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HALEEM KHAN

Enlightenment is the journey back from the head to the heart. ~Ravi Shankar

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BIO:

I come from a city called Ongole and I am a Kuchipudi dancer based in Hyderabad. I was the only child of my parents. I completed my school education there and then moved to Hyderabad for higher studies. I started learning Kuchipudi Dance in my city itself, but my passion got wings after coming to Hyderabad. Though I went on to study Human Resources and earn an MBA in it, I still always remained connected to my dance. Obviously, my work was boring for me and one day I just quit to follow my passion as a profession. I wish to create more and more dance compositions, create my own style and maybe, mentor a troupe in that style.

Q1: So, what was it again? The way you quit your corporate job?

(laughs) Well, I was sitting on the edge of my chair over there and fidgeting. There must be a word to describe that kind of awkward discomfort. I told them I had to go out for a tea. I picked up my laptop, came out and just didn't return. I'd always had this fascination for Kuchipudi. I had studied HR because of my parents ambitions about my academics. So, once out of that office, I went full on with practising Kuchipudi Dance.

Q2: Is it difficult for a male classical dancer in India?

It is very difficult. One has to face criticism of all sorts. There is categorization and, unfortunately, there is this strange way in which people can treat you. But, I'd say that one has to be strong enough. It's very simple. If you really love what you do, you would stand for it and keep doing it irrespective of all odds. I do that. There was a time when I used to get conscious about it and feel a complex. But, now, I'm at peace with all kinds of remarks, because I get compliments and love, too. And that makes up for the negative attitude that I get. Also, it is weird because this was originally an artform supposed to be performed by men and not women. I find it difficult to respect men who do not practice classical dance just because of these reasons. As a fellow-dancer or dance-lover, I expect them to stick to it because of their love for it, be stubborn like me. If you want to do something, there can't be excuses. Just try harder.

Q3: You have done a lot of experiments with your dance. Please tell us about them.

I have done experiments, yes. I wish to connect with my audience. I think there's a need to add to our existing classical art-forms. If art does not connect to the audience, then it becomes only a subject of study. In order to continuously contribute to it and to keep myself challenged all the time, I experiment with the kind of music I perform on, the poetry, the movements and even the performance spaces. I chose cafes especially in order to take the art form to more audience. I cannot see this form dying just because it remains isolated in fewer performance areas and people should forget about it.

For example, I started performing in non-auditorium type spaces like cafes and Lamakaan – An Open Cultural Space and on poetry of various languages like Hindi, Telugu and English. And I performed on ghazals written by the poet Tanisha, who was a Dakhani/Urdu poet and had donated the land of Kuchipudi Village where the dance developed. His poetry really appealed to me. I met professors, got



the poetry, got it composed and then performed on it. As an artist, this was a very enriching experience for me. I wish to experiment more.

Q4: You have been doing movies?

I have done a couple Telugu movies. One is called Nuvila and the other, which was a bilingual (in Tamil as well), is called Action. As opposed to dancing, for which I've always had this love and have been passionate about, acting is something which I hadn't thought would happen to me. But, now that I'm doing it, I find it very interesting. I loved acting in these two movies and now I wish to take up more movie projects.

Q5: How about a troupe of your own?

I do have a small informal troupe. We have been performing at places as well. But I do want to take this to a more organized state. That will give me more space to express myself better, to create more and more dance on concepts that I find amazing and fascinating.

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