



Tech spin, threat or aid?

● **Kasturi Swain**

In the age of YouTube and TikTok, how can the traditional grammar of Odissi be kept intact and unadulterated? That's what experts of the classical dance form were worried about while attending a recently concluded seminar on Odissi at City's Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Research Centre.

With the advent of technology, the treat of Odissi's dilution has surfaced time and again. Taking an initiative to deliberate on preserving the essence of the dance in changing times, Cuttack-based Gunjan Dance Academy, under the aegis of founder and celebrated Odissi Guru Meera Das, organised the seminar. The topic of discussion was 'Odissi Dance-Challenges of time and technology.' It witnessed free-wheeling conversations among the chairpersons and keynote speakers, all noted exponents of the dance. They shed a copious amount of light on the need to balance art and technology.

While the keynote speakers were Aruna Mohanty, Ratiknata Mohapatra and Kedar Mishra, Sharon Lowen, Sikata Das and Dr Itishree Devi chaired various sessions. Kickstarting a session, Meera highlighted the impact of social media on the dance. In order to prevent such negative influences, she stressed upon the need to address the younger generation.

But then, does the classical dance lose its character with new age interventions in costumes, stagecraft, language, stage accessories and attempts at commercialisation? Does technology not come with benefits like audio-visual benefits on stage and making the dance accessible to a larger audience? Speaker Sikata Das made an observation around the same topic. She emphasised that the Gurus have shaped the dance form like a tree, with two aspects – discovery and innovation. "To pre-

serve the aesthetic value, modifications should not sidestep the frame as every classical art form has inherent restrictions," she stated.

Elaborating on how innovations are inevitable but nature of usage gives contrasting effects, Das illustrated her point by citing 'discovery of the atom was revolutionary but that of atom bomb was catastrophic.' "This analogy hints at how classical dance or music must negotiate with every change," she added.

Considering dance as a conscious expression of life form, Itishree spoke about the intelligence and creative imagination of any dance form and how it is often shaped by a society or polity. However, she felt that dance has a cosmic element as it is borne out of a sacred intuition and it is the responsibility of artistes to preserve its spiritual essence.

"Globalisation has necessitated that dance is not restricted to the sacred domain. There are factors of politics, culture and economy which modify the dance's form and content. But we show know where to draw the 'Lakshman Rekha' as art is fluid," she opined.

Sharon Lowen, however, talked about the emergence of the 'YouTube Gharana' and sites like Sahapedia and Academia, and suggested that technology has given the dance form its fair share of pros along with the cons. "We can use social media as a digital archive, for reference and improvements. But when people think the dance can be learnt from forums like YouTube, they must know that they can at best learn the skeleton of the art," she advised. Similar views were echoed by Aruna Mohanty, Ratikanta and Kedar Mishra. Natya Shastra may have made classical dances exclusive and intellectual, but the challenge of making those inclusive and mass-friendly in times of commercial cinema, will always involve creative use of technology, opined speakers.

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