

VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM**An Exploration of Dance into Divinity that binds the world into one family**

Concept & Choreography: Charanya Gurusathya
Artistic Director, Natyashala School of Bharatanatyam
Member of International Dance Council (CID) UNESCO ,ABHAI, SPIC MACAY
Coordinator of Indian Classical Dancers Association-Global

Chapter VI-72 in Maha Upanishad of Samaaveda reads:

अयं बन्धुरयन्नेति गणना लघुचेतसाम्
उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

Ayam bhanduryamnethi gaNana laghuchetasyam
udaracharitana tu VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM .

Meaning: The distinction that “This person is mine, and this one is not” is made only by the ignorant minds. One who knows the Supreme Truth realises that whole world is one family. The Upanishad describes the quality of a man who understood the Truth, transcending the multiplicity of the world. It is a Sanskrit word where

- vasudhā- the earth
- ēva - is
- kuṭumbakam - family

Religions are different roads converging to reach the same goal. Dance is indeed a form of praise, we have adapted the values of each religion as a pathway to attain Supreme Consciousness through our Dance and merge with Divine.

Belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions. The Spiritual path is portrayed in our dance through five different religions practiced around the globe. We are depicting the different religions each as beautiful flowers from the same garden leading the humankind to the path of divinity and eternal connect.

Portraying the Allah of Islam, the Jesus of Christians, the Ishwara of Hindus, Dao of Taoism and Buddha of Buddhism.. A dancing path to the supreme.

This Dance to Divinity is portrayed through the Classical Dance of India, Bharatanatyam. Bharatanatyam, is the oldest and eminent Indian classical dance that significantly portrays the heritage of India. The dance presentation in Bharatanatyam style acts as a medium of expression, music and rhythm to depict and interpret five different cultures.



Hinduism

Namaste – Bow to the Divine self

Tandavam the dance of passion, energy & anger. Tandavam is performed by lord Shiva who is known as 'Nataraja', the Lord of dance. Shiva's Tandava is described as a vigorous dance that forms the source to the cycle of creation, preservation and dissolution.

The song which we have chosen is a Shiva Tandava Stotram which describes Lord Shiva's power and beauty. The beats in this song give immense positive energy and is considered to be divine and pure.

The idea behind choosing red coloured costume and traditional Bharatanatyam jewellery was that red signifies power, energy, dominance, passion and purity. In Hinduism red is of at most significance and is most frequently used for auspicious occasions like marriage, festivals and rituals. In India a red mark is put on the forehead during ceremonies and important occasions. Hence, we chose red colour for costumes and the jewellery.

Reewa says, “being a follower of Islam, exploring about various religions, their language, assumptions, beliefs and values throughout the dance production was something I liked the most. It also made me realise how Hinduism & Islam are closely linked to each other.” Both the religions believe that God has the power to execute and enforce his will. It's mentioned in both the Quran and the Gita that God is the Supreme Being and has complete power over the universe. Both the religions accept that God loves everyone equally and that he hears prayers.

In the dance piece, we have portrayed the beautiful form of Lord Shiva. He is the one whose hair is like a dense forest, whose throat is wet by the pure flowing water of the Ganga; the snakes resting around the neck of Shiva are like long garlands, Damad-damad - is the sound of drums that describes the passionate dance of the fearless Lord Shiva. Through the Rudra Tandava we choose to depict the violent aspect of humankind, Shiva as the destroyer of evil deeds. Connecting to eternal Shiva through the dance of Tandavam.

The song ends with 'Om namah Shivaya', this is one of the most popular and most important Hindu mantra. It is a salutation to Shiva, one of the three primary deities of Hinduism.

It has made us realise that the essence of all the religions is the same, just the approach is different. We should respect all religions and just believe in peace, kindness and harmony.

CHRISTIANITY

Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit



The idea behind choosing costume for Christianity as blue colour was:- the spiritual meaning of blue is cool, calm, and grounded, and according to many Bible scholars, Blue is the colour of the sky and a reminder of the heavenly kingdom. The jewellery was kept silver antique in combination with the costume and dance.

Rutuja says, "as a follower of Hindu religion, being a part of this dance production I got to experience all the religions and their beliefs which made me realise all different religions lead to the same path of spirituality."

There are also significant similarities between Christian and Hindu theology, most notably, both religions present a trinitarian view of God. The Holy Trinity in Christianity, which consists of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is sometimes seen as being roughly analogous to the Trimurti in Hinduism, whose members -- Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva— are seen as the three principal manifestations of Brahman, or Godhead.

In this dance we have explored on the concept of the emotions of a human being : love, laughter, compassion, fear and frustration. The dance depicts a miracle of Jesus story - Feeding of the 5,000 which is also known as the "miracle of the five loaves of bread" where Jesus used five loaves of bread supplied by a boy to feed thousands of people.

The song says:

Jesus is the One who cares, one who bears our burdens, one who gave and sacrificed his life for us. Hence, we should always trust Him at all times, knowing that we are safe in His palm. He is the way out of every problem, the way to life and He is the truth that we know. In Him we have our being. He has no beginning and has no end. He is our everything. Jesus told us to not to harm anyone, to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us.

Adapting to path of Jesus with faith, hope and positivity leads us to Happiness in Life.



SUFISM

As-salaamu Alaikum - Peace be upon you

This dance is an inspiration from the hymns of the Sufi Islamic Devotional singing known as Qawwali. The dance aims to lead to a state of religious ecstasy to a spiritual union with Allah (God).

We choose our costume colour in Green representation of the number of traditional associations in Islam. It also represents paradise in the Quran. Nidhee Shukla says, "Being a Hindu, the Islamic culture has always intrigued me, allowing me to understand, acknowledge and respect their cultural practices."

Sufism (meaning faith) is Islamic Mysticism, mystical expression of Islamic faith. It is the process of realising ethical and spiritual ideals. Practitioners are referred to as 'Sufis'.

The Qawwali 'Bismillah' portrays the emotion of bhakti and love towards Allah.

- Tere naam se shuru Hua, tere naam se khatam Lillah
- Everything starts with your name and ends with your name Oh Allah
- Mushkilein assan hui saari aafat tal gayi
- All my problems are solved by taking your name

Sufism and Hinduism are formed in two different countries yet they share some similarities. Hindus and Sufis believe that God is the supreme being (Nirgun Brahma) and he is the ultimate truth. The idea of Fitra-tala or Fitrata (nature of God) is present in both Hinduism and Sufism. We have attempted to portray the cultural belief in practicing charity, righteousness and forgiveness, thereby leading to inner purification.

TAOISM

wu liang shou fu – for endless happiness and longevity



The philosophy of Yin & Yang from ancient China that has influenced the concept of Spiritual connect. The dance Guides through portrayal of martial art to shift from Yin(dark) to Yang (light).

The Colour –black and white in our dance depicts the symbol Yin-Yang which symbolises that in every positive aspect there is a negative part and in every bad aspect we can find a good aspect in our Lives. We have kept the costume simple as to show peace ,non violence and no interest materialistic possessions.

In the story we are depicting students of Martial Arts who are using their learnings to fight in battle against each other, in the process they hurt their own friend. Finally The teacher guides them to the right path and the students realise their faults and try to adapt to goodness and shift from Yin to the Yang. Taoism teaches that trusting one's instincts and gut is the path to finding one's true nature. Taoism teaches to reject hate, to reject intolerance, and to live with compassion.

Harshita says, “The most attractive part for me was to easily understand the bonding between student and teacher and their obedience, principles and dedication towards martial arts. The place where we shoot the video was an uphill, walking up to the place in the costume was indeed adventures for us, adding to it walking bare foot with the Ghungroos or bells on our feet was fun and surely a fulfilling experience dancing on the grass land.”



BUDDHISM

Namo 'Mitabhaya – Bow to the Infinite Light

Experiencing the path of Buddha through our dance, representing the form of meditation. The dance follows the path of love, compassion and non violence to attain Buddha.

The teachings of the Buddha , as we know ,are aimed solely at liberating sentient beings from suffering. And even though this religion does seem simple and quite self explanatory on the surface, emoting it through Bharatanatyam was most definitely a task at hand.

Our aim was to take the audience on a journey that describes the main pillars along with various prominent ideograms attributed to it. We begin by portraying man and the various sins we commit including stealing, bickering, relishing in ones riches etc which is followed by the entry of Buddha himself , enlightening us with his elementary yet eye-opening philosophies on nonviolence or ahimsa and fellow feeling .

We move on to formations depicting the stupa, a lotus and finally meditating in the sanctity of the buddha . He taught his monks to arouse four states of mind, called the "Brahma-vihara" or "four divine states of dwelling" these being metta – loving kindness, karuna-compassion, mudita- sympathetic joy and upekkha – equanimity . A formation we are exceptionally proud of is the one where we depict the buddhist stupa and the monks walking around it. It is believed that by prostrating before a stupa, we turn our face away from our egos and toward our enlightened nature by circumambulating—walking around the stupa in a clockwise fashion and reciting prayers—we keep the image of enlightenment at the center of our attention.

As students of this art form, we highly believe that it is not just the dancer that makes the performance but also the various accompaniments that we add to it. Hence , If one pays close attention to the costumes and jewellery , we have minimised the usage of the latter as much as possible combined with a subtle white and gold costume keeping in line with this religions beliefs.

We chose to shoot in the early hours of the day in the most serene area we could find to keep in line with what we were presenting. Jennifer says, “ I now stand before you as a Christian, who practices a majorly Hindu art form while actually performing a Buddhist piece. This was exactly what caught my eye when I first heard of the idea being pitched..Emotionally this entire dance has been a rollercoaster . and we hope you sense these same emotions as you watch us depict the religion of Buddhism through our craft.

THE DIVINE PATH

Dancing Path to the Supreme

Bharatanatyam dance explores the path towards Spirituality. Dance is a form of praise, a way to connect with the divine. The purposes of the practice of a religion are to achieve the goals of salvation for oneself and others. Salvation, for the Hindu, can be achieved in one of three ways: the way of works, the way of knowledge, or the way of devotion.



Christians focus on worship and faith. Some Christians believe that as well as having faith, people achieve salvation by following God's law, which is found in the Bible. Taoism is a salvation religion which seeks to guide its believers beyond this transitory life to a happy eternity. There is a belief in an original state of bliss, followed by the fallen state and there is reliance on supernatural powers for help and protection.

Apurva says, "Being a part of this production was a wonderful experience for me as our group is actually diverse we learn a lot of different things from each others culture. We extensively researched every aspect of our dance included the jewellery, the colours of the costumes and even the make up. Through the research we understood that in every religion there's something that makes it unique from all the others."

SUMMARY

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam portrays the philosophy -the whole world is one family. Just like how a garden becomes divine having diverse flowers, fragrances , colours, Similarly every culture is a beautiful amalgamation of diverse languages, traditions and existence.

Practicing one religion or culture guides us to follow a path to reach to the Supreme. Spirituality is about ones own essence to get deeper and contemplate on oneself. The idea of God within us leads to self-development, self-knowledge and self awareness. This narrows the distance between humans and God leading to a Spiritual journey.

We have portrayed this path to open our arms to embrace and practice universal love and peace. Thus leading us to the Ultimate Consciousness.

Natyashala Ensemble

Charanya Gurusathya, Reewa Bagwan, Rutuja Jangam

Apurva Bangali, Nidhee Shukla, Jennifer Jayan, Harshita Mangalampalli

CREDITS

Mentor & Advisor : Gurusathya Rajasekar

Videography & Editing : Milind Phadnis

Costumes & Jewellery : Natyashala's Wardrobe

Music Scores : Copyright with the Original Composer & Owner

STUDIO NATYASHALA