



## “NOT A DREAM, NOT A PRAYER, BUT MY LIFE”

– MRUDULA RAI

“Dance is not only a dream, but my life, this art is my life.” A determined and dedicated teacher, Smt. Mrudula Rai is indeed an inspiration. Fighting hard to keep this dance form alive, this woman has taken marvelous efforts to spread Bharathanatyam right from the beginning. Born in a village called Thallapadi in Mangalore, the only person who encouraged this dancer was her mother. Being one among 6 children, 5 of which are boys, in the male dominant society of those days, no one but her mother took efforts in recognizing this talent in Mrudula, which she is very grateful for.

Mrudula Rai’s inspiration was her first guru Sri. Mohan Kumar. Unlike today’s modern world where classes are taken on a large scale, earlier, students had to wait for their chance to be taught. She gradually went on to blossom under his tutelage to do her ‘arangetram’. As soon as this blooming dancer turned 19, she got married, after which she had to shift to Madurai, the city of Temples where she had to face several linguistic problems as she

belonged to a family from Karnataka. Initially, she had given up hopes on the art which she considered to be essential for her life. However, destined to become one among the best, fate helped her make her way all the way up. There was this one little girl near her home who wanted to learn Bharathanatyam & there started her journey. Things started to look up & more students joined under her fold.

She moved to Coimbatore in 1992, and started teaching in a couple of schools. Slowly the number of students taught by her grew to almost 200. However, just like the circle of life, obstacles had made a way into her career as a dance teacher. The number of students suddenly lowered to 30 for reasons beyond her controls.

Not someone who gets knocked down by obstacles, raising her spirits up, Mrudula Rai took a risk - a risk which is now being cherished and a risk that is currently named “Shree Natya Niketan” in Singanallur.

All thanks to her friends and family, Mrudula was able to build this wonderful place which is home to several students; this place can aptly be called her second home.

Despite the fact that she had to shift nearly fifteen times to finally get this perfect spot, she kept her hopes up. "If it wasn't for my students, I wouldn't be here. They are my family." Her students claim that no one could be as selfless as Mrudula.

Mrudula has won several awards for her contribution to social service through dance. Mrudula also teaches under privileged children who study at various Corporation schools based on a request from the then Corporation Commissioner. These kids have performed at various stages and Mrudula is confident that some of them will complete all the six levels of examination and will go on to do their 'arangetram'.

Awards like Kala Natya Visharadhe, Vikasa Ratnam, The FOGSI 'We for Stree' Superhero award, Natya Moukthika were added to her portfolio in addition to the recognition from Rotary Club of Coimbatore. It was through this club that this fast growing dance school was able to perform in several places like Delhi, Spain and many more.

As humble and as generous as she could be, Mrudula said that it was the dedication and hard work of seven of her students who have taken up the career of being dance teachers. She is very proud about the fact that her students are lending a hand towards promotion of this dance form.

Even the parents of the students have been inspired by this individual, realizing that it isn't too late to learn something; they indulge themselves in learning this art. This dance school, being as diverse as it is, has students of varying ages from six to sixty. The school has also diversified into offering yoga and kalari training. Besides performing at various dance festivals, temple functions, special shows, the school also conducts an annual event called 'Nrithya Sandhya'

The one characteristic that she inculcates in her students is the quality of being humble and down to earth. She said that despite the fact that Bharathanatyam makes positive changes



in ones behavior, these qualities are essential as well.

Surpassing all the barriers like lingual and situational, this amazing woman has taken exceptional steps in building Shree Natya Niketan which is now home to 450 students and counting. As someone once said,

"Great dancers are not great because of their technique, they are great because of their passion", which is evident in this case.

After all these years, and all these phases, making sure that this two- thousand year old dance form keeps itself alive, Smt. Mrudula Rai is rightfully a Champion of Kovai.