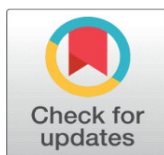
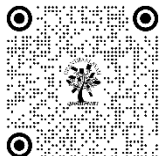


ROLE OF GURU IN THE SUSTENANCE OF PASSION TOWARDS CLASSICAL DANCE: A QUALITATIVE ENQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Guru is held in great respect and significance in Indian culture since he is the source of all wisdom and learning. India has a rich heritage of several art forms that are closely related to many aspects of life and are still practiced today and passed down from one generation to the next through the "*Guru Shishya Parampara*". The present study focuses on Indian classical dancers where each *shishya* has his own unique journey of learning wherein he evolves as a dancer and a human being. During this learning process, the role of *guru* plays a significant role in the life of the *shishya* and his overall grooming and continuing the dance journey for years together. Thus, understanding exactly the elements which keep the dancer going is extremely crucial. Therefore, this study aims to explore and understand the possible factors that help classical dancers to continue this long journey and sustain their passion throughout. The present study adopts a qualitative approach in which twelve Indian classical dancers were interviewed telephonically after contacting them using purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was done to illuminate the hidden meaning of the experiences shared by participants which reflected dancers' experiences and perceptions regarding their *guru* and how it has shaped them as dancers and human beings both. In addition to this, it also the dancers also expressed how they could sustain their interest and passion for Indian classical dance and could pursue it further.

Keywords: Guru, Guru-Shishya Parampara, Class Environment, Indian Classical Dancers, Passion

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Indian tradition, *guru* is held in high regard and significance since he is the origin of all knowledge and learning [Raina \(2002\)](#). Not only does a *guru* impart knowledge but also shapes the future generations [Radha \(2016\)](#). India has a rich tradition of numerous art forms that are well connected with many elements of life and are still existent in the current period and passed down from one generation to the next through the "*Guru Shishya Parampara*" [Menon \(1978\)](#). These art forms are all sustained due to humans and their learning. These forms of art are passed from

generation to generation using the '*guru-shishya parampara*'. More than knowledge is passed down from generation to generation in this traditional method of teaching and learning known as '*guru-shishya parampara*.' It manifests as a transformation of being, and the ability to alter one's being is due to the interaction and connection between the *guru* and *shishya*. "The *shishya* draws this from the *guru* with the force of his own desire" [Menon \(1978\)](#). *Guru* derives its name from two Sanskrit words: "Gu," which means "darkness," and "Hri," which means "to take away." When used collectively, they allude to the same thing: a force that banishes mental gloom [Ghosh \(1995\)](#). A teacher and a guru are fundamentally unlike. The difference between a teacher and a guru is that a teacher instructs us in the things and procedures of the outside world, while a guru instructs us in the methods for discovering the truth of our inner reality, or self, through which our lives are changed. Levels of aesthetic and contextual knowledge are communicated in part through intuitive processes within the *guru-shishya parampara*, absorbed through the *gurukula* system in which the disciple spends substantial time with the *guru* and his or her family [Prickett \(2007\)](#).

There have been various studies which suggests the impact which *gurus* can have on overall lives of the dancers [Lee \(2001\)](#). Researchers have identified certain critical features of *guru* and training that can have a significant influence on dancers. These factors include the quality of training, the quantity of time spent by *guru-shishya*, and the *guru's* general experience in dance [Baker and Horton \(2004\)](#). *Guru* is held in great respect and significance in Indian culture since he is the source of all wisdom and learning. One needs the guidance and direction of the *Guru*, in order to reach that level of being. Since he is the source of all knowledge and believes that living genuinely is the pinnacle of all perfection and worth, the guru is held with particular reverence and significance in Indian traditions [Raina \(2002\)](#). The effectiveness of the teaching, however, is perceived differently by each *shishya*. Additionally, an important factor in keeping motivation and passion in dancing is the general atmosphere of the class and the *guru's* attitude. [Van Rossum \(2004\)](#) investigated how the class atmosphere affected the dancers in research where the dance class was seen to switch from a cheerful or playful setting to one that was more disciplined, which demonstrated significant progress and attention in the students. The students said that their *gurus* were more critical and strict while yet being incredibly inspiring and motivational. The study led to the conclusion that although the dance classes were harder and more intensive. However, some factors, such as the teacher's motivation and encouragement, stayed consistent throughout and helped the students keep their interest in and dedication to dance. It is undeniable that teachers and the classroom environment have a significant impact on students and have the power to shape them in a variety of ways [Hannah \(2013\)](#).

1.1. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The guiding influence can also be credited with fostering the development of skills. However, there is no fixed pattern of how an individual evolves as a dancer and a human being. The experience of each dancer is unique in various ways which has shaped them in particular manner [Legrand and Ravn \(2009\)](#). Thus, to understand what exactly are the elements which keeps the dancer going in this long journey is extremely crucial. Therefore, this study aims to explore and understand the possible factors that help a classical dancer to continue this long journey and sustain their passion throughout.

2. METHOD

2.1. RESEARCH APPROACH

In the current study, a qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured telephone interviews as a tool in a qualitative research strategy. The qualitative approach was regarded as the best strategy since it provides the chance to collect extensive descriptive data that also helps to delve deeper into current lives of dancers.

2.2. PARTICIPANTS

After obtaining permission from ethics committee of Amity university participants were approached. The sample consists of participants who have been formally trained in Indian classical dance by the ancient *guru-shishya paramapara* and are residents of Maharashtra. Purposing sampling was employed after which all the information regarding the study was emailed to them and their participation was completely voluntary. A total of twelve dancers were approached and interviewed. They were given a brief overview of the nature of research after which the consent was obtained from them.

2.3. DATA COLLECTION

In the present study, interview method was the primary method that was used to collect the data. The questions were open-ended and free flowing to mainly explore overall effect of *guru* and other factors which helped them sustain their passion for dance. For the purpose of understanding the background of the participants, their demographic details were noted which included age, gender, form of Indian classical dance, number of years in the field, academic background, socio economic status and family structure.

2.4. DATA ANALYSIS

Since the study was completely qualitative in nature, the responses were analysed using thematic analysis given by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#) where the researcher's position in the study while conducting and analysis was constructivist. The researcher tried to understand the phenomena from the dancers' point of view. After thorough transcription of the interviews, initial codes were created. The process of looking for themes, grouping codes into prospective themes, and compiling all the information pertinent to each potential topic was carried out after much thought and modifications

3. RESULTS

Total of three major themes were extracted.

Table 1

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

		Percentage
Gender	Males	41.6%
	Females	58.3%
	18-25	37.5%

Age	26-30	62.5%
Marital status	Married	16.6%
	Unmarried	83.3%
Formal training in dance	Visharad	87.5%
	Alankar	12.5%
Family structure	Nuclear	75%
	Joint	25%

Table 2

Table 2 In the Present Study, a Total of 4 Main Themes were Extracted here Sub-Themes were also Identified to Make the themes Clearer

S. No.	Themes	Sub Themes
1.	<i>“My guru shaped me completely”</i>	1.Approach of teaching 2.Value system of the guru 3.Attitude and behaviour of the guru 4.Ways of rewards and appreciation
2.	<i>“I felt home”</i>	1.Class atmosphere 2.Relationship with peers 3.Perceived support
3.	<i>“My guru was divinely planned”</i>	1.How I surrendered 2.My guru became my confidant

3.1. THEME 1: “MY GURU SHAPED ME COMPLETELY”

The participants shared various experiences in relation to their *guru* which helped them not only grow as a dancer but as a human being. As mentioned by the participants, *guru* helped them build a very strong foundation and a base for dance. They also added how their *guru* had a significant role in their dancing journey, which may either increase and retain interest or completely decrease it.

3.1.1. THEME 1.1: APPROACH OF TEACHING

Participants shared the various unique experiences about their *guru’s* method of teaching which had a huge impact on their overall learning experience. Participants held great significance to their *guru* and the manner in which that *guru* shaped their vision of dance.

Creative teaching. Some of the participants mentioned that their *guru* was extremely creative and taught in a way where the students easily understood. Sometimes, the *guru* introduced certain simple games to be alert with the *laya* and *taal* which definitely kept the interest going. As mentioned by the participants, when the teaching was not monotonous, they really enjoyed which indirectly upheld their interest.

“I was too young when I began learning. As a kid, I needed novelty and something exciting. Whenever things at class got monotonous, I used to get bored and did not like dance that day. However, I am lucky enough that I found my guru, who exactly knew how retain my interest and make it less monotonous. She started teaching through unique methods of games, audio-visuales, creativity building and so much more. Not

only this, but she told us to choreograph small todas which excited us a lot" (25F, Interview no 7)

Giving a free hand. Participants shared how it immensely helped them when their *guru* gave them freedom in the dance. They further said that they got a free hand to choreograph or even building of compositions which not only helped them as a dancer but immensely improved their overall confidence.

"To be honest, the guru's 'restricted method' might limit the student's discovery, but the guru's 'open approach' helps the student grow as a person as well. This literally happened with me. I gained so much of confidence when my guru started me the freedom to make and compose small compositions" (19M, Interview no 10)

3.1.2. THEME 1.2: VALUE SYSTEM OF THE GURU

Participants shared a very important aspect of the *guru's* value and belief system which impacted them holistically. Participants mentioned that their *guru* believed in the idea that dance or any art form is just a medium to become better human beings and that dance can open various doors of perspectives to choose from.

"I always thought dance is just a mere extracurricular activity which would help me earn in future, until I met my guru. Her value system is very strong, and she believes that dance will help make better human beings. She always used to tell us that feel all the emotions in the stories we depict in dance, which will help you understand how exactly one feels. I think after this, I became more aware of my emotions and became more sensitive" (22F, Interview no 5)

3.1.3. THEME 1.3: ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR OF THE GURU

Guru's attitude, the manner he/she teaches, and a non-judgmental approach to treating all students equally were identified as essential components in their dancing journey. One of the participants mentioned that her *Guru* used to compare and criticize her dancing abilities with those of other classmates. This comparison with others used to irritate her, driving her to the thoughts of leaving the class. Participants further added "*guru* can make you or break you"

"When I joined the class, it was all good. However, after some time my guru started comparing me with other batch mates. The frequency started increasing and it used to reflect everywhere. I started self-doubting my abilities and planned to leave the class which eventually I did. That phase was completely low with no confidence. After I joined another class, the picture changed completely. There were no comparisons in fact my guru pointed out at everyone's positive aspects than their weakness in front of everyone. It boosted my confidence and in turn I started loving dance." (24M, Interview no 12)

3.1.4. THEME 1.4: WAYS OF REWARDS AND APPRECIATION

Encouragement: Participants discussed the significance of support from their *guru*, and other co-students. This fostered a tremendous sense of support, strengthening their confidence. They also indicated that their *guru* encouraged their efforts and provided them a push, which strengthened their drive to accomplish and learn more.

"So, the method that we had in our society's cultural activities was that the performers would perform, and the audience would contribute money as a mark of

appreciation. And I was quite shy at that time. So, during this method of delivering tokens of gratitude in the form of money, you won't believe my guru came up to me and gave me a token of appreciation and that was the time I understood how much my guru supports me." (21F, Interview no 9)

Validation: Participants expressed significance in having their chosen activity recognized by significant persons such as their parents, society, and peer group and mainly their *guru*. They were motivated when their choice was confirmed. They said that when their choice was acknowledged, they felt more confident in the task.

"When I first started dancing, I was quite interested in it, but I didn't know if my guru liked my dance or not." I used to take my time. But as soon as I mentioned participating in numerous tournaments or rehearsing, I realized my guru was overjoyed. She emphasized how well I was doing. This boosted my confidence" (20F, Interview no 3)

3.2. THEME 2: "I FELT HOME"

Participants placed a lot of importance on their 'dance class atmosphere'. They shared that the overall experience of going to the dance class defined their interest in dance too. How were the interactions in the class, how they were treated by others, what their peers and *guru* said to them and so on had a huge impact on the individual's overall experience.

3.2.1. THEME 2.1: CLASS ATMOSPHERE

Participants expressed that when they dance with others, their activity, particularly dance, improves, with encouragement and support by the *guru* and other classmates. Getting support without being judged was mentioned as a crucial component. One of the male participants stated that he was labelled and condemned for being a "male classical dancer," and that his body postures were criticized. This was a painful event that caused him to discontinue the class. One of the participants also discussed how "groupism" in the classroom and feelings of isolation influenced their confidence and enthusiasm in the learning process.

"The teachers and students in the class had a very skewed attitude and opinion of a male dancer especially from a low-income family." They used to make disparaging remarks about me. As a result of this, I lost confidence and quit the class." (20M, Interview no 4)

3.2.2. THEME 2.2: RELATIONSHIP WITH PEERS

Participants mentioned that how their relationship was with other batch mates highly affected their emotional state during the class. They said that if our batch mates were friends, we really felt like going to the class. We felt more supported and encouraged.

"I always loved going to the class as I used to look forward to meeting my friends. I had a very positive association with class because of this. If I did not have good friends, I don't think I would have continued" (23F, Interview no 1)

3.2.3. THEME 2.3: PERCEIVED SUPPORT

Participants placed a lot of importance on the support that they received or did not receive in the class. Further mention that this helps them to either continue or

discontinue the class. There were participants who mentioned that the men's support which was also non-judgmental made them feel at home. However, some participants said that due to lack of support and a judgmental environment they had to discontinue that particular class.

"Honestly, I had both types of experiences. In my first class where I began my dance journey, I did not have a very positive experience there. I felt the entire atmosphere was very judgmental and I could not go to anybody for any kind of support. This made me feel out of place and I left the class immediately. However, when I joined the other class, it was very different. I got immense support and encouragement from the teachers as well as my friends. I did not worry about the mistakes I was making or even if I did not understand anything I did not hesitate to ask anybody." (21F, Interview no 5)

3.3. THEME 3: "MY GURU WAS DIVINELY PLANNED"

Participants who believed in the idea of divine plans, strongly believe that their *guru* also has planned by the divine energy. The perception towards the entire experience of dance class was very different than those of others.

3.3.1. THEME 3.1: "HOW I SURRENDERED"

Participants shared that they believed in the idea of timing and divine planning and said that they had and felt a sense of connection with their *guru*. They also mentioned that they knew this connection and association was for a higher purpose and hence decided to surrender completely. They further stated that once they surrendered to the *guru*, their journey was extremely smooth and more satisfying.

"I started my dance journey pretty late when I was almost 24, however I knew that things are falling into a particular pattern where are used to always be directed to classical dance. This was very unusual and with me as I never had actually planned to learn dance. However, after various coincidences I knew that something was divinely planned for me and things started happening automatically. When I met my guru for the first time, I instantly knew that we I want to have a long-term association and I am destined to learn and receive knowledge from my guru. Then I decided to surrender and get the maximum." (24M, Interview no 2)

3.3.2. THEME 3.2: "MY GURU BECAME MY CONFIDANT"

There for a few participants who mentioned that their *guru* as an individual came into their life for a different purpose too. They sensed that it was beyond just learning dance. Not only as a *guru* but the teacher also became one of the closest people in their (participant) life. According to the participant this too was destined as she needed someone in that particular phase of life.

"I still can't believe how things happened I am I go to come in my life as my best friend too. I was going through a very rough patch in my life where my dance of course helped but my guru was an immense support, and I will always be grateful for this. She still is my go-to person" (25F, Interview no 11)

4. DISCUSSION

This research aimed to explore and understand how a *guru* and overall environment of the class helps in sustaining interest and passion for dance in the Indian classical dancers. In the present study it was seen that one's *guru* can make

or break an individual's life. *Guru's* value system, behaviour, connection, way and approach of teaching, and way of appreciation were some major facets in developing and maintaining interest in dance in the individual's life. It was also noted that dancer's needed a free hand in dance which enhanced their creativity and overall experience of dance. Similar findings were seen in a study by [Rafferty and Wyon \(2006\)](#) where it was seen that vocational dance students are more oriented towards democratic behaviour and favourable feedback from their *gurus*. *Gurus* also play an essential role in the development of passion and varieties of passion in the lives of dancers.

Not only the *guru* but also the atmosphere of the dance class was seen to be of utmost importance. Relationship with the co-dancers, support, and encouragement from them had a grave impact in the formative years of their dance journey. During this learning phase, the class atmosphere, attitude of classmates, and nature of learning were seen to either motivate or demotivate them. Similar findings have been noted in the literature, where [Ames \(1992\)](#) identified two types of class atmospheres: task-involving climates focusing primarily on learning, self-improvement, mastering tasks, accomplishments, and efforts, and ego-involving climates where few students are preferred and praised over others, competitions are encouraged, and mistakes are punished. Certainly, students in the first type of classroom environment have more satisfaction, higher self-esteem, dedication to the task, autonomy during learning, and sentiments of acceptance [Duda \(2001\)](#).

The intriguing element of this is that while most of the time such settings are established by *gurus*, they may also be generated by peers. The nature of passion and its wide-ranging consequences are well established as a result of existing research, but there are still theoretical and empirical gaps in our understanding of the elements that may impact one's passion and the pathways by which that passion influences behaviour.

5. CONCLUSION

Although an individual might have a lot of interest and passion towards dance, it further needs to be nurtured by various elements in order for it to sustain. The role which a *guru* plays in this process is seen to be significant. *Guru* is seen to be another parent in the life of the dance journey. Along with the significant role of *guru*, the class atmosphere, peers, certain external factors like appreciation, validation, support and so on have a huge role in the overall development and sustenance of passion of a budding dancer. However, the process or the elements were not fixed and systematic but were extremely unique to each individual in their own journeys.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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APPENDIX

1) Interview no 1 (23 years old, Female)

So, when I was around six years old, I began learning to dance. It was nearly because my mother wanted to dance since she was a child but couldn't due to family pressure for connected concerns, and she always desired that her daughter could go into the industry and achieve some recognition. So I was really young and had no idea what dancing was, what kind of dance there were, which one to choose, and so on. So my mum enrolled me in Bharatnatyam because she wanted me to start dancing in a classical form. Because she believed that once I had a solid classical foundation, I would be able to easily learn anyother dance form.

When I started going for class, I realised that many of the students were older than me, so they had an easier time understanding and grasping concepts. It boosted my confidence at times, but it also taught me that certain things take time, but with practise and hard effort, you can get where you want to go. Fortunately, I had a really

kind, compassionate, and supporting dance instructor who recognised the need of being patient with me, especially in the theoretical parts. I feel myself quite fortunate to have found such a tolerant Guru. I say that as I started loving and understanding what dancing is, my interest in myself grew significantly.

I always loved going to the class as I used to look forward to meeting my friends. I had a very positive association with class because of this. If I did not have good friends, I don't think I would have continued. But, about the age of ten, I acquired an interest in dancing, which I thoroughly liked and intended to pursue further. I started participating in a lot of contests in school and won a lot of trophies, which was one of the main reasons I started dancing. Following that, I continued to hunt for more chances and events in which I might compete

and win. So my passion in dancing grew, as did my drive, thanks to several awards, accolades, and wonderful comments from my Guru, parents, and audiences. I'm entering into the field by competing in several competitions and organizing my own shows. I used to like the fact that I never had any role models or even inspirations. When I'm on stage or dance, even at home, my parents' faces light up, and that, again, is something extremely significant to me because it makes me feel very joyful.

2) Interview no 2 (24 years old, Male)

It did not seem to me at first that I should begin with classical dance, but they I registered myself in a semi-classical dance class conducted at Ravindra Natya Mandir, where two teachers taught all of the children. There were several of us learning semiclassical, which I greatly enjoyed because the environment in the class was bright and dynamic. When I was in ninth grade, I watched a student doing Bharatanatyam and fell in love with the art. And I was quite eager to study it as well. And before that, I had never seen Bharatanatyam, and when I saw, I fell in love with it, and I began to wonder whether I should study it, where I could learn it, and so on. Because I got this concept, I began reading a lot about it and am currently conducting research on it because I had several questions. My initial concern was whether males could learn classical dance. And I began researching this on the internet and talking to others, and I discovered that there are many male classical dancers in the field who have learned aura while learning classical dance and are doing fantastic in the field. I talked to my family about it, and they were extremely supportive, but I had a lot of financial troubles, so I was a little reluctant. However, my parents advised me that if you are enthusiastic about something, you should pursue it and not give up because of financial constraints. Then I saw a Bharatanatyam class in Goregaon online and registered. I completed the fundamental Bharatanatyam instruction from that class, but after about seven or eight months, my ma'am moved to another location, and I had to stop. She directed me to another class in my neighbourhood, so I went there to see how the classes are and enrolled in the class. I felt a sense of connection instantly.

I started my dance journey pretty late when I was almost 24, however I knew that things are falling into a particular pattern where are used to always be directed to classical dance. This was very unusual and with me as I never had actually planned to learn dance. However, after various coincidences I knew that something was divinely planned for me and things started happening automatically. When I met my guru for the first time, I instantly knew that we I want to have a long-term association and I am destined to learn and receive knowledge from my guru. Then I decided to surrender and get the maximum.

3) Interview no 3 (20 years old, Female)

Basically, I started dancing when I was 4 years old since my mother and grandma were really interested in me learning Kathak at the time. So it has been almost 16-17 years since I began learning to dance. I didn't really comprehend what it was at the time, and I took two or three examinations before taking a break in 8th grade after taking four exams in all. I re-joined my class in 11th grade after a three-year gap, but I left again two years later when my architectural studies began. Thinking back about my journey and how various factors helped, I was approximately 3 to 4 years old when I first realised what dancing was or what movements were. When I was three or four years old, my parents-grandparents recognised that I had a passion for music and rhythm and I used to move my body in response to any song or sound, and my parents thought there was something extremely special about me, so they decided to enrol me in some dancing classes. And the reason for this notion was that I wanted to start dancing with some discipline. And then I'd get some dance instructions. I began attending Bollywood dance classes, and when I first started dancing, I was quite interested in it, but I did not know if my guru liked my dance or not; I used to take my time. But as soon as I mentioned participating in numerous tournaments or rehearsing, I realized my guru was overjoyed. She emphasized how well I was doing. This boosted my confidence. In addition to this, motivation in the sense that my mother enjoys looking at me on stage and appreciates me for being on stage and performing, which is something I like. And, when it comes to other motivations, my personal delight is one among them. The most significant factor, in my opinion, is that dancing relieves stress at work nowadays.

4) Interview no 4 (20 years old, Male)

I've been dancing since I was 13 or 14 years old. However, I began my Kathak adventure ten years ago. I began performing professionally initially, and then, because I want to be a soloist, I reasoned that mastering classical dance would be quite beneficial. I've always been drawn to classical forms, but I've always felt that I don't want to be on the feminine side. As a result, I was incredibly self-conscious and terrified of learning classical dance. As a result, I began learning classical dance late and had previously only performed in Bollywood and traditional semi-classical styles. But after a while, I understood that this was not what I wanted to pursue, so I switched to classical dancing. Initially, I intended to study Bharatanatyam, but because the guru was not in my immediate region and I would have to drive at least an hour to learn it, I opted against it and instead chose to learn Kathak. I was a fantastic singer. So, until the tenth grade, I was recognised for singing. So, anytime there was a school or community event, I would always participate and win awards in singing competitions. However, every year on the occasion of Shiv Jayanti, we had programmes and events in our society, and there used to be dances and contests, and I used to participate in them as well, and my elder sister used to choreograph a tiny bit or track and teach me the principles of it. However, it was incredibly informal, and even then, I hadn't considered dancing as a career choice. But I danced in various genres every year, and there was no repeated form of my dance that allowed me to explore all regions of emotions and styles. At one time, my sister would start by teaching me the choreography and then tell me, "OK, now you can go ahead and choreograph the next section yourself." So that's when I started doing short choreographies and fell in love with them. Slowly I started feeling that I should actually learn some classical style and then started looking for dance classes. But you know I realised that not

everyone looked at me and my dance or idea of classical dance. There were so many people who laughed at me and told me I would become a girl or feminine. But still my family was very supportive of my attitude. I started looking for a class and finally found one. But the environment and people there were not good for my confidence overall. The teachers and students in the class had a very skewed attitude and opinion of a male dancer especially from a low-income family. They used to make disparaging remarks about me. As a result of this, I lost confidence and quit the class.

5) Interview no 5 (22 years old, Female)

Okay, so my parents observed that I used to dance to every song that was playing when I was a young child, the beat of it I preferred dancing to everything else. My parents signed me up for singing lessons as well. When I was in second grade, I used to dance in both classical forms. I used to like to dance. When I went, though, I was not really interested in classical dance form till the fourth standard. First and foremost, I used to not recognise the classical features and technicality So, I dropped classical in fourth grade and have been using I learned current as well as Bollywood. Following that, I returned to classical training in the 11th grade and have been doing so ever since. I picked it up again because I subsequently understood that if I had a classical foundation, any dance form I have to learn will be really nice and easy in terms of rhythm and choreography. Many components of modern dance are derived from classical dance. So, I reasoned that if I needed to pursue something in dance in the future, I would find it easier if I had a classical foundation. So that's when I started taking classical seriously, followed by riyaz and everything else. During my bachelor's degree in psychology, I came across the notion of Dance Movement Therapy in a programme that I attended. That's when I recognised, well, dance has helped me deal with my emotions and obstacles as well. So, at the time, I reasoned that since I had a foundation in psychology and kathak, DMT, which is a blend of both, is something I should study. Since then, I've been working on it seriously. Before that, I always thought dance is just a mere extracurricular activity which would help me earn in future, until I met my guru. Her value system is very strong, and she believes that dance will help make better human beings. She always used to tell us that feel all the emotions in the stories we depict in dance, which will help you understand how exactly one feels. I think after this, I became more aware of my emotions and became more sensitive.

"Honestly, I had both types of experiences. In my first class where I began my dance journey, I did not have a very positive experience there. I felt the entire atmosphere was very judgmental and I could not go to anybody for any kind of support. This made me feel out of place and I left the class immediately. However, when I joined The other class, it was very different. I got immense support and encouragement in the teachers as well as my friends. I did not worry about the mistakes I was making or even if I did not understand anything I did not hesitate to ask anybody. This was always important for me- encouragement and my happiness. To explain further, when I was doing kathak, I used to compete, and my confidence began to grow, which resulted in greater comprehending. That gave me a push, and I began practising as well, which sparked my interest. I learned I enjoy kathak and want to pursue it more. My persistence in dancing was influenced by a variety of reasons. By chance, I ended myself with amazing gurus who always supported me and helped me stay consistent. And somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew I wanted to pursue DMT, therefore I needed a classical foundation. Another motivator was dancing in front of an audience during performances. I was never driven by accolades; just my pleasure was important to me.

6) Interview no 7 (25 years old, Female)

I had no idea what dancing was, but my body used to move whenever I heard any form of music. My parents, particularly my mother, saw my passion for dance and chose to enrol me in a dance class. I began learning kathak from a professional teacher when I was six years old. I had no idea what the form was or what I was going to do after learning it, but the fact that I got to dance was the most important thing to me. To be honest, I had no idea what form I was practising at the time, but the very prospect of dancing made me joyful, and this has remained to this day.

Which were the factors which helped you develop interest in dance? How was the process? As I said, I think I was born with interest in dance which got recognized at early age. Plus, my family played a major role in taking that interest ahead. So, I would say both the things were equally important. One more important point which I feel was important was my guru and class. I was just myself when I was dancing. My guru always appreciated my innocence while dancing and said that the happiness that you experienced while dancing clearly reflected on your face. I think it must have been true because it is yet the same. There were days when same steps and same taal used to be taught over and over again which used to create boredom in most kids of that age. But for me it was just dancing whether it was repeated or was the same old technical things.

I was too young when I began learning. As a kid, I needed novelty and something exciting. Whenever things at class got monotonous, I used to get bored and did not like dance that day. However, I am lucky enough that I found my guru, who exactly knew how to retain my interest and make it less monotonous. She started teaching through unique methods of games, audio-visuals, creativity building and so much more. Not only this, but she told us to choreograph small *todas* which excited us a lot. My pleasure, from what I recall, was important at the time. I anticipated to feel the same delight every time I danced. The pleasure I felt was tremendous. So, without a question, I wanted to continue working in this profession. After the first exam, I discovered I liked Kathak as a form when I was approximately 8 years old. But, according to my mother, you started comprehending the meaning behind the phrases and “bols” when I was around 14 years old, and your dancing improved dramatically. So I didn’t anticipate much from dancing, but it kept surprising me with things like happiness and contentment.

7) Interview no 9 (21 years old, Male)

So, the method that we had in our society’s cultural activities was that the performers would perform and the audience would contribute money as a mark of appreciation. And I was quite shy at that time. So, during this method of delivering tokens of gratitude in the form of money, you won’t believe my guru came up to me and gave me a token of appreciation and that was the time I understood how much my guru supports me. And I was quite shy at the moment. So, during this method of presenting tokens of appreciation in the form of money, when my father used to give me the envelope in his name, my mother’s name, my sister’s name, and my grandmother’s name, I understood how much my family supports me. As a result, I felt both supported and inspired at the same time. So, while this gesture was basic, it provided great encouragement and indicated that I should proceed. So the dancing had undoubtedly begun there, but I had never considered it as a job. Because first and foremost, I had no dancing training. So, after passing my 10th, I attended a dance programme by Sumedh Jadhav, which I really enjoyed, and during that performance, one guy in the backstage and I talked about dance and the general scope of it, and he informed me that there are auditions for perhaps the same

programme in the following week. As a result, I decided to attend to auditions. However, two days before the audition, I had an opportunity for one play for outdoor theatre and had to fly to Yavatmal as a result, which lasted 8 to 10 days, so I missed the dance audition. But I can confidently state that my path as a performer began with the Yavatmal performances. When I returned, all I could think about was pursuing a career in this profession, but it was only a possibility. My singing took a back seat entirely in all of this, and my dancing career began. When I first started dancing, I had a strong preference for solo dance, and it was at that point that I determined I wanted to be a soloist. I even chose to enrol in a Bollywood class near my home; however, after some time of studying, the choreographers suggested that instead of learning, I join them as a choreographer. Also, because I had a creative mind, my choreography talents were strong and continued to grow even after I began taking on choreography tasks. I am a Bollywood choreographer, and my path as a choreographer has accelerated significantly, but I have made little progress as a student. I had this idea in my brain that I wanted to learn something and be taught in some kind, particularly classical. Meanwhile, I began receiving a lot of choreographic projects, which led to participation in numerous contests and reality programmes. My choreographer graph skyrocketed and accelerated. I, too, began to make money. I was quite fortunate to have received exposure at such a young age, especially without any prior experience. Though my career as a choreographer was going well, I was always aware that I needed to study some classical form. And then my journey of classical dancing began too

8) Interview no 10 (19 years old, Male)

So, initially, I was learning to sing and had no aspirations to learn to dance. I began singing lessons when I was in the second or third grade. When I was in fourth grade, I used to act in plays. And then, all of a sudden, I took part in the annual school dance, and the dance went quite well. Not that I never danced at the yearly celebration, but your performance was unique since it was warmly received by the crowd and was really appreciated. At the time, my parents believed they should enrol me in a dancing class as well. So, ultimately, she enrolled me in a dancing class for no apparent reason. I had no idea whether it was a classical or Western form, nothing. I had no idea what was going on. It was exactly like other ladies, and it is extremely normal at that age for them to have no idea what they are learning or in what form they are learning, but it simply carries on learning. As the session progressed, I gradually realised that it was Indian classical form and that dance was Kathak. But, once again, I had no idea what other types of classical dances were or what the contrasts between them were. So my dancing experience began there, and I stayed in the same class until I was in eighth grade. But then my Guru married and had to migrate to the United States. Following that, one of her older pupils kept taking the lesson in India, but it did not work out well for me. I have no idea. My mum was watching television one day when she saw an advertising for a national level tournament in Orissa. But at the time, my dance had taken a back place in my life, and I wasn't in touch with much. So my mother and I took on the role for that competition, but the next dilemma we had was where I would learn for the competition since, because my Guru had moved to us, I didn't have someone to teach me at the moment. So we started looking for a dancing teacher all over again since I was determined to compete. Nitin uncle, one of my father's friends, has been in the music industry for many years, so my mother and father decided to approach him. He once recommended a dancing teacher who used to live in Bhandup. The change of gurus was quite stressful for me at the time, and I had to deal with a variety of challenges. For example, each Guru's style is extremely different, the structure of the class is very different, the Guru's teaching

method is very different, and I also had to create a link or a relationship with each new Guru, which took a long time. But it was also at that point that I realised I had a true talent. I didn't comprehend anything about Kathak in my last session. Maybe it was because of my age that I was entirely puzzled about what was going on. After a few years, I realised that my old class was pure Lucknow Gharana, therefore whereas my new class had mixed method. My guru had a very different style of teaching which really helped me grow as a dancer. To be honest, the guru's 'restricted method'; might limit the student's discovery, but the guru's 'open approach' helps the student grow as a person as well. This literally happened with me. I gained so much of confidence when my guru started giving me the freedom to make and compose small compositions.

9) Interview no 12 (24 years old, Male)

I decided to join classical dance after seeing a male dancer performing on television reality show. And I began researching this on the internet and talking to others, and I discovered that there are many male classical dancers in the field who have learned aura while learning classical dance and are doing fantastic in the field. I talked to my family about it, and they were extremely supportive, but I had a lot of financial troubles, so I was a little reluctant. However, my parents advised me that if you are enthusiastic about something, you should pursue it and not give up because of financial constraints. I didn't enjoy the ambiance or the entire setting there and left right away. People in the class had a very skewed opinion and perception of a male dancer from a lower socioeconomic background. This was evident in their behaviour, not just among the kids but also among the elders who were instructing them. So I decided to quit since I didn't enjoy it. I then decided to join another class and it was all good. However, after some time my guru started comparing me with other batch mates. The frequency started increasing and it used to reflect everywhere. I started self-doubting my abilities and planned to leave the class which eventually I did. That phase was completely low with no confidence. After I joined another class, the picture changed completely. There were no comparisons in fact my guru pointed out at everyone's positive aspects than their weakness in front of everyone. It boosted my confidence and in turn I started loving dance."