

Shovana Narayan – one & half page brief

Shovana Narayan, a name synonymous with Kathak, is the celebrated outstanding doyen of this art form. Breathing the spirit and ethos of Indian spirituality, classicism and artistic excellence, for her outstanding, consistent and trend-setting pioneering works in Kathak, she has been awarded the prestigious Padmashri Award by the President of India in 1992 and the SangeetNatakAkademi award for 1999-2000 in 2001. Recipient of over 30 national and international awards, they also include Delhi Govt's Parishad Samman, Japan's OISCA Award, Bihar Gaurav Award etc. She has been conferred D.Litt (HC) besides holding 2 (two) MPhil degrees (Defence & Strategic Studies and in Social Sciences), and a Master's degree in Physics. She was also shortlisted for the Distinguished Alumni Award, University of Delhi, 1997.

Shovana is multi-faceted and a pioneer as she has left and is leaving her indelible imprint as a performer, choreographer, Guru, researcher, organiser and author. Her pristine and sparkling performances while steeped in classicism and tradition yet breathe fresh air of artistic innovations and social consciousness. Her performances in the last over five decades in several national and international Festivals and before several Heads of States and Governments have been mesmerizing.

Deeply entrenched in Hindi and Sanskrit Literature, Hindu philosophy, Shovana's performances have been marked with depth of emotion along with the vivaciousness imparted by rhythmic brilliance. Even when the trend was to emote thumris, she opened the doors to the new path of basing her emotional outpourings from verses of Hindi and Sanskrit litterateurs, as early as in the early seventies (1970-71). She thus exhibited a silent revolution that came from her innate courage, unafraid in charting new paths, infusing traditional vocabulary with modern sensibilities within the intangible aspects of Kathak that have become pioneering works.

Emotional depth, gravity and depth of thought and treatment that bespeak social sensitivity saw outpourings metaphorically being trendsetters on issues of environment, issues relating to women and the girl child, human rights, incest, transiency of life, inter-faith dialogues with Buddhism, Sufism and inter cultural dialogues with other western classical music and dance forms.

She pioneered the genre of dance enactments to philosophical themes with eminent philosopher, late Prof Ramchandra Gandhi (grandson of Mahatma Gandhi) that were based on the lives of contemporary thinkers and sages (Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekanand, Ramana Maharshi, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Francis of Assisi). She has also rejuvenated the narrative tradition of North-India by presenting soliloquy ("Shakuntala" by Maithili Sharan Gupta & 'Yashoda's Soliloquy' by Sitakant Mohapatra). Her portrayal of Alia in the telefilms, Akbar's Bridge, won her accolades as an extremely sensitive actress.

Shovana has spearheaded and produced international collaborative works with nationally and internationally known Indian and western dancers and musicians and with special children. She has been Creative Director-choreographer of several international events such as the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of 6th International Abilympics 2003, Commonwealth Games 2010, Ter-Centenary of Guru Gobind Singh Khalsapanth 1999, classical dance segment of Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Indian Independence at National Stadium 1997.

Author of 15 books and numerous articles including for INTACH, UNESCO and such other prestigious organisations, these well researched publications based on study of epigraphical research are valuable sources of information that have demolished several pre-conceived notions. Her deep research has led to the discovery of 16 Kathak villages situated in eastern UP and Bihar. She has also made a film on the philosophical aspect of Khajuraho titled "Dance of the Temples".

She is also a visiting lecturer to several Universities in India and abroad and has given several hundreds of lecture demonstrations and motivational workshops all over India and across the globe. She is a central figure in ongoing discussions in the cultural field as participant in countless symposia and seminars. She has guided research students for award of PhD degree in the field of dance.

Shovana is a guru of standing whose disciples are adorning the world of classical dance. As a dedicated guru, she lays stress on not only imparting correct techniques with keen in-depth knowledge of the shastras but also on the intangible spirit and ethos of Kathak in the true Guru-Shishyaparampara. She is imparting free training to over 50 students of the underprivileged class for the last several decades and her choreography with 600 “specially abled “ students in the 6th Abilympics held in 2003 that won her international accolades, yet again showcased her sensitivity and pioneering works. An organizer too, she also holds two annual festivals 2 well known annual Festivals for the past several years.

Charting new paths, Guru Shovana Narayan is perhaps the only example of a person who has relentlessly pursued two parallel exacting professional careers, as a civil servant (IAAS, 1976 batch) and a recognized Kathak Dancer-Guru, achieving distinction and great heights in both.

Her quiet dignity and demeanour of her works and of her conduct has made her a role model for millions of girls today who aspire to be like her following in her footsteps of being an outstanding artiste-Guru-choreographer-author-researcher-organiser imbued with sensitivity and humanity, ethics and technical excellence and brilliance: in short an “artiste par excellence” in the true sense.
