

COVER STORY

## GRACEFUL DANCERS

The famous mother-daughter dancer duo, Manipuri dancer and instructor Sharmila Banerjee and her daughter Sudeshna Swayamprabha sat down in conversation with Rafi Hossain. They talked about the younger generation's treatment of tradition and culture and how the pandemic affected dance.



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL & SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



**Rafi Hossain:** Today, we have the mother-daughter duo Sharmila Banerjee and Sudeshna Swayamprabha. We have been in a place where we do not know what the future holds for any forms of art.

**What do you both think the future holds for dance?**

**Sharmila:** Even though we were locked in our houses

due to lockdown, productivity did not remain stagnant. At the beginning of lockdown, I started taking classes online. I was feeling a lot of mental anguish in lockdown, so for me, teaching dance classes online was a good way of doing that. Most people attending these classes were also happy with doing the classes online, as it may have also helped them get distracted from the ongoing pandemic. Most of the institutions around the world have also been doing online classes during the pandemic. There were even festivals held online where students were able to send recordings of their dancing. During this pandemic, every artist out there has been working on themselves and their craft.

**Rafi:** Sharmila Di, what would you say is the dance form which represents Bangladesh the most?

**Sharmila:** Sattriya dance is the dance which represents the Indian Subcontinent a lot, and since we are part of the subcontinent, we can call it ours. Manipuri dance is also something we can call Bangladeshi, as Manipuri people have been living in Bangladesh. Rabindranath has also given Bengalis a dance form through his songs. His songs take elements from different song types, so to dance to his songs will also require dancers to take elements from different dance forms. Only Bangla speakers will be able to fully comprehend the beauty of his words and songs. So that is also something that is ours.

**Rafi:** It seems to me that for some reason, contemporary dance forms are not flourishing in Bangladesh. Is it true?

**Sudeshna:** I would not concur with what you said, as there are many instances of people in Bangladesh doing



what she said: dance needs to be studied a lot. To properly learn a dance, you need to study its grammar, watch it properly, understand the meaning behind it, and ultimately internalize that dance. So it will take time to do that with contemporary dance in Bangladesh. But, there will be a time when it is widespread.

**Rafi:** Is the younger generation losing interest in tradition and culture?

**Sharmila:** They are not losing interest in tradition and culture. The younger generation will always want to learn more from other places, but the root will always be there. People have a misconception that if we bring in dances that have Western influences, we will lose our traditional dances. We have been taking influences from Western dance for a long time, and they have been also inspired by ours. I think that if people studied the history of dance more, then they would see how the idea that they have is very incorrect. The younger generation is getting access to Western dance very easily due to the internet, and instead of learning the basics of the dance, they are simply learning it by looking at dances. That poses a problem, but the majority of the ones who train end up learning it adequately.

**Sudeshna:** I want to add that the only thing constant in everyone's lives is change. The change will come, and it is better to accept it. The Bharatanatyam done now is not the same as the one done eighty to hundred years ago. Even the grammar of the dance form has changed and evolved with time. Research is being done on the form constantly because evolution is what makes it stay relevant with time. It will be different in the future, but the essence will always remain the same.

**Rafi:** Thank you, I had a great time talking to both of you.

**Sharmila:** Thank you for having us, Rafi. It was good talking to you because you let us talk properly. We could be honest and open with you. It felt easy for us to talk and I could see how you were listening intently. I am looking forward to talking to you again, Rafi.

**Sudeshna:** I am very happy to have been able to come here and talk to you. I was able to tell you a lot of things which I thought are relevant and it felt comfortable to open up to you.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

### POPCORN HIGHLIGHTS

Here are some binge worthy movie and TV series you can spend your time watching while you stay at home social distancing, keeping yourself, as well as others, safe.



#### HALSTON

Halston is a drama TV miniseries released on May 14, 2021, on Netflix. The show is created by Sharr White and based on the book, Simply Halston by Steve Gains. Directed by Ryan Murphy, it stars Ewan McGregor, Rory Culkin and Rebecca Davan, among others. The storyline follows the life of designer Halston, as he manages his way into the fashion world.

#### LOVE, DEATH & ROBOTS

Love, Death & Robots is an animated collection of stories, the second season released to Netflix on May 14, 2021. The series is created by Tim Miller and produced under the banners of Blur Studio and Netflix Studios. The collection of stories shown throughout the series range from science fictions, fantasies, horror, and even comedy.



Shrill is a comedy series aired on Hulu which had its third and final season aired on May 7, 2021. The series was based around the book Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman by Lindy West. The series stars Aidy Bryant, Luka Jones, and Patti Harrison, among others. It was also produced by Broadway Video, Brownstone Productions, Rushfield Productions and Warner Bros. Television. The plot for the television series revolves around how a woman learns to change her life for the better without having to lose weight and also learns to accept her body for what it is.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub