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Arts And Features Anil Srinivasan

A Conversation with
the award-winning
pianist and professor.

With an introduction
by Sikkil Gurucharan.

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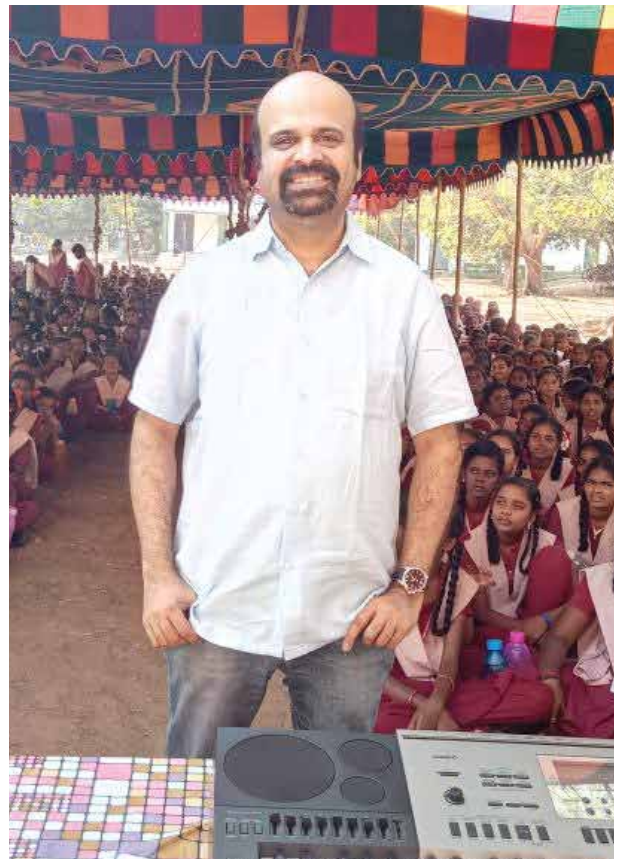


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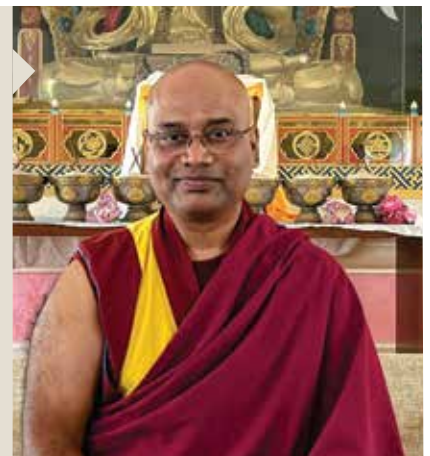
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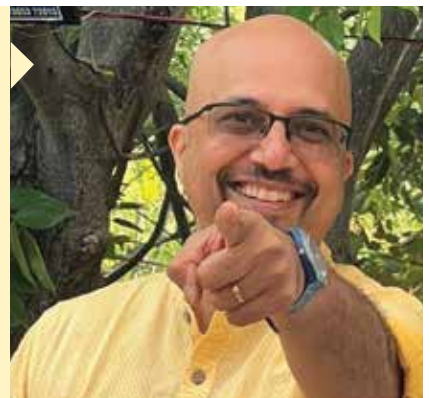
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Editorial

Choosing Courage

Dear friends,

Courage. What a beautiful word, one that speaks to actions arising from the heart.

As I reflect on my own journey and read the essays in this issue, I am reminded that we are all, in our own ways, courageous in choosing how we live. Whether as caregivers, teachers, entrepreneurs, artists, individuals embracing their gender identity, or emotional coaches, and in acts as simple yet profound as standing up to a bully, we enact courage in countless ways.

The contributions in this issue reflect this range: tracing courage across disciplines and lived experiences—in the discipline of the body and mind, in the ethical demands of artistic practice, and in the personal journeys of identity and creative expression. Together, they reveal courage as a sustained way of being shaped through everyday choices rather than singular heroic acts.

We are honored to welcome **Dr. V.R. Devika** and **Geshe Tenzin Lhabsum** to this issue of Global Indian Artist.

Perhaps the most meaningful outcome of these acts is the sense of worthiness and belonging they bring. In each moment of courage, we look fear in the eye, acknowledge it, and move beyond it to act on what we truly believe. Our sacred traditions recognise such action as deeply spiritual, an expression of fearlessness. As the Bhagavad Gita reminds us, fearlessness is among the highest of human qualities (16.1). Pema Chödrön similarly describes courage as “tender-hearted bravery”: not the absence of fear, but the willingness to remain open and present in its midst.



In my own journey, acts of not giving up led me to find my creative partner, Ahalya Sakthivel, founder of **Kanakavalli**, whose work is rooted in a similar commitment to tradition and integrity. Through this process, I have come to recognise how acts of courage open pathways to humane connection in what often feels like a disconnected world.

And that is enough.

Founder & Editorial Curator,
Global Indian Artist LLC



Cover Story

A Reflection on Courage as Listening

By Anita Vallabh, Ph.D.

There are collaborations that expand repertoire. And then there are those that alter the very way one hears oneself.

When I first began working with Anil Srinivasan, I was at a point in my musical journey where I had begun to feel a certain comfort—within form, within expectation, within the familiar arc of the Carnatic concert. That collaboration unsettled that comfort in the most generative way.

What struck me immediately was his ability to listen—not just to music, but to the person making it. He recognised in my voice a quality I had not named for myself: vulnerability. And instead of correcting it or containing it, he chose to work with it, to build from it, to allow it to become an expressive strength. That shift alone altered my relationship to my own music.

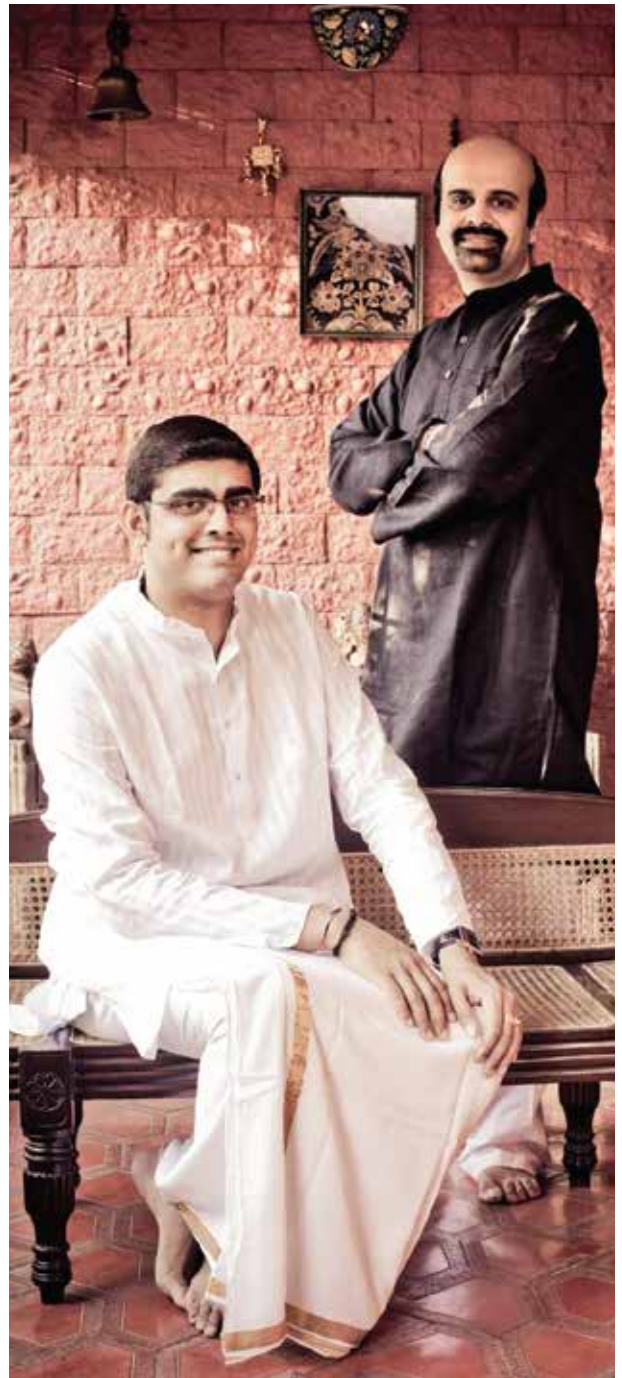
Working with Anil also meant stepping away from literal thinking. A concert was never just a sequence of compositions; it was a conceptual space. Themes were not illustrative but expansive, often drawing connections across language, form, and imagination. Music, in his approach, refused containment. It moved across boundaries—of genre, of structure, of expectation—while remaining deeply attentive to tradition.

Our collaborations, including one with the Dhananjayans called *Light on the Path*, revealed another dimension of this listening. Music and dance did not simply accompany one another; they responded, paused, and breathed together. Silence became as significant as sound. What emerged was not coordination, but a shared field of attention.

Looking back, I recognise that this journey did not merely add another layer to my work. It opened a parallel path—one that allowed me to reimagine my voice, my practice, and my place within the musical landscape.

There are artists who perform. And there are those who quietly reshape how others experience their own art. Anil belongs to the latter.

— Sikkil Gurucharan



Sikkil Gurucharan (seated), & Anil Srinivasan.
Photo credit: Kunal Daswani



Sikkil Gurucharan's reflection offers a revealing entry point into Anil Srinivasan's musical world. What emerges is a practice shaped by attention to oneself and to others. Courage, in this musical context, resides in a way of listening: to listen attentively, to respond with understanding, and to remain open to being altered by what one hears.

It is this courage that has led Anil Srinivasan, an M.Phil. graduate from the Columbia School of Business and a philanthropist, to found the Rhapsody education initiative, pioneering STEM learning through music and arts-based interventions, as well as KRUU, bringing project-based learning from universities to school students.

His talks are engaging and informative, bringing in wit, mimicry, and the melody of his piano to elevate and entertain audiences, while involving them in the process.

In conversation with Global Indian Artist, Anita Vallabh speaks with Anil Srinivasan, who traces this movement: from listening as discipline to a way of seeing others and recognising their artistry, and to a way of being.

Courage is often associated with visibility or bold action. In a musician's life, where do you find courage actually operates?

Courage in music is often misunderstood. We imagine it as boldness on stage, dazzling virtuosity, or the sheer visibility of performance. But in my journey, courage has lived in quieter places. It has meant choosing vulnerability

over certainty, listening instead of asserting, and risking failure by attempting something unconventional. Courage, for me, is surrendering to music and allowing it to reshape me.

You chose the piano as your primary instrument in a cultural ecosystem where it was neither central nor conventional. What—or who—gave you the confidence to pursue this path, and what concerns did you carry at the time?

I do not believe I chose the piano. I strongly believe the instrument chooses you, and music flows through that choice. It is at once humbling as it forms the basis for something extraordinary that shapes one's life.

"Bringing the piano in", I was stepping into a cultural ecosystem where it was neither central nor conventional. In Chennai's Carnatic milieu, the piano was seen as an outsider. Yet I felt drawn to its voice—its ability to hold Western harmonic structures and Indian melodic sensibilities.

My mentors encouraged me to embrace difference, but I carried concerns: Would audiences accept this instrument? Would it be seen as alien? Over time, I realized that courage meant trusting the piano's ability to converse with tradition, and trusting myself to be an interpreter.

I recall S Gurumurthy once remarked in a public forum: "The piano, in your hands, is not a Western instrument—it is a voice that listens to Carnatic music and responds with humility." That affirmation gave me confidence to continue.

Courage, then, was not about defiance—it was about listening and dialogue.

Listening is fundamental to music-making, yet it is rarely articulated as a practice in itself. How do you understand listening in your musical life today?

Listening has become the foundation of my practice. It is not passive—it is the most active discipline I know. Listening means attending to silence, to the spaces between notes, to the emotional states of collaborators, and even to the audience's breath. It is how I compose myself before I compose music.

Your involvement with Concerts in the Dark with blind children offers a radically different sensory framework. What did this experience teach you about attention, listening, and non-visual ways of knowing?

This truth was brought home to me during Concerts in the Dark, where I perform blindfolded, working in darkness to reflect and respond in empathy to the visually disabled. Through this experience, I realized that listening is not just about hearing—it is about attunement, about tactile and emotional knowing.

One child told me, “I don't see your piano, but I feel it in my skin.” That sentence has stayed with me ever since.

Collaborating with the Dhananjayans places listening at the center of musical decision-making. What did that experience teach you about shared creative partnership in performance?

Working with the Dhananjayans was a masterclass in shared listening. Every decision in performance was rooted in attentiveness—to rhythm, to gesture, to silence. I discovered that listening together creates a third space, larger than either of us alone. Partnership in performance is not compromise—it is co-creation.

As Shanta Dhananjayan once said, “Dance listens to music, but music must also listen to dance. Only then does the art breathe.” That insight continues to guide my collaborative work.

You have often described Rhapsody as a pathway rather than a program. What does that distinction make possible pedagogically and ethically?

Rhapsody was conceived not as a program, but as a pathway. A program is structured and measured; a pathway is open and exploratory.

Pedagogically, this allows children to discover themselves through music, to connect disciplines, and to learn without fear of judgment. Music becomes a lens through which they encounter the world.

Ethically, it resists gatekeeping. It insists that music belongs

to everyone—not just the “talented.” It allows children to explore, to fail, and to find their own relationship to sound.

When you look back at your journey so far, what continues to surprise you about music—and about yourself as a listener?

What continues to surprise me is how music keeps revealing new dimensions of myself as a listener. I am constantly reminded of how much I don't know, how much silence teaches me, and how every collaboration reshapes my understanding.

Listening, in the end, is not just a practice. It is a way of life. And courage in music is not about being heard—it is about listening deeply enough to be changed.



Courage !!!

By *Dr.V.R.Devika*

1942. World War II was just about to turn in favour of the allies but the city of Madras was gripped in the fear of a threat of a Japanese attack. Huge numbers of people deserted the city, but in the middle of a coconut grove to the south of Adayar river and the Theosophical Society, a few thatched huts of Avvai Home were giving solace to destitute women and young girls, some of whom had fled the exploitative Devadasi system. British Indian Soldiers were housed in pitched up tents on the other side of the river. Their eyes fell on the young girls. Some soldiers made some comments. These were reported to Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy who had set up the Home. She stood vigil with a huge stick through the night and the next morning travelled all the way to the office of the British head of the Southern Command near the Fort and told him in no uncertain terms that if any untoward behaviour was noticed from any soldier, he would be held responsible!

Courage seems to have been the middle name of Muthulakshmi Reddy. As the first Indian woman member of the legislative assembly and the first alderwoman of any lawmaking body anywhere in the world, (after being the first woman surgeon from Madras Medical College!), Dr.Muthulakshmi tabled the bill to abolish the system of dedicating young girls to a temple as Devadasis. These girls, married to the God, were allowed to learn music and dance and were available to become concubines for wealthy patrons outside their marriages. She faced stiff opposition from orthodox men for this project of hers and had to argue with erudite men in the assembly. S.Satyamurthi, a fearless politician was against any interference in cultural practices from the government. He is said to have told her that the women who were dedicated as Devadasis were fulfilling a divine duty. Dr.Muthulakshmi is said to have retorted "Women of my ilk are done with their share of divine duty. You may get women in your family to be blessed with such a duty." This exchange was deleted from the records of debate in the legislative assembly.

Where did she get such courage? Muthulakshmi was the daughter of a Devadasi, a system in which a young girl was given in dedication to the deity of a temple, in a ritual called "Bottu Kattudal". A chosen patron of the ritual paid a dowry and other gifts to the God and had a sexual right over the girl. He had no obligation of giving his name or





Muthulakshmi Reddy

inheritance to the woman or the children born from this association. It was a system devised by men of upper class, for them to have their cake and eat it too. Conventional marriage was banned for the girl. Her children took her name and were brought up by her in her maternal home.

Muthulakshmi's mother Chandrammal was a girl of 11 when her Melakkara artist family decided to conduct her Bottu kattudal and dedicate her in a marriage to the temple deity in Pudukkottai. Narayanasamy, a professor of English at Raja's College and a tutor to the royal family of Pudukkottai, was requested by the sister of the King of Pudukkottai to become the patron for this Bottu kattudal. He was married but his two children had died in infancy. The thirty-year-old man's hands were gripped by the 11-year-old during the ritual with an appeal to be taken away from the situation. Chandrammal promised him that she would be loyal to him all her life but she wanted to get out of the system. He made a home for her. Muthulakshmi was born when Chandrammal was sixteen in 1886.

Chandrammal's family was interested in getting Muthulakshmi dedicated to the temple but Chandrammal fought hard and fast against it. For her, honour lay in marriage and she wanted her daughter to be married. Muthulakshmi was admitted to a school and showed great interest in learning. Narayanasamy was proud of his children and agreed to educate them, tutoring his daughter in the absence of a girls' school in the town after puberty, so that she could write the Intermediate examinations. Muthulakshmi, the lone girl among the hundred candidates from Pudukkottai who appeared for the examination, topped in all subjects when the results were announced.

At the age of seventeen, in 1903, Muthulakshmi had the audacity to write to the King of Pudukkottai Marthanda Varma, for admission to the Raja's College for boys as there were no colleges for girls there at the time. The town was aghast and several threatened to withdraw their sons from the Raja's college if a girl, that too one born to a Devadasi was admitted. They felt the presence of a girl in college might corrupt the minds of the boys. A curtain was drawn in the class between the boys and the lone girl to shield her from their stares. A bell was rung after she had left the campus at the end of the day when the boys could come out of their class. She topped her class.



***Sitting: Dr.Sundaram Reddy and Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy.
Standing behind are sons Ramamurthy and Krishnamurthy***

Then came the decision to study medicine. Father and daughter travelled to Madras where the British dean urged the young girl to go for the easier L.M. and S. (Degree of Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery) while the girl wanted to study surgery. He felt she was too frail to try surgery and No Indian girl had studied surgery in Madras Medical College at the time but Muthulakshmi was stubborn.

Even as she was studying medicine, Muthulakshmi, besides looking after an infant at home, was volunteering at women's hostels, helping Sister Subbulakshmi (Sister being the title by which Subbulakshmi was known) at her home for young widows, and found the time to attend talks by Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu at the Theosophical Society.

Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy took her daughter along with her sons when she received a scholarship to travel to the UK to look at medical practices there. It was there that she, grieving for her younger sister who died of cancer at the age of 23, decided to work for establishing a cancer treatment speciality hospital in Madras. She sent her second son Krishnamurthy to specialise in cancer treatment in the United States and established the iconic Cancer Institute WIA (Women's Indian Association) in Adyar after heroic battles with the government for land and permissions, and begging for donations. Today it stands as a testament to her grit, will and courage, and continues to uphold her dictum that the poorest patient must get the same treatment as the richest.

In 2018 when this author met with the legendary oncologist and chairperson of the Cancer Institute (WIA) in Chennai, Dr. Shanta, she said: **“The diktat of our founder was that the poorest patient and the richest must get the same treatment. It is both our strength and burden.”**

Muthulakshmi won several gold medals for merit in studies at the end of the course. Several newspapers carried pictures of her as the first woman surgeon. She received congratulatory letters from several people including the national poet Sarojini Naidu. One letter among them took her aback! It was from Dr.Sundaram Reddy, an FRCS in anatomy. He had heard about her and wanted to marry her! Muthulakshmi had been resisting every day pressure put on her by her mother to get married. She was now 26 years old and in 1912, 16 was too late for marriage! Her first reaction was to reject the offer in the letter. Dr.Sundaram Reddy went all the way to Pudukkottai, convinced Chandrammal that he would be like a son to her and appealed to Narayanasamy to convince their daughter to agree to meet him. The first visit was awkward but subsequent visits brought them close to each other. **The courageous woman got her beau to sign a declaration before engagement to declare that she would be an equal in the marriage and that her activities were not to be curbed by the husband.** They got married in 1914

according to Brahma Samaj rituals as marriage in Hindu rites was banned for her at the time as the daughter of a Devadasi. So C.N.Muthulakshmi became Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy.

To be continued...



Muthulakshmi Reddy as a medical student



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MOVEMENT BEYOND MEASURE

A Conversation with Bharatanatyam
Dancer Sutikshana

By Anita Vallabh, Ph.D.



In this conversation, Bharatanatyam dancer Sutikshana reflects on dance, perseverance, embodiment, and the meaning of courage in her life and practice.

You were born without your right leg below the knee, and with differences in your hands and fingers. What drew you toward Bharatanatyam, and what made you choose the path of performance?

I neither stumbled accidentally upon Bharatanatyam nor chose it as a deliberate challenge. Love birthed my pursuit of Bharatanatyam and continues to fuel it today.

My mother and guru, Vanitha Veeravalli, grew up learning the form and nurturing a deep love for it. It was one of the few things she carried with her when she moved to the United States. I believe that love gave her an innate certainty when she began teaching me Bharatanatyam at the age of four—with an attitude of, “Of course. Why not?”

Throughout my childhood, dance safeguarded my sense of belonging. My mother’s dance school gave me the opportunity to lead others, and my Chicago-area community appreciated me simply as a dancer, not a conditional one.



I began performing regularly at festivals across North America and Chennai, eventually even at the Madras Music Academy’s Spirit of Youth and HCL series. What all these performance experiences held in common was the feeling that I could make the space my own, with the knowledge that I was surrounded by support.

This may be true of many performers, but what made it especially meaningful to me was that being on stage suspended the burden of having to prove myself as a person with ability and agency—a burden many people with disabilities may implicitly carry. Sharing in art allowed appreciation to transcend man-made definitions.

So, what drew me to Bharatanatyam? Ultimately it was my mother’s love, which gradually became my own. It allows me to never question myself, to remain equanimous in the presence of external doubt, and to dance—not despite a prosthetic leg and limb differences—but with them.

What challenges did you face during your training and performance journey, and what continues to challenge you today?

Perhaps contrary to what some may have anticipated, my challenge was not a physical one. Having navigated the world with a limb difference from birth, I never had to reroute how I did an adavu or found my balance. When dancing in a group setting, we would sometimes default to a left-handed mudra instead of a right-handed one for greater uniformity.

However, I have come to embrace the idea that uniformity and symmetry are only stepping stones toward the larger goal—effective and impactful communication. As a dance practitioner once told me, limbs are only ornaments. The central body—the core and head regions—builds the majority of the story. That was freeing to hear.

My main challenge has been knowing what to invest most of my time in. Whether it is Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, my profession as a high school educator, or my side project in public speaking, it is easy for me to become excited by and deeply involved in many things at once. It stems from believing that there is room for curiosity everywhere.

However, I have had to remind myself that prioritization is not incuriosity. When I give myself the chance to focus wholeheartedly on one thing, I feel more satisfied with my progress.

What continues to challenge me is how to sustain multiple close-to-my-heart pursuits simultaneously, without compromising depth or presence in any one of them.

You mentioned that dancing does not feel like courage to you. Then what does courage mean to you personally?

It is not that dancing categorically does not feel like courage. Dancing with a prosthetic leg and partial limbs is natural to me and therefore does not inherently require courage.

Courage, to me, is pushing yourself toward a meaningful challenge—expanding yourself where you would have normally shrunk.

When I pushed myself to complete the trikāla jāti continuously, rather than stopping because of “imperfections,” that was courage. When I intervened, instead of remaining silent, to stop two of my high school students from bullying a peer, that was courage. When I chose rest and trusted my body to deliver the next day, rather than pushing through pain, that was courage.

In all these situations, it would have been easier to fall back into a pattern of behavior that kept me static, or even caused harm. Choosing courage in those moments allowed me to grow in the long term.

The more consciously I choose courage in shaping my unknowns, the more my confidence deepens, and the more I identify myself as capable. My hope is to make that process contagious.



Letting Go. Letting In.

Creativity Begins Where the Noise Ends.

By *Geshe Tenzin Lhabsum*

Let's start with something simple.

Pause for a second. Just notice what's going on inside your head.

You'll probably notice — it's not quiet. A thought, a memory, a worry, a plan — something is always happening. It just keeps going. And the weird part is, we've gotten so used to it that we don't even question it anymore. It feels so normal... But is it?

If you look a little closer, most of that noise isn't really 'yours'. It's just built up over time — from parents, school... culture, religion, social media. Layer by layer, it piles up into this constant background chatter that feels like 'You', but it is mostly conditioning. And then there's something a bit uncomfortable to notice — maybe we're not just used to the noise... maybe we're actually afraid of what's underneath it.

Try it. Sit with nothing for a minute. No phone, no sound. It doesn't take long. The mind starts reaching out for something—anything—to hold onto. Almost like stillness itself is dangerous.

So here's the real question — not philosophical, just practical: Can a mind that's constantly talking ever be quiet enough to create anything? Because we tend to think creativity comes from doing more. Thinking more. Pushing harder. But if you really look at it, that's not what's happening. A noisy mind doesn't create — it repeats. It replays old ideas, old reactions, old patterns. Even when it feels like you're creating something... it's often just rearrangement. And that's why it feels stuck.

Now here's where things usually go wrong. We try to fix the noise. Calm the mind, control thoughts, focus harder. But the moment you try to control thought, you've already created more of it. One part of the mind trying to manage another — it's still noise. It's like trying to smooth water by stirring it.

You see this clearly in meditation. People sit down, close their eyes, and almost immediately get into a struggle — “Why am I thinking so much? Am I doing this right? I need to focus.” They've basically just swapped everyday chatter with meditation chatter. Same noise. Just a different ground.

Maybe the issue isn't controlling the mind. Maybe it's understanding it.



Think about watching a beautiful sunset. For a brief moment, there's just seeing. No words. No interpretation. And then, almost instantly, the mind jumps in.

"This is nice. I should photograph it. This reminds me of..."

And just like that, the moment is gone. Not because it ended, but because being in the experience gets replaced by thinking about the experience.

This is pretty much how most of us live. Not really in direct contact with life... but through a layer of interpretation. The layer doesn't just describe reality — it starts shaping it. And from that layer, we act. It creates ideas of what love should be, what success should look like, how life should go. And we start relating not to what's actually happening, but to these ideas. So instead of meeting people directly, we meet our image of them. Instead of responding freshly, we react from memory. And then life starts to feel repetitive.

Thought itself isn't the problem. It's a tool. We need it. But somewhere along the way, it stopped being a tool and became a process that never switches off. Constant, energy-draining background noise — just replaying, imagining, worrying. It's invisible. And exhausting.

That's why even on vacation, the mind doesn't rest. The place changes. The noise doesn't. Underneath all this, something deeper is going on. A constant movement of seeking. Trying to become something. Trying to secure something. Trying to avoid something. And along with that comes fear — fear of losing, fear of not being enough, fear of uncertainty. That movement is what keeps the mind active.

So instead of asking... *"How do I stop thinking?"* — which is still more thinking — maybe a more useful question is: Why can't the mind stay still?

You don't get this by forcing silence. You start seeing it... just by observing. You can start with something as simple as watching the breath — not to achieve anything, but just to see what's happening without interfering. The moment you bring in a goal — peace, clarity, results — you're back inside the same loop of seeking.

But when there's just observation, something starts to shift.

The mind slows down — not because you made it... but because you're no longer feeding it constantly. And as it slows down, there's space. And in that space, things start becoming clearer. You begin to see how much of your life is driven by ideas — about yourself, about others, about how things should be.

Even love is often based on an image — what you think a person is, rather than who they actually are. And that gap between image and reality is where a lot of confusion lives. But when that interference drops, even briefly, something

else becomes possible. You start to see directly.

No labelling. No analysing. Just contact.

And in that directness, there's a kind of connection that doesn't need explanation.

So the real shift isn't from noise to silence.

It's from unconscious noise to actually understanding it.

When you really see how thought operates — how it builds and sustains itself — it begins to settle on its own. Not permanently. But long enough for something new to arrive. And that 'something new' is what we call creativity. Not as talent. Not as technique. But as a way of responding. When the mind is not crowded, it becomes more sensitive, more flexible, more alive. And from that state, action is no longer repetitive. It feels fresh. Letting go is not about giving something up. It's really about seeing what you're unnecessarily holding onto — patterns, reactions, ideas — and letting them loosen a bit. When that happens, even slightly, the noise reduces. The mind becomes quieter, naturally. And in that quiet, there is Space.

And in that space — if you don't rush to fill it — something starts becoming clear. You didn't have to chase it. Creativity was always there... just sitting beneath all the noise.



kanakavalli®

The Enduring Language of the Kanjivaram

By Anita Vallabh, Ph.D.

Almost twenty-five years ago, I met Ahalya in Chennai. A friend took me to visit her jewellery store. Although our meeting was brief, the memory stayed with me: her graceful presence, a beautiful Kanjeevaram sari, jasmine flowers in her hair, and an unmistakable sense of dignity.

Today, as Global Indian Artist partners with Ahalya, I sat down with her to hear the story of **Kanakavalli**: a journey shaped by a deep respect for heritage, craftsmanship, and the enduring language of the Kanjivaram. The name itself carries a special resonance: kanaka, meaning gold, and Valli, in honour of her guru Alarmel Valli, whom Ahalya regards as an embodiment of beauty and grace. Over the years, Kanakavalli has emerged as an international brand synonymous with a thoughtful engagement with the Kanjivaram tradition.





At the heart of Kanakavalli lies a clear philosophy: **heritage must be honoured, not tampered with**. When someone seeks out a Kanjivaram sari, they are drawn to it because of its provenance: its history, lineage, and cultural memory. Over time, many attempts have been made to introduce novelty into traditional crafts, altering materials or reshaping the structure of the textile in response to contemporary fashion. For Ahalya, however, once the grammar of the Kanjivaram is altered, it ceases to remain what it is. The audience for Kanakavalli is therefore not defined by demographics but by sensibility: those who recognise the value of good weaving, good silk, and good zari, and who understand the integrity of the craft.

Ahalya's relationship to the Kanjivaram is deeply shaped by the cultural rhythms of Tamil life. The aesthetic language of the sari is something she describes as almost instinctive, much like language itself: one may learn it, she observes, but speaking it with fluency requires growing up within its world of references. This familiarity also informs her relationship with weavers. Craft, in her view, rests fundamentally on relationships and an understanding of the ecosystem within which artisans live and work.

Ahalya's professional journey began with jewellery. In her mid-twenties, while navigating work and motherhood, she encountered a young craftsman whose clarity of purpose

left a lasting impression. That meeting revealed the larger significance of craft: not only as aesthetic expression but also as a source of livelihood and economic independence.

Her shift to saris emerged from a surprisingly ordinary experience: shopping for them. What struck her most was how transactional the process had become. Customers were immediately asked about budgets, and racks were organised according to price points. Yet a sari, particularly one purchased for a wedding or an important life event, carries emotional resonance. Reducing such an experience to a simple calculation of price, she felt, diminished both the customer and the weaver.

Within this system, the weaver's audience often remains invisible. A master craftsman may create something extraordinary, yet the work ultimately appears on a rack defined only by its price tag. For Ahalya, the central challenge facing handloom traditions lies not merely in production but in perception. Conversations often focus on increasing efficiency or improving supply. The more urgent question, she suggests, is how audiences come to recognise the value of the craft and pay for it accordingly.

Ahalya does not see herself primarily as a designer but as an interpreter of what she calls the **social language of the Kanjivaram**. Through colour, layout, texture, and





composition, Kanakavalli responds to the lives of contemporary women while preserving the grammar of the tradition. Half a century ago, Kanjivarams were worn largely at weddings, pujas, and ceremonial gatherings. Today women move through many different public spheres: professional spaces, political platforms, and boardrooms. Interpreting the sari for these contexts requires sensitivity while retaining its essential character.

This philosophy has also shaped the growth of Kanakavalli. What began as a modest sari space within Ahalya's jewellery store in Chennai gradually evolved into a network of stores across India. In the early years, the brand travelled extensively across the country, presenting exhibitions that allowed audiences to encounter the textiles directly: to see them, touch them, and understand the craft behind them. Despite the rise of digital commerce, Ahalya remains convinced that saris must be experienced physically. They are tactile objects, she explains, and the experience of choosing one, particularly for a wedding or an important life event, carries emotional significance.

For many people, particularly those living abroad, Kanakavalli evokes memories of home: weddings, festivals, films, and the familiar rhythms of Tamil cultural life. Reflecting on her journey, Ahalya speaks of discovering something unexpected about herself: resilience.

The principle that guides her work remains simple: Ahalya does not believe in rigid rules, but she recognises that every choice carries consequences. Within that awareness lies the enduring philosophy of Kanakavalli: preserving the language of the Kanjivaram while allowing it to continue speaking to the present, and to a global community that carries its memory across continents.

The Courage to Create

By Neena Alapatt



Residents of the "Parc at Duluth" Duluth, Georgia



The author at the Suwanee Arts Festival, 2018

The Courage

My artistic journey is, above all, a reflection of the courage creativity requires.

From the moment I could hold a stick, I was already sketching—scribbling on scraps of paper, on walls, on anything that would take ink/color. My father, weary of the marks spreading across the house, turned an entire wall into a blackboard so I could draw without limits. Whether praised or ignored, I kept creating because the act itself felt essential.

As a child I entered community art contests, never taking home a prize, yet the lack of accolades never dimmed my drive. After marriage and moving to the United States, I found myself returning once more experimenting with different artistic mediums in the evenings after work. This return marked something deeper: the courage to begin again, to change direction, and to embrace the unknown at different stages of life.

My professional path has zigzagged through computer science, accounting, and law, ultimately leading me to earn a master's degree in computer science and build a career in tech. Even amid deadlines and meetings, a quiet voice reminded me that my deeper calling lay in art and the bravery it demands.



*Residents of the "The Mansions at Gwinnett Park"
Lawrenceville, Georgia*

Today, I teach a vibrant group of senior artists—many in their eighties and nineties—whose courage continues to inspire me. **They remind me that bravery is not bound by age. It lives in the decision to try something new, to risk failure, and to keep creating.**

My journey—shaped by reinvention, resilience, and self-belief—allows me to connect deeply with those who are just beginning. **I teach with one core conviction: courage is the foundation of all creative expression. With it, anyone can pick up a brush, face the blank canvas, and create something meaningful.**

My art and my classroom teaching are rooted in the belief—that art, like life, asks us to be brave, to keep exploring, and to grow through every stroke, no matter where or when we begin.



*Residents of the "The Mansions at Gwinnett Park"
Lawrenceville, Georgia*



*Residents of the "The Mansions at Gwinnett Park"
Lawrenceville, Georgia*

Motherhood became another turning point. It asked me to pause and reimagine my path. In that space, I found the courage not just to enter the world of art, but to confront failure directly. I created what I can only describe as “horrible” art. I made mistakes. I kept going. Each misstep became an act of bravery—choosing persistence over perfection, curiosity over fear.

Recognizing my own limitations, I took another step and enrolled in a painting class. Unexpectedly, my peers began to seek out my perspective—my techniques, my way of seeing. Their trust challenged me to see myself differently. It gave me the courage to step into a role I had never formally trained for: teaching.

Without formal credentials in fine arts or education, I began exhibiting my work, often selling a few pieces. In recent years, I have also curated spaces for other artists to exhibit their work.

COURAGE

★ IN THE ★

ARTISTIC REALM

It's not about being fearless.
It's about making art
ANYWAY.

ACTS OF ARTISTIC COURAGE:

- ☆ MAKING THE WEIRD IDEA IN YOUR HEAD REAL
- ☆ SHARING BEFORE YOU FEEL "READY" (SPOILER: YOU WILL NEVER FEEL READY)
- ☆ TRYING NEW THINGS (EVEN IF YOU MIGHT BE BAD AT THEM)
- ☆ KEEPING GOING WHEN YOUR INNER CRITIC IS SCREAMING LIKE A DRAMA QUEEN
- ☆ REMEMBERING THAT "BAD" ART STILL COUNTS AS ART (IT'S ALL PRACTICE, BABY!)

THE BLANK PAGE

YOU CAN'T DRAW

IT WON'T BE GOOD

WHAT IF PEOPLE HATE IT?

IT'S ALL BEEN DONE BEFORE

WHY EVEN BOTHER?

OH, I WILL.

I DARE YOU TO MAKE SOMETHING **AWFUL!**

MADE SOMETHING TODAY

THAT'S MY HUMAN.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!
EVERY ARTIST HAS FACED THE BLANK PAGE BEAST. WE SURVIVED. YOU WILL TOO.

MISTAKES ARE PROOF YOU'RE TRYING!

SQUEEZE OUT THE DOUBT!

SHARP IDEAS AHEAD!

LET YOUR CREATIVITY MAKE A MESS!

KEEP GOING, YOU MAGNIFICENT WEIRDO!

COLOR OUTSIDE THE LINES!

COURAGE IS **CREATING** DESPITE THE FEAR.
≡ YOU'VE GOT THIS. ♥ ≡



Who says you cannot leap ?

By *Sanjay Rao Chaganti*

He was always the one who could hold a room.
As a child at family weddings, he moved effortlessly from booming out Gabbar Singh's dialogues to delivering classical lines with dramatic gravitas. Villain to purist in under two minutes. Uncles paused mid-conversation. Aunts laughed. Cousins edged closer. For a few luminous minutes, the hall belonged to him. People were spellbound. They clapped. They asked for one more.
He felt alive.
In college, the pattern continued. Debates. Theatre. Public speaking. When he stood up, the room leaned in. He was not trying to perform. He was simply inhabiting something natural.
And then came that very respectable fork in the road called Career Choice.
Television was opening up in India. He had acted in a pilot. There was a flicker of a possible path.
At the same time, he received a scholarship to pursue graduate studies in the United States.
He chose the scholarship.
It was sensible. Prestigious. The kind of decision that made relatives introduce him with just a little more pride.
A degree followed. Then a job. Then another. Stability. Structure. Promotions. Titles. The comforting rhythm of professional success.
On paper, it was excellent.
Inside, something felt quietly archived.

The Wound

By his early forties, the discomfort was no longer subtle. Not dramatic. No rebellion. Just a question that began to appear in the margins of life:

Is this it?

In that search, he came across a line attributed to Rumi: *"The wound is the place where the Light enters you."*

This time, it landed.

The wound was not failure. It was restlessness. A sense that the boy who once commanded a wedding hall had been gently placed on hold.

Without that wound, he might have continued successfully misaligned.

The Bhagavad Gita begins with Arjuna paralysed on the battlefield. His crisis is not weakness. It is awakening.

Life, it seems, does not send formal notifications before these moments.

The Brain That Loves Safety

It was never lack of talent that kept him from pursuing performance.

It was fear. Polite, educated fear.

Deep inside the brain sits a small almond-shaped structure called the amygdala. Its job is simple: detect threat, trigger protection.

See a snake. Heart races. Move.

The problem is that the amygdala does not distinguish very well between a cobra and a career shift.

Uncertainty feels dangerous.
So when he contemplated stepping away from a stable trajectory, anxiety surfaced. Doubt surfaced. Sensible internal committee meetings began.
Be practical.
Be responsible.
You have obligations.
And so he complied.
Modern psychology confirms that avoidance strengthens fear. Each retreat quietly teaches the brain that the threat must have been real.
The ring of fear grows thicker.

The Choosing

Eventually, the wound grew louder than the fear.
The question shifted.
Not "*Can I succeed?*"
But "*What will I regret not exploring?*"
He realised he did not crave fame. He craved aliveness. Live interaction. Shared insight. The moment a room becomes still because something meaningful has landed.
He began turning inward. Studying contemplative traditions. Exploring Buddhist psychology. Practicing yoga more deeply. Reading about resilience and meaning.
He did not leap dramatically.
He got trained.
He experimented.
He facilitated small conversations.
Led workshops.
Created reflective spaces.
Each step brought fear.
Each step brought joy.
He chose courage.

The Non-Linear Truth

Choosing courage is not a one-time act.
It is cyclical.
What keeps you alive evolves. And each time something shifts, the amygdala whispers again. Identity trembles. Fear resurfaces.
And once again, there is a choice.
Notice the change.

Name the fear.
Remember the flame.
Choose courage.

Again.
And again.
And again.

Sangha and the Jambavans

For nearly three years, he met every month with a small group of like-minded travellers.
They challenged one another. Reflected blind spots. Encouraged courage. All in a safe space.
In the Ramayana, Hanuman forgets that he can leap across the ocean. It is Jambavan who reminds him of his strength. Sometimes we all forget that we can fly.
We need Jambavans.
People who gently say,
You are stronger than you remember.
At certain points, that group was his Jambavan. Over time, he began to play that role for others.
Not dramatically. Simply holding up a mirror.
Today, he is quite comfortable with that moniker: Jambavan.
The gentle reminder.

A Quiet Acknowledgement

As you might have guessed, the man in this story is me.
I did not become fearless.
I became more willing to notice change.
More willing to name fear.
More willing to choose courage.
Again.
And again.
Along the way, I became a coach. Not because I had figured life out, but because I had walked through those rings of fear enough times to recognise them in others.
Today, I work with professionals who feel that same quiet restlessness. Who sense that something within them is ready to be lived. Who are standing at their own shoreline, wondering if they can leap.
Sometimes all that is needed is a Jambavan in the room.
If this resonated, I would genuinely love to hear how it landed for you. Drop me a line at sanjay@tillitonse.org



Nāṭya: Its Purpose and Process

By *Nrithya Jagannathan*



The Nāṭyaśāstra is a treatise on dramaturgy, attributed to Bharatamuni and believed to date back to the 1st century CE. With 3000 śloka-s in 36 chapters, this text is considered a very significant one in the context of the staging of a dramaturgical presentation, stated by Brahma, its creator, to be the pañcamam vedam (the fifth Veda)

The sages, of restrained senses and mind, (**niyatendriyabuddhayah**), led by Ātreya approached Bharata requesting him to elucidate the origin of the Nāṭyaveda, its purpose, its limbs, its scope and its application. (Nāṭyaśāstra 1.2,3,4,5). Bharata in turn asked them to cleanse themselves (**bhavadbhiḥ śucibhirbhūtva tathā'vahitamānasaiḥ**) and listen to the creation of

Nāṭyaveda (treatise on dramaturgy) by Brahmā.

This state of mind in which natyotpatti, the story of nāṭya, is received, itself indicates the necessity of a mind that is fully in attention and ready to receive.

Brahma, Bharata says, created the Nāṭyaveda, upon the request of the deva-s to offer celestials, sages and humans alike a means of uplifting didactic entertainment. Brahmā's spontaneous creation of the Nāṭyaveda may be viewed as analogous to *vivekaja jñāna* (Yogasūtra 3.54), the intuitive and non-sequential knowledge that emerges from profound meditative attainment.

Bharata explains that Brahmā, having created nāṭyam asked Indra to pass on this nāṭyaveda to the Deva-s deeming them to be fit recipients (grahaṇē dhāraṇē jñāne prayogē cāśya sattama) but Indra said that they are aśakta, unfit, to understand or apply nāṭya. He requests that the muni-s who are vedaguhyajña (know the secrets of Vedic lore) and saṁśitavratā (unswerving in their penances) alone can take the responsibility of transmitting and preserving the nāṭya tradition; it is thus that Bharata learned the Nāṭyaśāstra from Brahmā subsequently passing the knowledge on to his hundred sons, also thought to be his disciples.

These references indicate that the Ṛṣi-s who received the revealed wisdom of the Veda-s did so in a state of meditation, possible only because of their intense tapobalam (power of penance).

Subsequently nāṭya is embellished with tāndava (rigorous) and lāsya (graceful) aspects and the support of Svāti and his disciples for musical instruments and Nārada and others for the songs is enlisted.

The nāṭyam is staged for the Deva-s at the occasion of the Indradhvajotsava (flag ceremony of Indra) and Bharata and the performers are blessed by delighted Deva-s with gifts. The theme being the victory of the Deva-s (celestials) over the Daitya-s (demoniac), the wrath of the Daitya-s was invoked and the vighna-s (harbingers of obstacles) teamed up with the Daitya-s to paralyse and cause amnesia to Bharata and his team of performers.

In parallel, the Yogasūtra explains about nine antaraya-s or impediments that prevent the human mind from attaining

its potential to meditate. Where there is sādhanā of any kind, antarāya-s will manifest. Overcoming them requires fortitude of mind, represented by Indra's victory.

Indra conquers the Daitya-s with his jarjara (flagstaff). Subsequently, Brahma assures the performers that that a nāṭyamantāpa would be built for them, with the Deva-s offering their protection from all impediments. Brahma also pacifies the Daitya-s stating that henceforth nāṭya would be a bhāvānukīrtanam, a faithful retelling of myriad experiences undergone by the denizens of the three worlds.

Nāṭya, according to Nāṭyaśāstra, is a theatrical presentation, with multiple elements coming together, as indicated by the term, "nāṭyasangraha." These elements are

- Rasā - sentiment
- Bhāva - emotion
- Abhinaya - gestural representation
- Dharmī - rules of representation
- Vṛtti - dramatic styles
- Pravṛtti - actions
- Siddhi - accomplishments
- Svara - notes
- Ātodya - musical instruments
- Gāna - song
- Prakṛti - natural disposition
- Upacāra - behaviour
- Maṇḍapa - performance hall

According to the Nāṭyaśāstra (3.23) even before the staging of a production, there has to be the ritual purification of the naṭamaṇḍapa (the proscenium) and invocation of the



devatās who preside over and protect the nāṭyagṛha (the hall). The director of the production chooses the appropriate auspicious time (muhūrta) for staging the production. An elaborate raṅgāpūjā (worship of the stage) is recommended, which includes ācamanam (ritual sipping of water) prior to the āvāhanam (invocation) of the devata-s, devata pūjanam (worship) with the respective offerings, jarjara pūjā (worship of the flagstaff) homa (fire ritual), breaking of the kumbham (the pot) with utmost care by the nāṭyācārya (director) followed by illumination of the nāṭyagṛha. Ācamanam plays a vital role in antaśśuci (inner purification) and its performance in a state of absolute attention is also yogic in nature. The pūrvaranga vidhi (preliminaries) of the Nāṭyaśāstra details the devata-s, where they are to be propitiated in minor detail, all of which is indicative of the focused mental state expected of a performer.

Further, the nāṭyācārya is required to prepare himself three days prior to the performance staying away from his residence for the duration of the śucikaranam (purification ceremony). This entire process is reminiscent of the three aspects of kriya yoga – tapah (purification), svādhyāya (introspection) and īśvarapranidhāna (sublimation) as presented by Patañjali, in Yogasūtra 2.1

The Nāṭyaśāstra (3.99, 3.100) emphasizes the state of mind in which the natyacarya is to be – śānta. This is the state of mental equipoise that the Bhagavadgīta presents as sthitaprajñā (Bhagavadgīta 2.54 to 2.72), for the responsibility of staging the entire production lies with the Nāṭyācārya. If the offerings are made with a mind that is agitated, the Nāṭyaśāstra states that it can lead to unfavourable consequences.

In the raṅgāpūjā vidhi, the play director along with assistant director have to perform a particular ritual where they are in a certain sthāna (position), with one leg to be raised and placed on the floor. The feet have to be placed at a distance of two tāla (a specific measure) from each other. Envisioning this, it is evident that a very high degree of attention is required in executing every step of the preparatory rituals, even before the staging of the nāṭyam itself. Such attention to minute detail itself reflects the yogic dimension of the Nāṭyaśāstra.

Further, when addressing the purpose of nāṭyam, the Nāṭyaśāstra states, how living in alignment with nature (1.114, 115, 116) indicates that nāṭyam is a performance intended to ease the dukkha of the rasika, while invigorating the mind. The burden of life's preoccupations are eased as the audience is immersed in and enjoys the story that is being enacted. This creates some sukha (joy) and allows for the expansion of the mind – buddhivivardhanam.

The Yogasūtra (2.16), in presenting the pathway to clarity of thought, indicates that duḥkham (sorrow) is inevitable because of the nature of the mind but that it is possible to anticipate and avoid future sorrow. This becomes the first step in eventually strengthening the mind to transcend the dukkham born of ephemeral life experiences by connecting to the imperishable within.

Seen through the lens of nāṭya -yoga, the practice of nāṭya and the process of presentation is deeply ethical and spiritual. It demands of the practitioner a sustained courage—the courage to remain attentive, to confront inner impediments, and to return, again and again, to a state of clarity and equipoise. It is this quiet fortitude that allows nāṭya to fulfill its purpose: as a pathway that refines the mind, steadies the self, and ultimately leads both performer and spectator toward deeper understanding.

Pricing With Dignity

How South Asian Dance Artists Can Set Rates Without Losing the Spirit of the Work

By Manasa Jayanthi



In our dance world, we are trained to speak in rhythm before we speak in numbers. We learn how to hold talam, how to enter a space with discipline, how to offer our art with humility. But when it comes time to name our fees, many of us suddenly feel unsure and almost apologetic. We soften the number. We over-explain. We ask what others are charging only in private. We negotiate downward because the organizer is a family friend, because it's "for the culture," because we want the opportunity, and because we do not want to be seen as difficult.

And yet, the truth is simple: pricing is part of the practice. It is not separate from devotion. It is one of the ways we protect our ability to keep dancing.

Once we begin naming the economics behind our work, a pattern becomes impossible to ignore: artists consistently undercharge not because they lack skill, but because the market is unclear. **Many dancers say some version of the same thing: I know I'm undercharging. I just don't know what the right number is. That uncertainty is not personal failure. It is structural.** Unlike industries with standard pay bands, South Asian classical dance often functions without a visible, transparent market. Rates are rarely published, fees vary wildly between cities, countries, and organizers, and much of our work happens in spaces where compensation is treated as optional, flexible, or "based on what we can manage."

Everyone likes art until they have to pay for it.

When there is no true market, what fills the gap are pseudo-trends that act as informal benchmarks that spread through whispers, assumptions, and repetition.

“This is what organizers pay.”

“This is what people accept.”

“This is what’s normal.”

But normal is not always sustainable. Sometimes it is simply what we have tolerated for too long.

So how do we set rates with dignity, especially across different countries, currencies, and cultural contexts without losing the spirit of the work?

A Practical Framework: Three Anchors For Pricing

I return to three anchors when I set my own rates, whether I’m teaching, choreographing, performing, or consulting and I strongly believe they work in the diaspora, in India, and anywhere classical dance is being held with seriousness.

Tip 1

The Work Anchor: What does it actually cost you to say yes?

Before you quote a fee, name the full labor involved not just what the audience sees.

A performance contains:

- rehearsal and run-through time
- preparation, admin, coordination, and communication
- costume and jewelry maintenance
- hair, makeup, flowers, tailoring
- travel (local and long-distance), baggage, last-minute transport
- accompanists, nattuvangam, musicians, sound support
- recovery time because the body carries the work between rehearsals and after the stage lights go off

The simplest pricing formula is also the most honest:

$$\text{Time} + \text{Expenses} + \text{Buffer} = \text{Minimum Fee}$$

The buffer matters. It is not selfish. It is sustainability.

It covers the realities we never plan for: the replacement ankle bells, the emergency tailoring, the unexpected Uber, the last-minute rehearsal extension, the makeup that must be replenished.

Tip 2

The Context Anchor: What kind of engagement is this?

Not every invitation carries the same budget, intent, or responsibility. That does not mean we should accept less dignity; it means we should build clear tiers.

Here is a proposed three-tier structure that helps:



1. Community Rate

Example Definitions: For small local events, student fundraisers, grassroots cultural spaces, and causes you genuinely want to support.

2. Standard Rate

Example Definitions: For festivals, cultural organizations with ticketed audiences, and mid-scale events.

3. Institutional / Corporate Rate

Example Definitions: For universities, museums, corporations, embassies, and any space with formal budgets.

This model works internationally because the categories are universal, even when the currency differs. What changes is the number, not the principle.

Tip 3

The Trend Anchor: How do we read the “market” when it isn’t visible?

Even if the market is informal, we can still gather data. We just have to treat pseudo-trends like evidence, not destiny.

Build a small “trend set” for yourself by being bold:

- ask 3 trusted peers what they charge for comparable work (it can even be different dance studios/styles)
- keep a log of what organizers have offered you (even if you declined)
- track which invitations repeat and which ones always underpay
- pay attention to geography (travel costs) and timing (which season, is it a yearly festival)
- notice where prestige is being used as a substitute for compensation

Pseudo-trends become useful when they help you benchmark, not when they convince you to shrink.

And sometimes the most important trend to create is a new one: artists raising rates together, openly, without shame.

Another note to consider is scripts for quoting your fee without apology:

Many artists don’t only struggle with value they also struggle with language.

Here are a few lines that preserve warmth and boundaries:

1. To ask budget first:
“Thank you for the invitation. Will there be an honorarium offered?/What budget have you allocated for artist fees?”
2. To share your rate clearly:
“My fee for this engagement is _____. That includes rehearsal preparation, performance, and travel costs.”

3. To offer options without discounting yourself:
“If that number is outside the current budget, I can offer a shorter set / a lecture-demonstration/a smaller ensemble version.”
4. To hold a boundary:
“I’m not able to take unpaid performances at this time, but I truly appreciate being considered.”

You do not need to justify your worth. You only need to name it. Because dignity is part of lineage.

We can love this art deeply and still insist on sustainable structures. We can be devoted and still be paid. We can give generously and still protect ourselves from depletion.

Pricing with dignity is not about becoming transactional. It is about telling the truth about what our work costs, what our bodies carry, and what it means to keep this form alive across generations.

A dancer who is resourced is not less sincere. They are more able to continue. And continuity like devotion is a practice we build together.

Why Dancers Feel Everything in their Belly

The mind-gut connection

By Sagar Vallabh



Every dancer is familiar with the feeling of butterflies in the stomach before going on stage. As you may have guessed, **the mind and gut are deeply connected, and that relationship influences performance, recovery, and emotional resilience.**

Your gut has a nervous system, it's called the enteric nervous system or the 'second brain' and consists of about 100 million neurons communicating with the brain via the vagus nerve. That's how anxiety causes abdominal cramps as well as nausea, and chronic stress disrupts digestion and energy levels.

Perfectionism

Dancers strive for perfection. This in turn can lead to psychological stress, which can then disrupt gut health. Stress causes blood to be diverted away from the gut, increases inflammation, and causes the gut to become more sensitive.

Gut health and mental clarity

You've probably heard of serotonin. It's what is called a neurotransmitter linked to mood, motivation, and emotion. What you do not know is that 90% of the body's serotonin is in the gut. Little wonder then that when gut health is compromised dancers may notice:

- brain fog
- low mood or irritability,
- difficulty concentrating on choreography
- feeling 'flat' or overwhelmed

(often interpreted as a lack of discipline rather than a biological signal).

Serotonin not only controls gut motility, regulates secretion, mediates gut sensation, and drives nausea/vomiting reflexes, but also 'interacts with the gut microbiome'. Gut microbes can influence how much serotonin is made in the gut and serotonin in turn affects gut motility. Hence the importance of the gut microbiome—more on that in another article.



What can you do about it ?

As a dancer you are taught to command and control your bodies, but when it comes to the gut, you are better off trying to cooperate with it than trying to control it. Subtle shifts in daily habits can support the mind-gut relationship:

- Eating regularly helps stabilize energy and stress hormones
- Allowing time after meals supports digestion before rehearsal or performance
- Paying close attention to how certain foods may affect stamina builds awareness
- Using slow diaphragmatic breathing helps calm the nervous system.

Rethinking pre-performance butterflies

Think of the pre-performance butterflies as a sign of activation of the brain-gut axis. Dancers may benefit from reframing the sensation: butterflies as readiness rather than fear.

Grounding rituals that may help:

- Steady breathing,
- Gentle movement
- Consistent warm-up routines
- These help to channel that activation into focus and presence.

A more integrated dancer

Understanding the brain-gut connection encourages a broader definition of training—one that includes nourishment, rest, and emotional health alongside technique and strength.

When you support your internal system you may discover:

- More consistent energy
- Improved recovery
- Greater emotional resilience.

*Do not ignore the gut.
Think of it as part of
your intelligence.*

The Anatomy of the hip in Movement

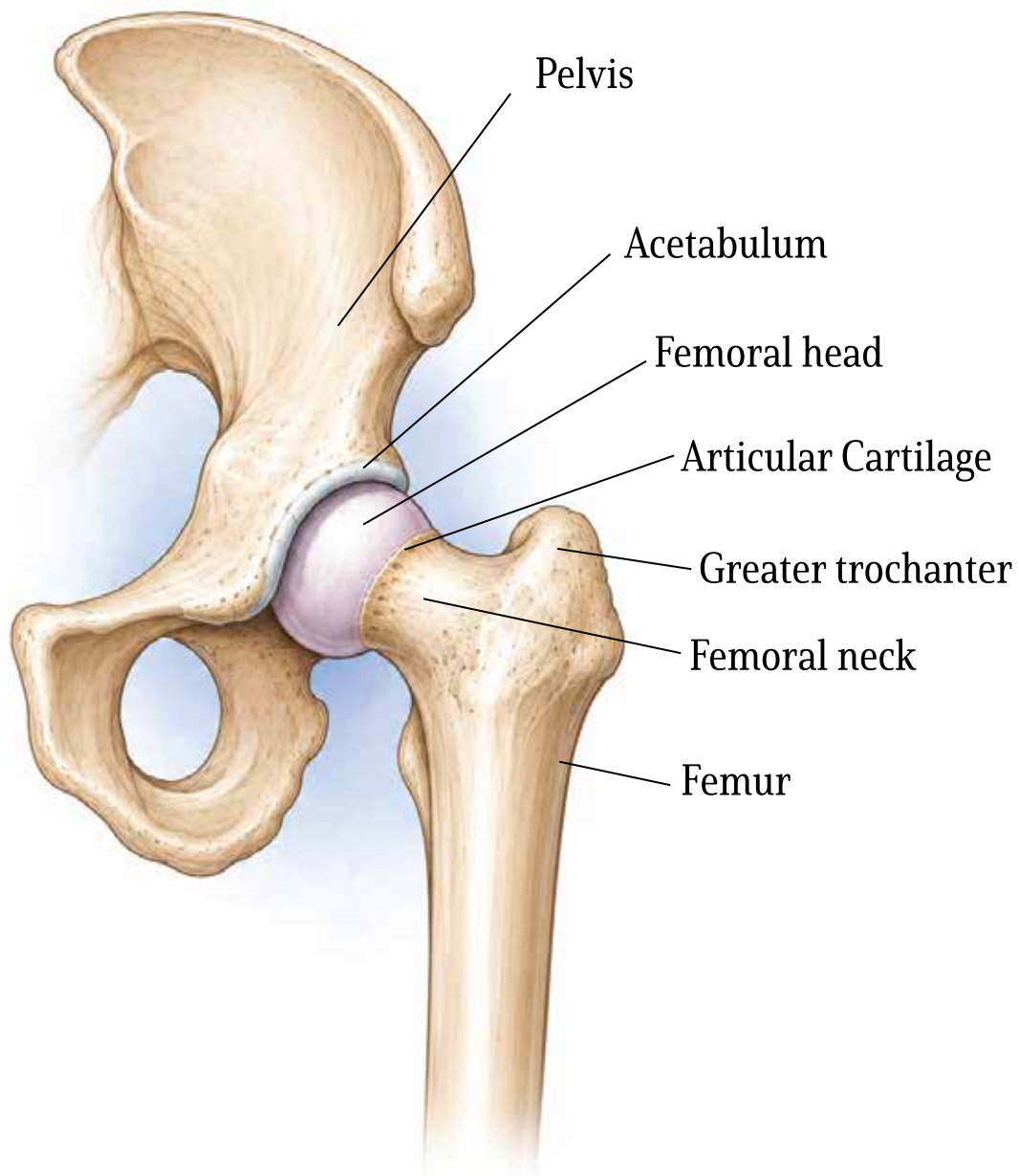
By Dr. Pranamyia Suri

In dance training, the hips are often spoken of as the primary source of “turnout”, as though they alone “open” the leg into position. This understanding, while convenient, is incomplete. **The hip joint does not act in isolation, nor does it function as a simple hinge that can be forced into a certain position. Rather, it participates in a coordinated system of movement, where rotation emerges through the balanced engagement of multiple muscle groups and the alignment of the entire lower limb.** When this coordination is misunderstood or unevenly developed, dancers may rely excessively on certain muscles, leading to strain, asymmetry, and, over time, injury. A closer look at the anatomy of the hip reveals a far more nuanced and intelligent structure—one that demands both strength and sensitivity in its use.



Photo credit: Prasad KN

Hip Joint



The hip joint is ball-and-socket articulation formed between the femoral head (thigh bone) and the acetabulum (part of the pelvis). The normal range of motion of the hip joint includes flexion up to 120 degrees, extension up to 30 degrees, abduction up to 45 degrees, adduction up to 30 degrees, internal rotation up to 45 degrees, and external rotation up to 35 degrees.

Here are the muscles responsible for movements of the hip.

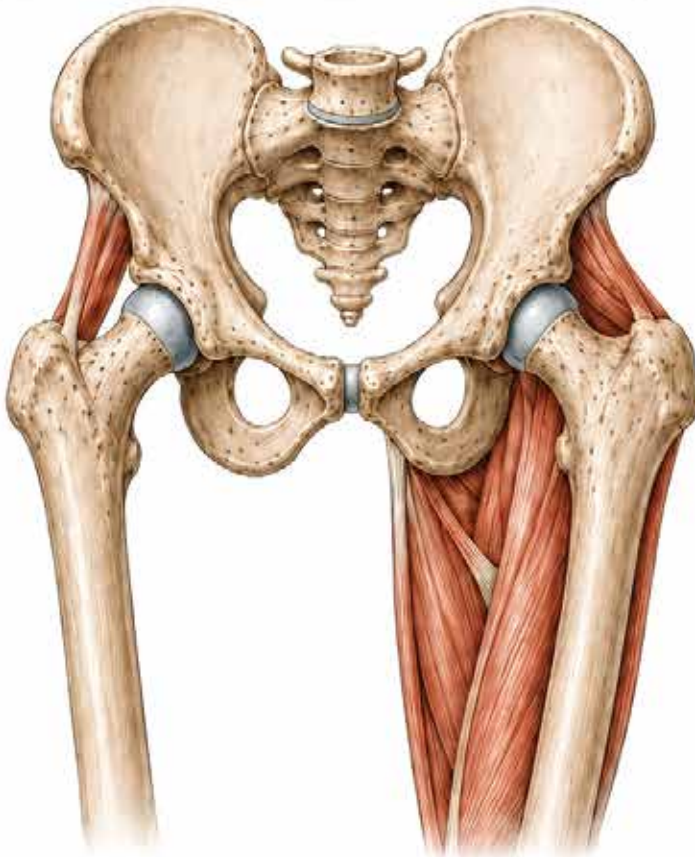
- **Flexion** – iliopsoas, rectus femoris, sartorius, pectineus
- **Extension** – gluteus maximus; semimembranosus, semitendinosus and biceps femoris (the hamstrings)
- **Abduction** – gluteus medius, gluteus minimus, piriformis and tensor fascia latae
- **Adduction** – adductors longus, brevis and magnus, pectineus and gracilis
- **External rotation** – biceps femoris, gluteus maximus, piriformis, assisted by the obturators, gemilli and quadratus femoris.
- **Internal rotation** – anterior fibers of gluteus medius and minimus, tensor fascia latae.

ANATOMY OF THE HIP IN MOVEMENT

The hip joint is a ball-and-socket articulation formed between the femoral head (thigh bone) and the acetabulum (part of the pelvis).

NORMAL RANGE OF MOTION OF THE HIP JOINT

- Flexion up to 120°
- Extension up to 30°
- Abduction up to 45°
- Adduction up to 120°
- Internal rotation up to 30°
- External rotation up to 45°



1 FLEXION



Key muscles:

- Iliopsoas
- Rectus femoris
- Sartorius
- Pectineus

2 EXTENSION



- Gluteus maximus
- Semimembranosus
- Semitendinosus
- Biceps femoris (the hamstrings)

3 ABDUCTION



- Gluteus medius
- Gluteus minimus
- Piriformis
- Tensor fascia latae

4 ADDUCTION



- Adductors longus
- Adductors brevis
- Adductors magnus
- Pectineus
- Gracilis

5 EXTERNAL ROTATION



Key muscles:

- Biceps femoris
- Gluteus maximus
- Piriformis
- Assisted by the obturators, gemelli and quadratus femoris

6 INTERNAL ROTATION



Key muscles:

- Anterior fibers of gluteus medius and minimus
- Tensor fascia latae

THE HIP IN DANCE

The hip does not act in isolation. Efficient movement arises from the balanced engagement of these muscle groups alignment of the lower limb, and intelligent control of the entire kinetic chain.

Keeping in mind Individual differences in range of motion, here are some common injuries in dancers.

1. **Hip Impingement:** Hip impingement occurs when the hip ball pinches against the hip cup, damaging the cartilage. This can lead to a deep ache in the anterior groin, night pain, clicking, and catching.
2. **Snapping Hip:** This painful syndrome can cause a clicking sound, accompanied by a snapping sensation when moving the hip. Snapping hip is often caused by muscle tendons inflamed from overuse, leading to click when rubbing over the hip socket.
3. **Labral Tears:** Labral tears are one of the more common diagnoses of hip pain, especially in dance. Extreme motion ranges, especially those involving twisting and rotation, can cause a labral tear. Symptoms can vary but usually include pain in the groin, pinching, catching, or grating feeling in the hip.
4. **Hip Flexor Tendonitis:** Overuse of the hip joint and surrounding muscles can evolve into hip flexor tendonitis. These tendons may inflame from landing or falling incorrectly, resulting in hip flexor tendonitis. This pain can present as dull pain, or as a deep burning sensation.
5. **Hip Bursitis:** With repetitive movement, the bursa (fluid filled sac that cushions the hip joint) will become inflamed. Dancers usually experience pain over the side of the hip that travels down the thigh and possibly to the knee. Often the pain will increase while sleeping, climbing stairs, or getting up from a chair, and increased pain from standing or walking for long periods.

The hip joint is not an isolated structure. It is the centerpiece of a complex kinetic chain governed by muscle balance, ligamentous stability, and precise control of the center of gravity. Subtle weaknesses or imbalances can cascade into compensatory patterns affecting the spine, knee, and ankle.

For dancers especially, where extremes of motion meet aesthetic precision, understanding these relationships is essential not only to prevent injury but to sustain longevity in the art form. In each action—be it *araimandi*, *prēnkhanam*, *muzhumandi*, *garūdamandalam*, or the transitions through jumps and *sarukkal adavus*—the dancer negotiates a dynamic equilibrium between stability and mobility. **Attentiveness to these subtle anatomical relationships allows the dancer not only to refine technique but to move with greater efficiency and resilience, thereby reducing strain and minimizing compensatory patterns that lead to injury.**

In doing so, a dancer's practice deepens, and a sense of joyful exhaustion emerges.

Food, Memory & Place

Mangoes in Summer

By Anita Vallabh, Ph.D.

A reflection from coastal Andhra Pradesh

At the height of summer, mangoes are everywhere across South India—stacked in grocery stores, piled high in roadside stalls, and carried home in baskets and sacks. Their arrival signals not simply a fruit harvest but a way of life shaped by climate, agriculture, and community.

My memories take me back to my grandmother's home in Dimili village. Raw mangoes, plucked from nearby farms, would be stored in a cool room, tucked into layers of dried grass to ripen slowly. There was always anticipation: checking them each day, waiting for the fragrance that signaled they were ready.

Mangoes found their way into every meal. Raw slices were eaten with yogurt on particularly hot afternoons. Mango pickle was prepared in large batches, a seasonal ritual that brought family members together in a shared act of chopping, mixing, and preserving.



As children, my cousins and I eagerly waited for the stage when the mango pieces, coated with salt and turmeric, were spread out to dry in the sun. Before the spices were added, we would sneak up to the open terrace and steal a few pieces, relishing their sharp, tangy flavor.

Even today, the annual making of mango pickle remains a cherished ritual across Andhra Pradesh, bringing families and communities together in a celebration of both food and memory.

There is a curious paradox to the mango. It arrives during the hottest months of the year, when temperatures often exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Yet one of its most beloved forms is as a fiery, spicy pickle. Mixed with warm rice and a spoonful of ghee, its sharp, spicy flavor becomes an essential part of summer meals. For many families, that distinctive taste is inseparable from memories of the season itself.

Its brief season reminds us that some pleasures are meant to be anticipated, shared, and savored before they disappear until the following year. The mango, perhaps more than any other fruit, transforms summer into a season of abundance, and community.



Image courtesy: Varun Novotel, Visakhapatnam. Guests participate in an Avakaya Mixing Ceremony at Novotel Visakhapatnam, continuing a seasonal tradition that brings communities together around the making of mango pickle.

My Mother's Andhra Mango Pickle



Image credit: Karthik Bhagavatula. My mother choosing the best of mangoes

Every summer, my mother carefully selected mangoes, prepared several varieties of pickle in large batches, and sent them to us in the United States. For us, the simple act of opening a jar carried with it the flavors and memories of home. This recipe comes from her kitchen, where most ingredients were measured by handfuls rather than cups and spoons.

Ingredients

- 4 raw medium sized mangoes
- 1/8th cup fenugreek seeds
- 2 cups mustard powder
- 1/8 turmeric powder
- 2 cups chilli powder
- 6 cups raw sesame oil
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1 tsp Hing (Asoefatida)

Method

1. Wash and dry the mangoes thoroughly.
2. Cut the mangoes, with the skin intact, into large pieces, removing the seed before cutting. Leave overnight until it is completely dry.
3. Combine the mustard powder with the salt, turmeric, chilli powder, hing and fenugreek seeds and coat the mango pieces evenly.
4. Add 4 cups of sesame oil and mix thoroughly.
5. Transfer to a large mixing vessel.
6. After two days add remaining 2 cups of sesame oil over the mixture and close the container.
7. Mix once daily for the next two days.
8. Store in large glass or ceramic jars. Ensure a layer of oil remains on top; add more if necessary.



This spicy condiment is traditionally enjoyed with warm rice and ghee, but also pairs well with vegetables, yogurt rice, and whatever else your heart calls for.

Meditation

Courage is the most important of all the virtues,
because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently.

Develop enough courage so that you can stand up for yourself and
then stand up for somebody else.



Maya Angelou



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