

STUDENTSPEAK

Poetry in MOTION

Shikha Chowhan, 22, took inspiration from women who took to dancing at a rather late age. Currently a student at the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, she shares her experience

I'm 22 and learning how to dance. With no prior experience in classical dancing (or any form of dancing for that matter), my decision came as a pleasant surprise to myself. I was inspired to go ahead with my decision after reading and watching performances of women who took to dancing at a very late age. Rukmini Devi Arundale started learning Russian Ballet at the age of 16 and Bharatanatyam at the age of 24. Martha Graham started learning Ballet and Contemporary Dance at the age of 16. Merce Cunningham learnt Ballet and Modern Dance at the age of 20. Their persistence not only made them skilful dancers but also made them world renowned.

I graduated from Christ University with a management degree in Travel and Tourism. While I worked for a year in this industry, my evenings were spent learning Contemporary Dance at Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts. I experienced a certain fluid joy in movement; and started to imagine a future as a choreographer and a dancer. What started out as a simple passion soon became a healthy obsession! I left my job and enrolled for a one year diploma course in 'Mixed Media and Movement Arts' at the same institute.

This is the best course I've found with my limitation of wanting to stay in Bangalore. Five months in to the course and I've gained considerable understanding into Contemporary Dance, Ballet, Kalaripayattu and Bharatanatyam. I'm also beginning to learn various ideas and techniques that go into choreography. Guest teachers bring a repertoire of knowledge about a certain dance form; which in turn helps me appreciate the Indic dance forms better.

Increasingly, my love for Ballet is taking me to newer heights as a dancer, maybe because I find it extremely hard. It's completely against the anatomy of one's body and requires an acute understanding of 'alignment' and 'co-ordination' of every body part. When a Ballet performer appears agile and elegant on the dance floor – know that a lot of hard work, pain and patience, have kept her company!

Polish Ballerina, Kama Jezierska, inducted us for two months in this art form. We then had James Gillivrey from Scotland. His focus on "going easy" on Ballet has helped me cope better. Tough and painful workouts, an essential part of this dance form, have in turn helped me grow into a stronger person.

My most interesting sessions are while doing Yoga. We sometimes visit Lalbagh for this. For two weeks, there was Erica Kaufman, who focused on Suryanamaskar. Body awareness was another course taught by Harold. We learnt from him the science of our anatomy and how the joints and muscles work. He taught us interesting concepts such as "good pain" and "bad pain". Until then, I always thought pain was something someone avoided at all cost. Amusingly, through dance I'm learning metaphysics!

The Indian teachers for Kalaripayattu and Bharatanatyam, Dil Sagar and Minal Prabhu, create an intellectually stimulating and supportive environment at the institute. They constantly encourage us to evolve into creative, aware and thinking practitioners of the art of dance and dance-making.

My focus currently is on making my movements less clumsy and more poetic. I intend to join a dance company, either in India or internationally. Until then my goal remains just one — practice, practice, practice!

—As told to Poonam Jain

