academy voluntary?

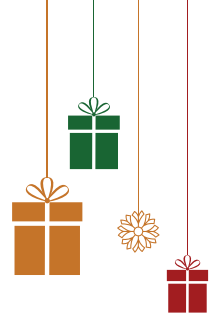
Ramji: Yes—every role on the committee is entirely voluntary. None of us are paid; we serve out of commitment to the arts. My official title is Honorary Secretary, and that word “honorary” applies to the whole committee.

We have many verticals that generate revenue, and our administrative office manages them efficiently, keeping the Academy financially strong and professionally run. With our President, Mr. N. Murali, a chartered accountant, the institution remains robust. Our contribution is one of passion, not remuneration.



Repetition is not favoritism—it reflects sustained excellence.

Well being and Ecology



The Everlasting Flower Vase

By Neena Alapatt

My creative process starts with a simple moment beside a bundle of bamboo. I look at each stalk—its curve, grain, and texture—and let those natural qualities dictate the layout. I sketch directly on the piece, then use a handheld pyrography tool to burn the lines, building depth with a few careful passes. This step by step rhythm feels like a conversation with the material.

I work in two complementary styles. In one, I keep the palette minimal, allowing the bamboo's natural color and the dark burn marks to define the piece. In the other, I add bright acrylics inspired by Kerala murals, highlighting intricate patterns and bringing vivid energy to the work. Placing the muted and the colorful side by side gives viewers a chance to experience both subtle restraint and bold expression.

The Everlasting Flower Vase brings these two approaches together. I hand paint detailed blossoms on bases cut from mature elephant bamboo culms. To prevent cracking as the wood dries, I split several stalks in half, then stack and bind four halves to create a four faced sculpture. Mandala motifs weave around the design, while Kerala's vivid palette draws the eye from earthy tones to bright highlights. Mounted on a lazy-Susan base, the piece can be rotated, allowing each viewer to choose the side that matches their mood.

Beyond form and color, this work also carries memory. It is a tribute to my heritage and to the lessons my father taught me.



Photo Credit: Neena Alapatt

Beyond form and color, this work also carries memory. It is a tribute to my heritage and to the lessons my father taught me. He grew up on a remote farm, living sustainably and using only what the land provided. Bamboo fascinated him because it grows quickly, is incredibly strong, and can be both practical and beautiful. He collected bundles of bamboo and sent them to me whenever I returned to the United States. Each piece arrived with its own character—smooth, curved, and ready for the next idea.

My connection to bamboo is personal and practical. I work mainly with yellow bamboo and towering elephant bamboo, which can reach up to 12 inches in diameter and 80 feet tall. Despite its size, the material feels light and responsive, reminding me of the quiet strength my father admired. Every design begins with a sketch, followed by careful burning, always honoring the natural form of the stalk. Whether I choose a restrained mandala look or a vibrant Kerala inspired finish, the goal is the same: to create work that feels honest, functional, and rooted in the stories of the material and the people who first valued it.



Photo Credit: Neena Alapatt

Whether I choose a restrained mandala look or a vibrant Kerala-inspired finish, the goal is the same: to create work that feels honest, functional, and rooted in the stories of the material and the people who first valued it.

A Map for a Meaningfully Creative Life

Ancient wisdom meets modern psychology in the climb up (and down) Maslow's pyramid.

By Sanjay Rao Chaganti



Stability should be the runway, not the cage.

When Abraham Maslow first drew his famous hierarchy of needs, he probably didn't imagine it would explain our mid-life existential crises so neatly. From survival to self-actualisation — with Wi-Fi and coffee now firmly wedged at the base — the pyramid remains an elegant way to describe the arc of human growth.

As a coach working with professionals and artists around the world, I see people climbing and re-climbing this pyramid all the time. It isn't a one-way ladder but a dance. Some days we're chasing security, other days we're yearning for meaning.

1. Physiological Needs — The Stage of Hustle and Hunger

Maslow begins with the basics: food, rest, and shelter. In my twenties, "rest" was a myth and "food" was anything served in a paper box at the airport. I loved the 'high' of achievement. Yet, sometimes, I mistook activity for achievement and caffeine for clarity.

One client once told me, "I'm living on autopilot, but the plane is still airborne, so no one's complaining." That line summed up the foundation stage perfectly. We survive, we hustle, and if we're lucky, we learn when to land.

The first step toward a creative life is recognising when survival has become a habit.

2. Safety and Security — The Stage of Building the Nest

Once survival is handled, we chase stability: the steady income, the safe job, the predictable calendar. Necessary, yes — but seductive.

During my current Grihastha (householder) years, I have enjoyed the stability that achievement has brought. Yet, I do spend a lot of time pretending to understand my investment statement while secretly missing the chaos of my youth. Why? A London-based client put it better: "I've built a life so safe I'm scared to shake it."

Stability should be the runway, not the cage. The nest is for resting, not nesting forever. I am starting to shake things up in my life.

3. Love and Belonging — The Stage of Connection

Relationships, friendship, and community form the glue of Maslow's middle layer.

When my daughter was little, I'd rush home after coaching sessions to read her a bedtime story — only to fall asleep halfway. She'd nudge me and whisper, "Daddy, you can't fall asleep in the middle of your own story!"

That one sentence became a life lesson. Love and belonging aren't grand gestures; they're moments of attention. Sometimes, the deepest connection we can offer is staying awake to what (and who) matters.

4. Esteem — The Stage of Growth and Recognition

This is the domain of promotions, awards, and applause — outer validation for inner hunger. Recognition feels good, but chasing it endlessly turns life into performance art.

A senior leader I coached admitted, "I'm respected, but not fulfilled." Through reflection he rediscovered the joy of writing, something long buried under spreadsheets. His weekly blog didn't earn trophies, but it brought him peace — and a surprising number of thank-you notes.

As for me, I've moved from craving the stage to enjoying the conversation after the talk. Esteem is wonderful when it becomes appreciation, not addiction.

5. Self-Actualisation — The Stage of Purpose and Play

Here's the summit everyone talks about — not as a finish line but as a field of freedom. Maslow called it "becoming everything one is capable of becoming."

For me, this phase feels close to what Indian philosophy calls Vanaprastha — literally "retiring to the forest." It never meant vanishing into the woods; it meant stepping back from constant doing to rediscover being. A stage for reflection, mentoring, creativity, and purpose.

At fifty, a friend teased, "You've been promoted from Human Doing to Human Being." I laughed, but he was right. These days I write, mentor, and teach emotional intelligence and mindfulness to professionals who once swore they'd never meditate. Two mornings a week, I block off my calendar — my mini Vanaprastha forest amid the inbox jungle.

The real climb is from achievement to alignment, from ego to essence.

The first step toward a creative life is recognising when survival has become a habit.

Clients in this space often say, "I've achieved what I set out to — now what?" The answer is rarely "retire." It's usually "realign."

The real climb is from achievement to alignment, from ego to essence.

6. Transcendence — The Gentle Letting Go

Late in life, Maslow added a final layer — the urge to move beyond self. It's that subtle shift from "What can I get?" to "What can I give?"

A yoga friend told me recently, "My goal isn't enlightenment anymore; it's to enjoy my morning tea without checking WhatsApp."

For many of us, these small steps of evolution are enough — indeed, they are big steps. Transcendence isn't about withdrawal; it's about lightness. You still care, but you don't cling.

I see this grace in teachers who teach quietly, in artists who create without audiences, in elders who radiate calm without trying to be wise.

The Modern Relevance

Maslow's pyramid may look linear, but real life feels more like a spiral. We revisit every layer — hungry again, insecure again, inspired again — and that's perfectly human.

The gift of this model is its reminder that meaning isn't found only at the top. It hides in every layer — in the meal cooked with love, the safe home, the bedtime story, the creative risk, the silent smile.

Wherever you are — hustling, building, connecting, re-aligning, or simply sipping tea — the invitation is the same: live with awareness, compassion, and a dash of humour.

As for me, I've learned that maturity isn't about climbing higher; it's about laughing more gently on the way. Often at myself.

Reflect & Reset: Questions for Each Stage

- **Hustle & Hunger:** What am I chasing, and why?
- **Safety:** What comfort has quietly become a cage?
- **Belonging:** Who needs my full attention this week?
- **Esteem:** What am I proud of when no one's watching? What can I laugh at about myself?
- **Purpose:** What would I still do if there were no applause?
- **Transcendence:** What can I release, with gratitude?



Prakṛti and Creativity:

Finding Balance in the Way We Create

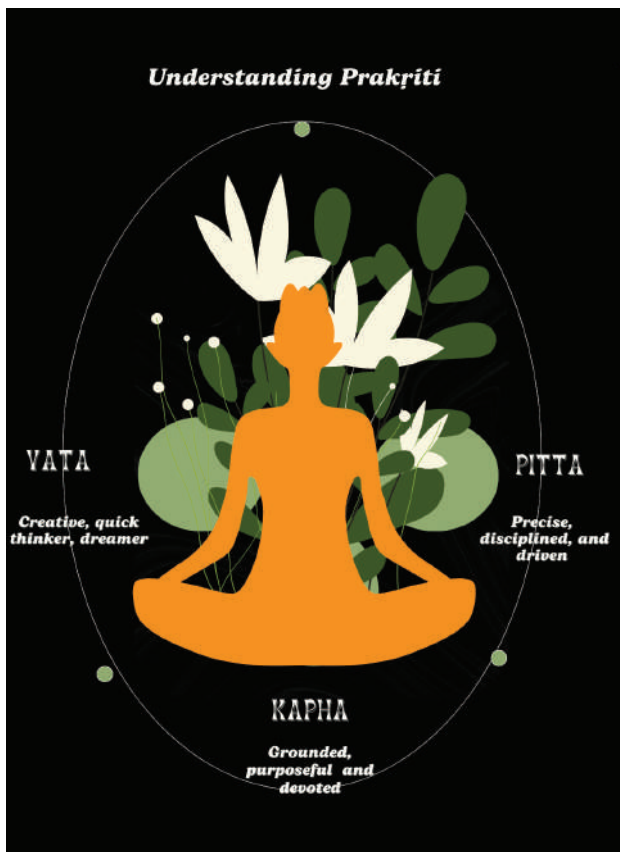
By Dr. Madhumita

The Spark of Everyday Creativity

Creativity doesn't always arrive with paintbrushes and poetry. More often, it appears in the most ordinary moments — turning leftovers into a delicious meal, humming a tune while making the bed, or simply in the way we choose to wear our clothes.

Creativity is defined as the ability to form novel and valuable ideas using one's imagination. Children are naturally imaginative, creating exciting new worlds and filling their lives — and those around them — with color, laughter, joy, and play. As we grow older, we often begin to consider imagination childish, forgetting the joy and playfulness it brings. Creativity is also a way of expressing a thought or idea through any medium of art — drawing, painting, cooking, dancing, singing, writing, acting, or even simply speaking.

The individuality of creators is wonderfully varied. Based on the many descriptions I've heard over the years, they might be loosely grouped as the 'irritatingly meticulous,' the 'passionate snails,' or the 'temperamental hurricanes.' Let us take a closer look at the reasoning behind these affectionate epithets for such beautiful souls.



Understanding Creative Temperaments Through Prakṛti

While all of us are creative, the way we approach creativity varies. Ayurveda, India's ancient science of life, offers a beautiful insight: our creativity, like our personality, flows from **Prakṛti** — our inherent nature. Whether we move like wind (Vāta), burn like fire (Pitta), or anchor like earth (Kapha), creativity expresses itself differently through each of us.

According to Ayurveda, every individual embodies a unique combination of the three fundamental dosas: **Vāta**, **Pitta**, and **Kapha**. These dosas determine our temperament, energy, and way of being in the world. Though there are seven combinations in total, this essay focuses on the three primary types — those with a dominant dosa of Vāta, Pitta, or Kapha.

Each type has its own rhythm, strengths, and challenges — shaping how we imagine, create, and complete the work we love.

Over the years, I've met different types of creative individuals. Many of us will recognize ourselves—or someone we work or live with—in these descriptions.

The meticulous Pitta dominant individuals

Those who tend to be authoritative, critical, thoughtful overthinkers — precise, driven, goal-oriented, and highly intelligent — often have a dominance of Pitta. To an observer, they may appear intense or dominating, with a quick temper, and it can indeed be challenging for more sensitive souls to work under such detailed direction. Yet, these same individuals are also achievers. Their intensity, discipline, and perseverance often bring them remarkable success and well-deserved laurels.

I remember a moment during a photoshoot when I was working with a wonderfully Pitta-dominant colleague. A tiny thread on my sleeve, which I had neither noticed nor considered important, caught her eye immediately. Within seconds she produced a pair of scissors to trim it neatly. Where most people would have simply pulled it out or ignored it altogether, she saw that little thread as disturbing the aesthetics of the picture. What could have taken ten seconds stretched into two minutes — but indeed, the final look was flawless.

For all the amazing Pitta-dominant souls: perfection is always in the beholder's eye. Precision is beautiful, but extending the process too long may not serve you — especially when it begins to frustrate you or keep you from meeting your own carefully set goals.



The grounding Kapha dominant individuals

Then there are those dreamy, lost-in-thought souls for whom timelines are wonderfully blurry. Their work is phenomenal, but the process often takes its own sweet time. They are friendly, lovable, jovial individuals who do not easily budge — like a majestic cow or bull with a shining, glossy coat, seated calmly in the middle of a highway. Reprimands, dates, and deadlines drift past them, gently brushed aside with an expression of simple, wholehearted love. And somehow, we easily forgive them, allowing them to weave their magic at their own unhurried pace.

These are the Kapha-dominant beings who bring a sense of stability to a constantly changing world.

A fun anecdote comes to mind. A student of mine was navigating a very difficult phase of life in her 40s. After six months of working together, she began to feel more energetic and joyful. One day, she told me she had decided to start painting again. As we spoke, she revealed that she had always loved art and had learned a particular technique in high school. She even mentioned a half-finished painting from those years that she had kept all along — and now, with renewed enthusiasm, she picked it up once more and finally completed it, two decades later.

For all the amazing Kapha souls: your steadiness is a gift. With a bit of external encouragement to maintain timelines, your art can reach others just as deeply as it nourishes you.



Ayurveda, India's ancient science of life, offers a beautiful insight: our creativity, like our personality, flows from our prakrti—our inherent nature. Whether we move like wind (Vāta), burn like fire (Pitta), or anchor like earth (Kapha), creativity expresses itself differently through each of us.

The enthusiastic Vata dominant individuals

Then we have the super-enthusiastic, energetic souls — the first to raise their hands to volunteer, arriving with a barrage of ideas at every meeting. Whether any of those ideas will ever sprout into saplings, however, remains a delightful mystery. To an observer, they appear restless and ever-changing, shifting their plans with the seasons, the months, the weeks, or even the days. They are unpredictable forces of nature who can speak a hundred words a minute, effortlessly untangling complex webs with the snap of a finger — webs that might take others a lifetime to unravel. These beautiful beings often have a dominance of Vāta, leaving a playful dust storm swirling in the paths they cross.

A fun anecdote comes to mind. I once worked with a wonderfully Vāta-dominant person, and in the few years of our collaboration, we began at least ten new projects together. Not one has yet come to fruition — though the conversations were electric, and the ideas abundant. I suspect that by the time even one of them takes shape, the project list will have multiplied tenfold.

For all the amazing Vāta souls: perhaps slowing down just a little might help others follow your brilliant, breezy trail.

Balancing Our Creative Nature

Now that we have identified the different permutations and combinations of creativity we each embody, the question naturally arises: what can we do to help ourselves? Ayurveda offers gentle, practical ways to bring balance to our dominant tendencies.

For the Vāta-Dominant Creative

These are the visionaries who benefit most from calm, grounding practices.

- Meditation, prānāyāma, āsana, warm oil massage, chanting
- Eating light, warm meals that soothe and stabilize
- Working in an uncluttered space
- Using a sheet of paper or blank board to capture their many ideas, so others can follow the threads
- Surrounding themselves with a calming support system that can lovingly help navigate the mental whirlwinds

For the Pitta-Dominant Creative

Their intensity is a gift, but they thrive when heat is softened and urgency eased.

(Once they set a goal, they continue planning even while sleeping, eating, bathing, or walking!)

- Walks around a lake, hikes in the wilderness, or swimming
- Cooling prānāyāma, meditation, soothing music, chanting

- Inputs from trusted friends who can balance the overcritical tendency and gentle reminders that temper is just another form of fire that can be cooled

For the Kapha-Dominant Creative

These steady, loyal creatives blossom when energy is stimulated and movement encouraged.

- A fast-paced walk, a short run, twisting, jumping — anything that gets them moving
- Stimulative prānāyāma, energetic music, intense āsana practice, powder massage, spicy foods
- Working in spaces that invite movement — walking while recording thoughts, using a wall-mounted board for writing
- And most importantly, receiving consistent encouragement from enthusiastic individuals who can keep nudging their energy forward

Living Creatively

Many of us believe we lack creativity, or perhaps more importantly, we worry about what others will think of our creativity. It is vital for each of us to recognise our inherent creative spark — even if it lies dormant beneath a veil of doubt. One simple way to awaken it is by triggering our imagination, which is far more straightforward than we think. Interestingly, most of us begin imagining only when we are bored. Is it not important, then, to sit back and allow ourselves to be bored once in a while? In that quiet pause, imagination finds space to flow, and creativity begins to bloom.

Once we understand our own creative tendencies, the next step is learning how to create balance. This balance can emerge through specific practices that bring rhythm to our individual lives, and through cultivating a supportive circle that complements our creative nature. In such a personalized creative space, where thoughts can flow, refinement can unfold, and stability can be nurtured — allowing us to live more creatively and more fully.

Our life is a blank canvas, filled by the experiences we gather through creative living.



The Cost of Devotion

What It Really Takes to Keep Dancing

By *Manasa Jayanthi*

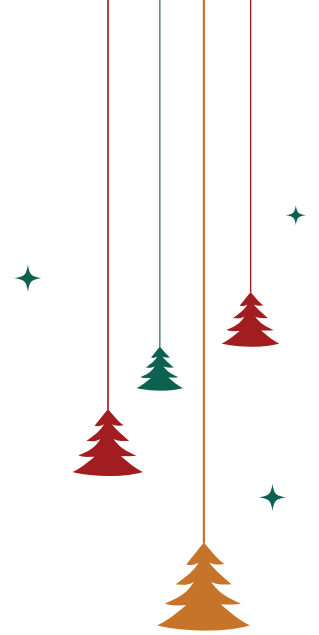
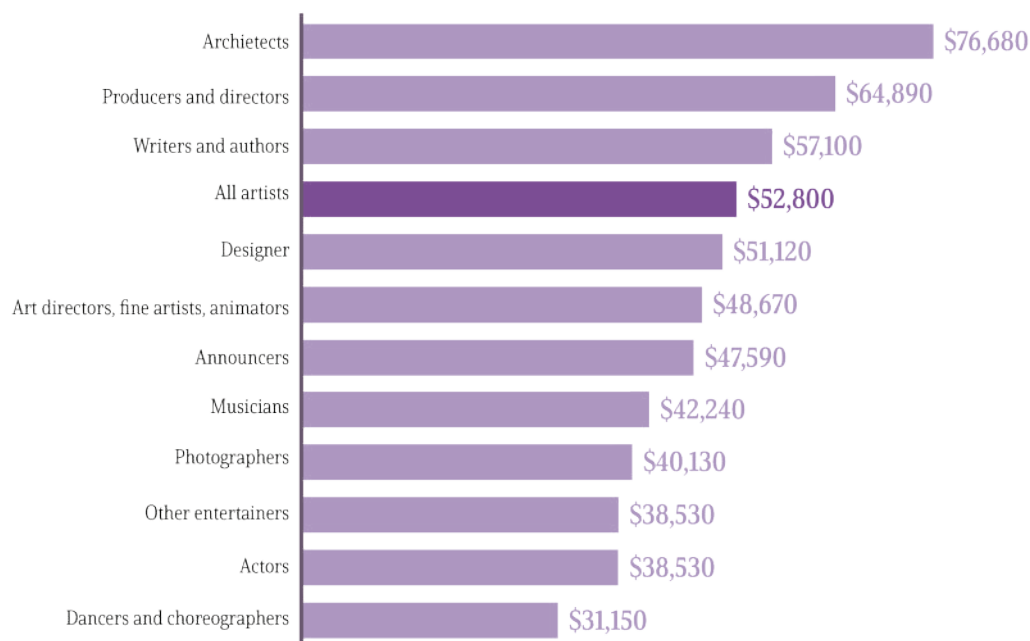


Photo Credit: Phillip Sowers / Lanai Photography Dancer: Manasa Jayanthi

Figure 4a. Median annual wages and salaries by artist occupation: 2012-2016



Note: Estimates are measured in 2016 dollars for full-year/full-time workers.
Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey (ACS), PUMS, U.S. Census Bureau

Source: National Endowment for the Arts, “Artists and Other Cultural Workers: A Statistical Portrait,” 2023.

What many of us carry, whether we say it aloud or not, is a shared unspoken understanding about our finances that tradition hands down quietly. The silence is cultural. But it is also structural.

Immersed in an art form where heritage declares that art itself is the offering, I have often struggled with the very notion of serving at any cost. I rehearse at all hours. I teach to pass on the legacy of the dance. I perform for the community. And I absorb costs quietly because that is what we learned from those before us; that is the sacrifice. The devotion is real. It is one of the great strengths of our culture. But devotion alone does not pay rent, sustain our bodies, or secure our futures.

According to the National Endowment for the Arts¹, dancers and choreographers in the U.S. earn a median annual income of approximately \$31,000, one of the lowest wages across all artistic fields. Over 60% hold additional jobs to support their practice. Research from Dance/USA² and Dance Data Project³ shows that most dance work is paid per performance or per class, not per rehearsal, planning session, costume investment, studio rental, or creative development hours. And in South Asian classical dance, these often-uncompensated layers are even more numerous.

We know this intimately because we experience it not as theory, but in our day-to-day lives.

The Labor Behind the Offering

For most South Asian dance artists in the diaspora, a sustainable practice demands multiple streams of work. We teach weekly classes and semester-based curricula, lead seasonal workshops, and mentor students through arangetrams and senior solo debuts. We choreograph commissioned works, stage productions, perform at festivals and cultural events, and increasingly create offerings from lecture-demonstrations to collaborative performance videos. And to stabilize income, many artists also maintain a parallel non-arts profession.

Meanwhile added to this layered labor, the expenses accumulate: studio rentals must be booked, local/international musicians and co-artists compensated, and costumes and jewelry maintained or replaced. Marketing, photography, videography, lighting, and makeup are now part of basic visibility. Travel, whether across town or across continents, is a recurring reality of training, performing, and teaching. Even the last-minute Uber to rehearsal becomes part of the cost of the work.

To this, add the realities of living in the diaspora with supporting family here or abroad, contributing time to cultural and community organizations, and subsidizing students because “it matters.” And it does matter. Many of us choose and stay in this work precisely because it shapes

identity, memory, and belonging as it is work of the self, not just the stage

But meaning does not erase material need, and care does not require self-sacrifice or self-erasure.

These demands are not complaints; they are simply the material conditions of sustaining classical dance. The artistic labor is vast and meaningful, but without shared language and planning around financial sustainability, the weight of learning, producing, teaching, performing, and organizing falls quietly and unevenly on the artist.

A financially sustained practice does not diminish devotion. It allows it to continue.

Reimagining Devotion: Sitting With Tension

So the question becomes: *How do we reimagine devotion? Not as self-sacrifice, but as stewardship.*

For many of us, dance entered our lives as an offering: to lineage, to God, to guru, to community. To speak of money in the same sentence as bhakti can feel uncomfortable, even disloyal. We inherit narratives that tell us that to truly love this art, we must give endlessly, absorb the cost quietly, and prove our sincerity through personal depletion.

This discomfort is real and worth sitting with. Because when we do not name it, we risk equating devotion with erasure.

There is a cultural inheritance here that deserves examination. We learned to admire the artist who never asks, who stretches every dollar, who takes on one more student, one more rehearsal, one more unpaid performance. We learned to believe that struggle makes the work pure. But purity is not the goal. Sustainability is. Continuity is. Care is.

This is where Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth becomes an important teacher not as wealth in the capitalist sense, but as nourishment, equilibrium, and circulation.⁴

Lakshmi is not excess. Lakshmi is enoughness.

To integrate Lakshmi into our artistic practice is to allow compensation to reflect real labor, collaboration to be rooted in fair exchange, and financial clarity to exist alongside artistic integrity.

This is personal work and it is also collective work.

As individual artists, we can begin by noticing when we shrink, undercharge, overextend, or apologize for our needs. As a dance community, we can normalize transparency, reduce shame, discuss pricing openly, and support one another in building sustainable structures.

This shift is not abandonment of tradition. It is the continuation of it.

Because a lineage only survives when the people carrying it can, too.

A Collective Practice

Financial wellness is not a side concern or eventual destination, it is a core condition of sustaining this form and part of the artistic practice itself. The same discipline we bring to adavu precision, abhinaya clarity, rhythmic command, and pedagogical rigor, we can and should bring to building the systems that sustain us.

Financial sustainability does not ask us to choose between the art and ourselves. It asks us to remember that we are not separate from the art.

When we are resourced, we create more expansively. When we are stable and paid equitably, we compensate others equitably. When we are steady, we can imagine new futures.

This is not only about individual survival.

It is about the continuity of the form itself.

Because the art survives when the artist does.

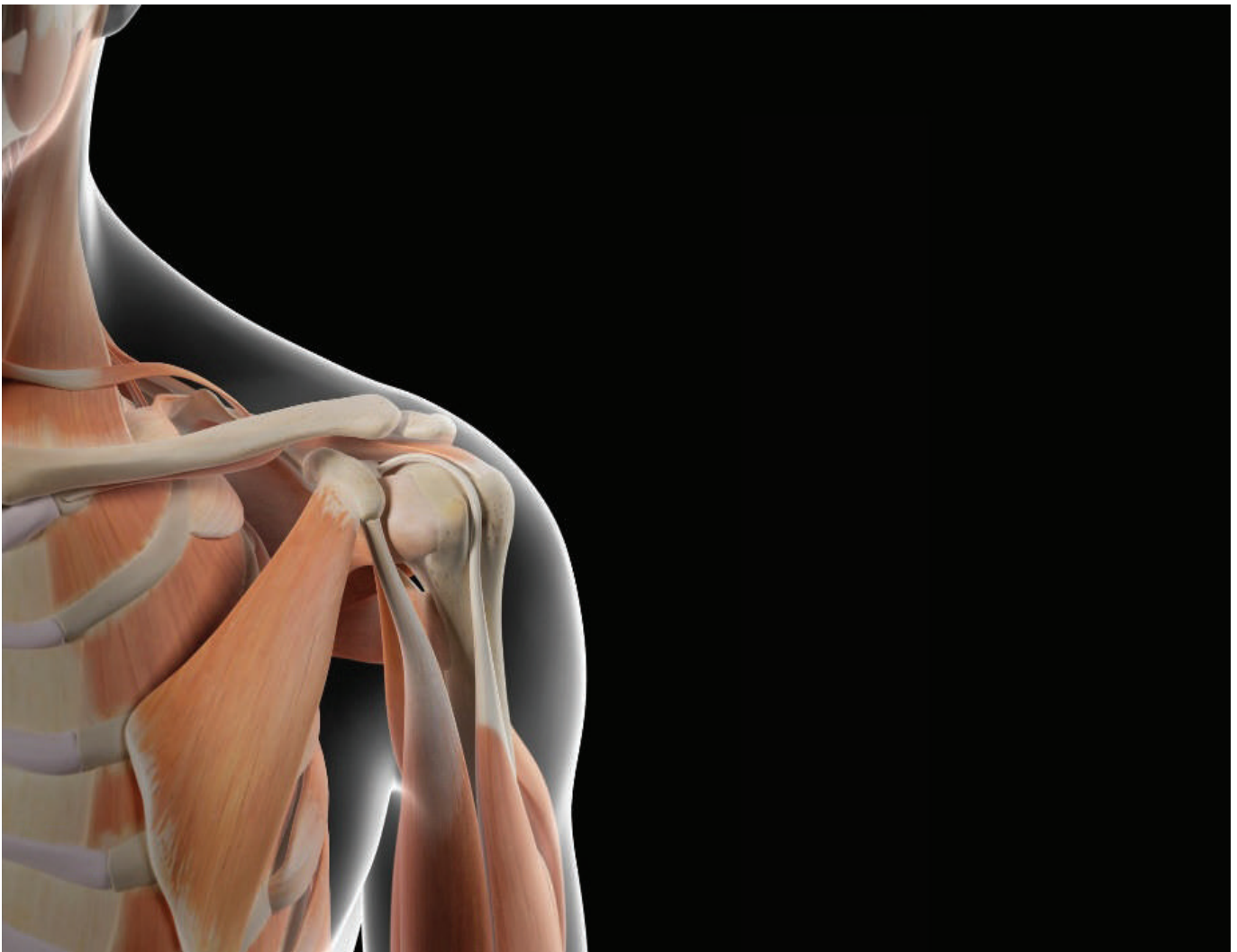
A financially sustained practice does not diminish devotion. It allows it to continue.

Nerd's Corner



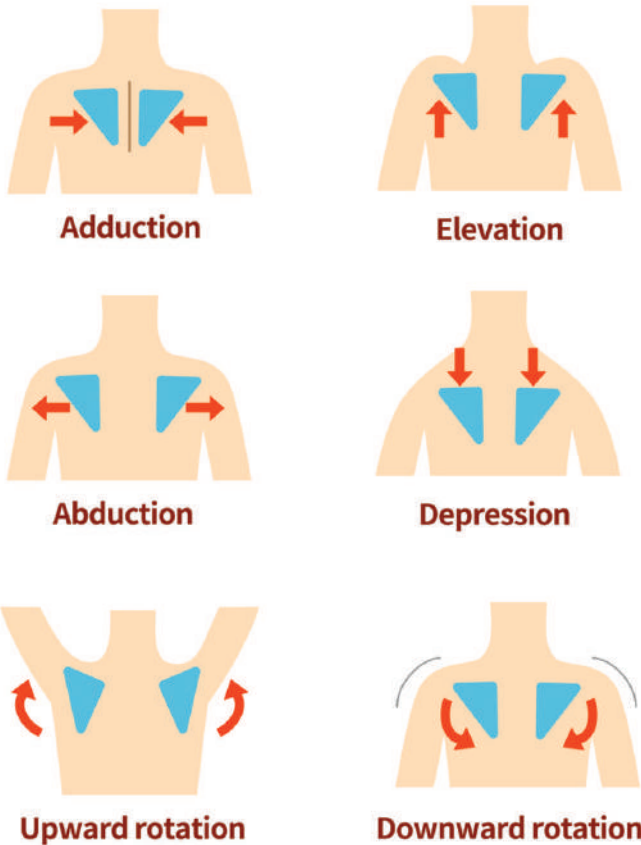
Understanding the Shoulder: Mobility, Stability and Injury Prevention

By *Dr. Pranamyia Suri*



The shoulder is a highly mobile yet inherently unstable joint complex composed of the **glenohumeral joint**, **acromioclavicular (AC) and sternoclavicular (SC) joints**, and **the scapulothoracic articulation**. Together, these allow the arm to move freely in multiple planes — essential for the expressive vocabulary of Indian classical dance. Stability is primarily maintained by the **rotator cuff muscles** (supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor, and subscapularis), which hold the humeral head in the shallow glenoid socket. Supporting them are the **deltoid**, which sustains arm elevation; the **scapular stabilizers** such as the serratus anterior, trapezius, and rhomboids, which coordinate shoulder blade movement; and larger muscles like the **pectoralis major/minor** and **latissimus dorsi**, which assist in powerful arm motions but can cause imbalance if overactive. Efficient shoulder function in dance depends on the harmony between these muscle groups, precise **scapulohumeral rhythm**, and the dancer's ability to maintain mobility without compromising stability — a delicate balance that is constantly challenged by the sustained arm positions and dynamic gestures of classical repertoire.

Scapular Movement



In Indian classical dance, the Nātyārambham posture forms the foundational stance from which most movements originate. It involves holding the arms abducted at shoulder level, elbows slightly bent, wrists extended, and palms in specific hasta positions. This seemingly simple posture demands continuous engagement of the deltoids, rotator cuff, and scapular stabilizers to sustain the arms in space while maintaining symmetry and grace. Proper alignment—keeping the scapulae gently retracted and depressed, the ribs neutral, and the neck relaxed—is crucial to prevent overcompensation by the upper shoulder muscles. Thus, understanding the biomechanics of Natyarambham not only enhances aesthetic precision but also plays a key role in protecting dancers from chronic shoulder overuse injuries.

Efficient shoulder function in dance depends on harmony — mobility without losing stability.

Common Shoulder Injuries in Classical Dancers

Injury	Cause	Symptoms	Prevention / Management
Rotator Cuff Tendinopathy	Overuse, poor posture, excessive overhead movement.	Dull pain, weakness, pain lifting arm.	Strengthen cuff & scapular stabilizers, correct alignment.
Subacromial Impingement	Poor scapular rhythm, overdeveloped deltoids, tight pecs.	Pain raising arm, “catching”.	Mobility + strengthening of serratus and lower trap.
Biceps Tendinitis	Repetitive lifting with internal rotation.	Front shoulder pain	Strengthen posterior cuff, reduce internal rotation dominance.
Scapular Dyskinesis	Weak serratus/lower traps.	Winged scapula, asymmetry.	Retraining scapular movement pattern.
Frozen Shoulder (Adhesive Capsulitis)	Stiffness from repetitive strain or rest after injury.	Restricted ROM.	Early mobilization, physiotherapy.
Ac Joint Irritation	Repetitive arm crossing or overhead lifts.	Localized pain on top of shoulder.	Modify repetitive choreography, posture.



From left : Kaustavi Sarkar (odissi), Ariaki Dandawate (kathak). Photo Credit: NJPAC

What Traditional Arts Need from their Audiences

By Vani Krishnamurthy

In my work at Arts India US, I spend most of my time thinking about artists -- how to support them, how to strengthen their creative ecosystems, and how to build pathways for them to connect meaningfully with audiences across the United States. But over time, something has become undeniably clear: even the most rigorous training, the most innovative choreography, or the most beautifully constructed musical phrase can only travel as far as the audience's willingness to receive it.

I've been reflecting on this idea of openness -- of audiences meeting an artist halfway. Much of today's discourse around South Asian classical or classical-adjacent performing arts focuses on what artists can do to "adapt," "translate," or "modernize" to remain relevant. And while artists do, of course, benefit from exploring new tools, languages, and relationships with contemporary audiences, the burden cannot sit on them alone.

At some point, the audience must also arrive with curiosity, willingness, and a generosity of attention. The artist cannot choreograph openness. They cannot compose humility or curiosity into the room. They can only create the conditions for connection and hope the audience steps into that space. Creating these conditions can, however, go a long way in drawing openness out of an audience.

When Audiences Are Guided Into Openness

In October 2025, at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center's (NJPAC) Diwali reception, I spoke briefly before a performance to an audience largely unaccustomed to watching classical performing arts. At that moment, before the dancers took the stage, I directly asked the audience to choose openness.

I framed it as an active role—an invitation to shift from the passive watching that our technological environment so readily trains into us, to the more intentional posture of receiving. I also anticipated the questions I assumed might arise: What were they about to experience? How would the artists be conveying their message? And, importantly, why might this message matter to them?

What unfolded was one of those rare moments where the room seemed to settle. The attention sharpened. The performance did not change, but the audience's capacity to access it did.



From Left: Neil Khare (tabla), Shankhadip Chakraborty (vocal), Kaustavi Sarkar (Odissi), Ariaki Dandawate (Kathak).
Photo Credit: NJPAC

Artists need scaffolding -- mentorship, resources, institutional access, and opportunities to create new work that reflects who they are today. That is the core mission of Arts India US.



From left to right: Amy Fitzpatrick (VP Of Development, NJPAC), Vani Krishnamurthy (Executive Director, Arts India US), Sarah Rosen (Managing Director of Women@NJPAC, NJPAC), Andrew Moya (Wells Fargo)

A Shared Responsibility

In the end, if we want Indian classical performing arts to not just survive but live vibrantly in the United States, the responsibility must be shared. Artists need scaffolding -- mentorship, resources, institutional access, and opportunities to create new work that reflects who they are today. That is the core mission of Arts India US.

But audiences, too, must practice openness. They must arrive with the same curiosity artists bring to their craft.

Over time, if each of us does our part, audiences will begin to allow for awe instead of explanation and have patience for sustained sensation instead of immediate understanding. The future of these art forms in this country depends on a collective shift by those who consume them: from not only asking, "What can artists do to connect with us?" to also considering, "How can we prepare ourselves to meet them?"

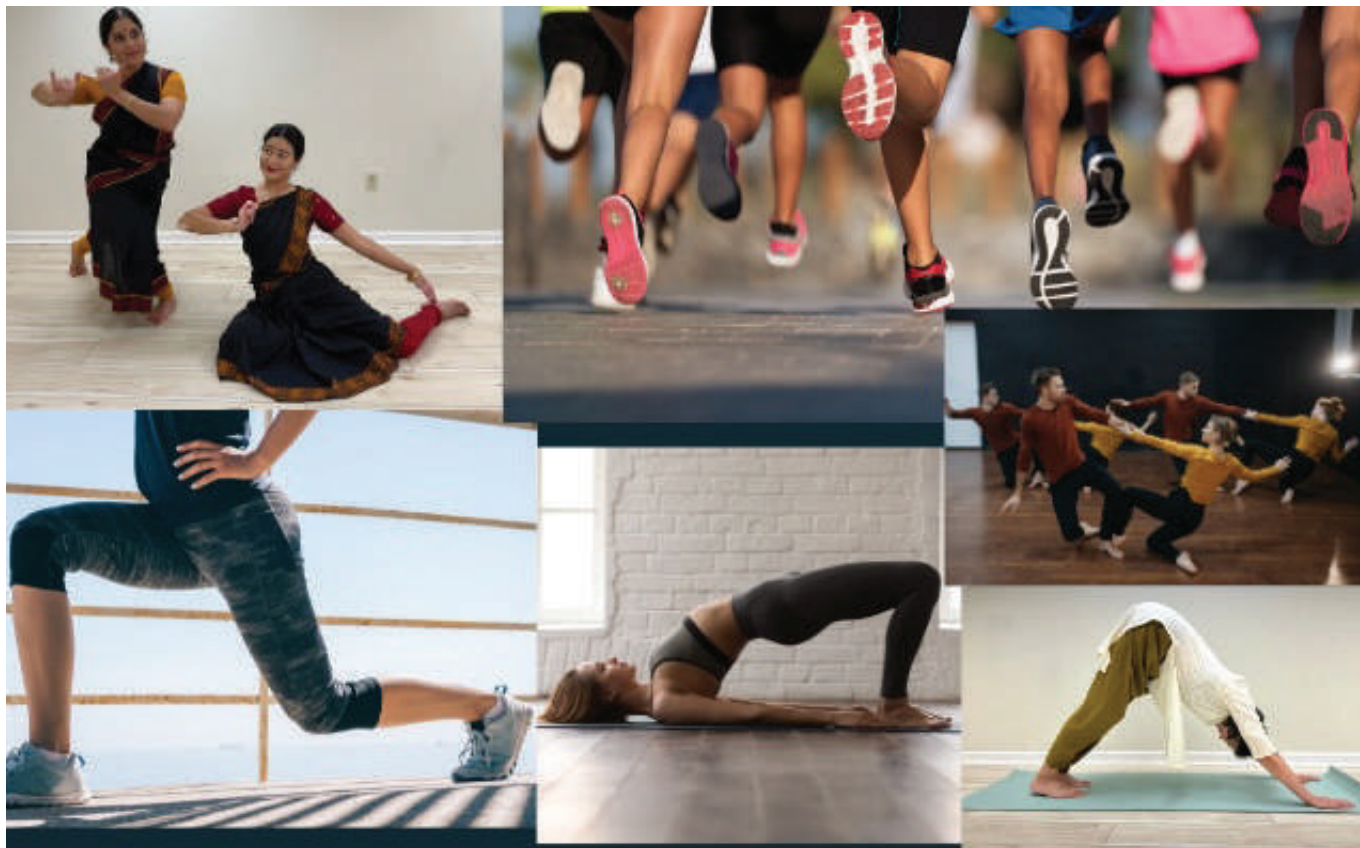
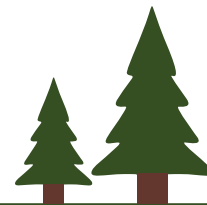


Vani Krishnamurthy, Executive Director, Arts India US.
Photo Credit: NJPAC

Strong, Graceful, Unstoppable:

The New Era of Fitness for Dancers

By Sagar Vallabh



Left hand corner: Madhavi Reddi and Bansari Hanna (sitting), Right hand corner: Anita Vallabh. This collage was designed using Canva.

The music fades, the applause lingers, and your heart still races. Long after the performance ends, your body tells the story in every muscle, every breath, every heartbeat. How do you keep that story strong? What makes a dancer's body move with such effortless grace? The answer lies in a balance of strength, flexibility, stamina, and attention to recovery.

Let's get into the weeds with each of these four pillars of fitness.

Strength

Forget the myth that strength training reduces flexibility. Today's dancers are proving that muscle and mobility can coexist beautifully.

Best approaches:

- Low-weight, high-repetition training using dumbbells, resistance bands, or bodyweight. Choose a weight that allows ~20 reps to build endurance and functional strength

without bulk.

- Pay attention to your Posterior chain —glutes, hamstrings, and back—areas that are frequently weak amongst dancers and the general population for that matter. Try: straight-leg Romanian deadlifts, glute bridges, resistance-band rows.
- Core stability— I cannot emphasize this enough—a strong core is non-negotiable. To prevent potential injury to the back and hips. Try: dead bugs, bird-dogs, planks with shoulder taps.

What makes a dancer's body move with such effortless grace? The answer lies in a balance of strength, flexibility, stamina, and attention to recovery.



Sagar Vallabh hiking the Salkantay Trail in Peru, 2024.

Stamina

Let's face it, Dance requires sustained effort. Fatigue doesn't just tire the body, it dulls technique and artistic expression.

Two effective ways to build stamina:

- **HIIT training** (high intensity interval training):
1 minute of all-out effort + 2 minutes at a slower pace (or variations thereof)
Aim for 5–6 intervals.
- Prefer steady movement?
20 – 30 minutes of moderate endurance work 2–3 times a week. It can be in the form of dancing, running, speed walking, swimming, jump rope, stair climbing, rowing etc.
Both approaches dramatically improve cardiovascular capacity.

Flexibility

Flexibility creates freedom of movement and reduces injury risk.

Golden rule: consistency over intensity.

One deep stretch won't change mobility—but daily practice will.

Dynamic stretching

Active movements (lunges, arm circles, hip and spine rotations) that take joints through their full range of motion, eg. lunges, arm circles, hip rotation, spine rotation.

- When: Before class or performance
- Benefits: Prepares muscles, reduces injury risk

Static stretching

Hold a stretch in a fixed position 20–60 seconds (hamstring stretch, splits, forward fold)

- When: After training
 - Benefits: Lengthens muscles, improves long-term mobility and range of motion.
- Mix dynamic and static stretching.

General tips:

- Never force a stretch. Allow the body to ease gradually into the stretch to the point of gentle tension, stopping well before pain.
- Balance – dancers often favor one side. Try to maintain balance between both sides to prevent injury.
- Breathe deeply, steadily and effortlessly—your exhale signals the muscle to relax.

Recovery

You will frequently come across dancers who push themselves to perform through pain - not a good idea as it does not lend itself to longevity. Recovery is not optional but essential for dancers, just as important as training and performance for two reasons:

Physical restoration

Rest allows muscles, joints, and connective tissue to repair microscopic tears.

Without it, fatigue can compromise technique and body alignment leading to poor movement patterns and higher risk of injury

Mental & emotional wellbeing

Time away from the studio reduces stress, prevents burnout, and restores motivation.

Your body is unique and intelligent—listen to it, honor its needs and build the four pillars: strength, stamina, flexibility, and recovery into your practice in ways that feel true to you.

Reflections on Creative Living

Why We Must Keep Nourishing the Creative Fire Within Us

By Anita Vallabh

For nearly thirty-eight years as an educator, I have heard students and friends say with quiet certainty, “I’m not creative.” The comment always surprises me, because it usually comes from people whose lives are full of innovation and problem-solving. My walking buddy Meaghan, for instance—someone who organizes get-togethers with ease and participates actively in public policy—once told me she wasn’t creative. Her comment revealed how deeply our society equates creativity with the arts alone. We fail to recognize the creativity in connection, persuasion, planning, and building community—the very things she excels in naturally.

In Sanskrit, the term *pratibhā* refers to creative effulgence, that inner luminosity from which insight arises. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the English word *creative* comes from the Latin *creare*, meaning “to bring forth, to bring into being.” Creativity, then, is the act of bringing something into existence—something that reflects the best, most effulgent parts of ourselves. Yet somehow, despite every human achievement around us, the word *creative* continues to feel confined to painting, dance, or music. But life, neuroscience, and history reveal a far more expansive truth: creativity is a core human need.

From my own experience, I know that every time I have attempted something new, I have been afraid. I fear failure; I fear being at the receiving end of “I told you so.” And I am often intellectually lazy—unwilling to endure the messy process that creativity inevitably requires. Life feels simpler when we remain with what is familiar, when we do not stretch beyond what we already know. Yet it is in those very moments of stepping into the unknown, carrying the weight of uncertainty and fear, that creativity truly begins. Elizabeth Gilbert writes in *Big Magic* that creativity and fear walk side by side; if we wait for fear to disappear, nothing new will ever be made (Gilbert, 2015).

Here is the truth behind our fears: we grow up hearing instructions like “Color within the lines,” “Don’t challenge tradition—respect it,” “Be neat,” “Stop dreaming.” These messages sound harmless, even well-intentioned, but they plant early ideas about correctness, conformity, and staying small. They teach us that remaining inside boundaries is safer than imagining beyond them. But what if, instead, we asked: Why not outside? What new possibilities might we discover when we let the mind wander beyond the lines already drawn for us? And what if our respect for tradition lay not in preserving it unchanged, but in exemplifying its



malleability—its capacity to evolve with time while still holding its essence intact?

In *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*, Kaufman and Gregoire write that creative self-expression acts as a coping mechanism for those living through hard times or dealing with trauma. They emphasize that creativity is not located in a single creative center of the brain. Instead, it emerges from the dynamic collaboration of three neural networks: the Default Mode Network, where imagination and daydreaming flourish; the Executive Control Network, which shapes and refines ideas; and the Salience Network, which helps us determine what is meaningful.

So allow yourself to imagine freely, and to remember, time and again, what both science and centuries of human intuition tell us: the arts are profoundly good for our mental, physical, and emotional well-being because in the act of creating, they awaken the networks that make us more empathetic, resilient, and attuned to possibility.

Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross, in *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us*, reference a 2021 study by Daisy Fancourt



Photo Credit: Anita Vallabh

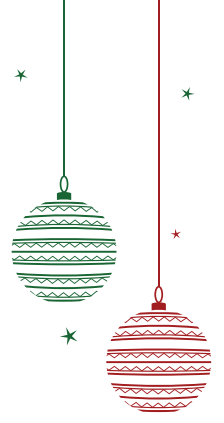
and her team on the health benefits of artistic activity. They found that the very complexity and “messiness” of the arts—what is often dismissed as a limitation—is at the heart of why the arts are so therapeutic. Their unpredictability, emotional depth, and multisensory engagement activate healing modalities in ways that linear, orderly tasks simply cannot.

And when we marvel at the wonders of human history, we are witnessing creativity at its most magnificent scale. Standing before the Brihadiśvara Temple in Thanjavur, the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, or the pyramids of Egypt, one cannot help but ask: How did they build such massive and intricate structures without modern machinery? The answer is creativity—geometry, engineering, problem-solving, community labor, and a worldview that places imagination and devotion at the center of human life. These monuments were created by people who dared to conceive what did not yet exist. Imagine how messy and complex that process must have been.

Looking back, history is shaped by those willing to take such leaps. What if Mozart had stayed within the rigid boundaries of courtly music? Western classical tradition would lack his emotional vocabulary. What if A.R. Rahman had not blended raga, Sufi, and electronic textures? Indian film music would not carry his unmistakable signature. What if every devadāsī had given up dance and music? A vast lineage of embodied artistry and sacred knowledge would have disappeared. What if our rishis had not preserved the Vedas? What if Patañjali had not compiled the Yoga Sūtras? We would be spiritually impoverished—under-nourished in culture, wisdom, imagination, and inner guidance. Every era is transformed by those who choose courage over fear, and contribution over silence.

What I know for sure is that I never want to look back on my life with regretful should haves and could haves. Creativity is, at its core, the willingness to step forward toward uncertainty, risk, and messiness. And it is this very act of stepping forward that Paulo Coelho warns us not to abandon when he reminds us: “When we give up on our dreams and find peace, what we were trying to avoid in the battle—disappointment and defeat—becomes the only legacy of our cowardice.” I would rather face discomfort and the possibility of failure than the regret of never having dared at all. And if courage becomes the only legacy I leave behind for my daughter and grandchildren, it will be a hand-me-down I am proud of.

I would rather face discomfort and the possibility of failure than the regret of never having dared at all. And if courage becomes the only legacy I leave behind for my daughter and grandchildren, it will be a hand-me-down I am proud of.



Synergies – The Intersection of Yoga and Nāṭyam (Part 2)

Pathways to a Creative Mind

By *Nrithya Jagannathan*

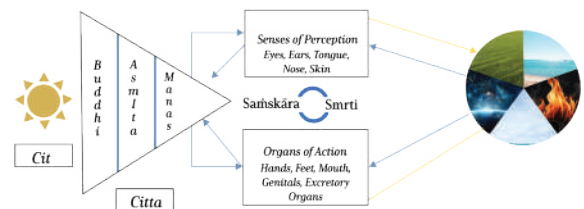
While yoga today is mostly conflated with āsana, it is vital to remember that it is a Vaidika Darśana (a philosophy deriving from Vedic lore) that is entirely ādhyātmika (inward looking) in nature. At the crux of Yoga Sādhana (the practice of Yoga for spiritual empowerment) is an understanding of the mind.

Yoga, beyond āsana (physical postures) involves:

- discipline in diet, lifestyle, work and study patterns and exercise with a view to refining and strengthening the body and mind
- honest unbiased introspection and evaluation of one's thoughts and actions, as an ongoing and reiterative process
- acting with humility and accepting one's limitations, without anticipating gain or loss and continuing to align with what is, regardless of the outcome
- understanding that every one of us is a part of an interconnected whole and that it is only in the harmony of the whole, that each of its parts also be in harmony and stability
- facilitation of a deep awareness of the inherent connection between body, breath, senses and mind. When the mind is slowly trained to meditate, it can reflect the nature of the soul within. When the mind is regulated, the senses follow rather than leading the mind astray.
- awareness that there is a larger cosmic order at play (*ṛtam*) and while the mind appears to be powerful, in reality its role is limited to being a faithful instrument for the consciousness within
- the realization of the all-pervasive and omniscient nature of *īśvara*, to accept changes in one's path with equanimity and to align oneself to these changes without fear, anger or regret.

In other words, Yoga makes us the very best that we can be in everything that we take up, so that we become suitable vessels to receive and hold divine grace. Yoga, as a directed process of bringing the mind to progressively deeper states

of immersive attention, to the chosen object of thought, also offers the practitioner a time-tested method of stilling the raciness of the mind. It is in such a serenity that creative potential blossoms and manifests as creative living - this in turn, is foundational for every performing artist.



Process of cognition as per Yogasūtra

Cit is the unchanging consciousness and the source of all perception; it is the bhokta, the experiencer, of all that is shown to it by the mind.

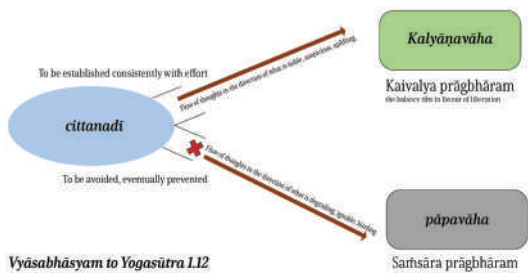
Citta, the mind, comprises manas, asmitā and buddhi, three aspects of the one and same mind, but with different functions. The manas aspect receives the sensory inputs, organizes, classifies, stores and retrieves these as memories. Asmitā is that aspect of the mind that develops an identification with what is being experienced through the lenses of, "I am" and "mine."

Buddhi, is the deeper aspect of the mind, capable of processing experiences and taking a decision on the appropriate course of action.

At any point of time, the content of the mind is also informed and influenced by memories of past experiences (Smṛti) and corresponding conditioning of behaviour (saṁskāra).

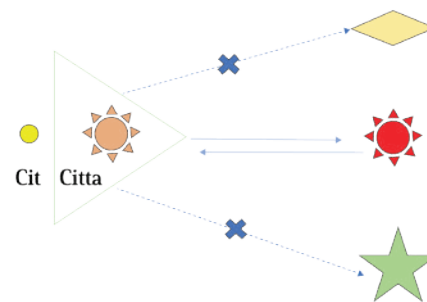
The mind can perceive either with clarity, attention and lucidity or it can be restless and agitated, or it can be deluded or clouded. In the former state, sattva guna (the underlying quality of all matter, including the mind that enables coherence of thought and responsive expression) is dominant while in the latter, rajas (that aspect of the material matrix that causes one to be agitated, distressed or restless) and tamas (that aspect of the material matrix that causes one to be deluded or apathetic) hold sway. The more the mind is trained, the more refined its perception and its capacity to engage in dhyānam. If we envision the journey of a dancer in the context of Yoga Sādhana, it is evident that such a dominance of sattva becomes essential to not just understand the nuances of a character, but also to hold a sthāyi (base emotion) within the mind, while expressing that sthāyi with creative embellishment.

There are two possibilities for the human mind, as indicated by Vyāsa’s commentary to Yogasūtra 1.12. The mind that is sattva dominant, tends to flow in the direction of what is right and true, anchoring itself in dhyānam, by gradually eliminating its toxicities through sādhanā. This flow is known as kalyāṇavāha. The other possibility is for the mind to be so tainted by rajas or tamas and the feelings that these guna-s engender, causing it to flow towards attachment driven choices, binding us repeatedly to saṃsāra (the cycle of birth, life and death). This flow is known as pāpavāha.

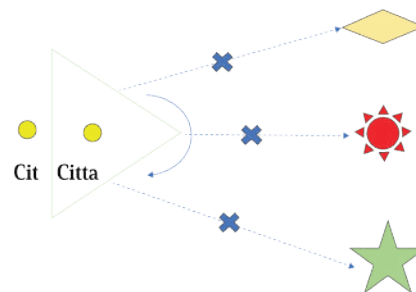


According to the Yogasūtra, only abhyāsa (sustained practice to free the mind from the thrall of rajas and tamas by enabling sattva dominance) and vairāgya, the cultivation of the highest order of dispassion, can help us attain our goal as sādha-kā-s (spiritual practitioners).

When trained, the mind can be absorbed in a state of dhyānam, in which the attributes of its object of meditation, impact and inform the mind to such a level that the mind acquires a complete understanding and mastery over that object. This in itself, is an inward journey, requiring the mind to disentangle itself with all external distractions and connect to its chosen object. While any object can be the mind’s focus, legendary Yogī, Sri T Krishnamacharya indicates in his commentary to the Yogasūtra that Īśvara (the Supreme Consciousness) is the ideal dhyeya (object of focus), for Īśvara is the repository of all kalyāṇa guṇa (auspicious attributes) and alone capable of enabling the transformation of the mind to the highest state of śuddha sattva (a continued state of sattva dominance without regression into rajasic or tamasic modes).



The process of saṃyama (meditation) bestows siddhi-s, exceptional capabilities. However, these are not the goal, but rather seen as incidental in the path of ādhyātmika sādhanā. When the mind has turned fully inwards, it mirrors the Consciousness, that “perceives” itself in its own form. This is the highest state of kaivalyam (liberation/ freedom) and it is for this purpose alone, that the mind serves the purusa (consciousness).



For this, Patañjali delineates the pathway of the Yoga Aṣṭāṅga, an eight-limbed path of yoga that offers a holistic and sustainable journey to understand the mind and develop the mind to its highest potentials.

It is the lived experience of every great dancer that the rigorous physicality of training, serves as the means by which the body ceases to be a limitation and becomes an instrument of sublime expression through every muscle. But, for such spontaneity and seamless fluidity of outward expression, an anchor of stillness becomes vital. Such manodharma (unrehearsed and spontaneous creativity), birthed in a mind that has stilled its chatter and incubated in the crucible of reflective meditation, is what transforms a framework driven art into unbridled artistry.

Yoga, beyond āsana, involves a discipline in diet, lifestyle, work and study patterns and exercise with a view to refining and strengthening the body and mind. It is in such a serenity that creative potential blossoms and manifests as creative living.

There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through anyother medium and will be lost.

Martha Graham



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Music, Mind and Emotion: The Resonant Bridge Between Sound, Self, and Beyond

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