

Mudras of Connectivity



Prachi Hota

About 15 months ago, an online dance recital was unthinkable. Today, it is the norm. "Now we need to know about lights, camera and sound," says Odissi dancer Prachi Hota, who has conceived Samanubhasan—a series of seminars on creating a virtual space for practitioners, scholars and lovers of Indian art to engage with each other on issues that affect their disciplines. Previously the performer and the audience shared physical space and conversation to enable a seamless performance. "A dance routine can be performed differently before different audiences. In an auditorium, people share an experience which will never be replicated since each act is unique. This conversation is muted online," rues Hota, who has been dancing professionally for the last 12 years.

She was initiated into Odissi at the age of three. The optimist in Hota believes that Covid-19 has made her art accessible to people who previously would never visit an auditorium. "Besides, we can watch performances of international fellow artists online. Subsequently, academic engagement with art has increased. Exchanging information and learning from our fellow artists and elders in the fraternity are easier now," she elaborates.

This is not the first time Hota is performing online. A crowning moment was her rendering of the re-composition of Adiguru Shri Pankaj Charan Das, the father of contemporary Odissi. She per-

formed *Hamsadhvani Pallavi* as recreated by Aruna Mohanty at Param 2020, a global online classical dance festival. It was choreographed by Kelucharan Mohapatra. Its lyrics have roots in the salvation-through-devotion Bhakti movement, that began in South India and migrated North. Through her steps and mudras, Hota translated the physical description of Lord Krishna's inner and outer beauty.

"All Indian art and craft traditions are inherently flexible, and as practitioners, scholars and patrons, it is important to engage with each other," she believes. Hota has also written, edited and directed *Aseem*, a short documentary on the life of the Adiguru. Like many GenNxt artists, Hota too is versatile. She can play the sitar, is a Hindustani music vocalist and a filmmaker, who is currently doing her Master's in Filmmaking at the London Film School. She is conscious of the legacy of the great masters.

Today's artists singularly go beyond the confines of their gurukuls to democratise the inclusive nuances of art. Hota and her colleagues conduct workshops in Delhi government schools as part of Project Anjuman to teach students to expand their creativity and critical thinking.

The first episode of her new online series will be available online in a few weeks. Hota abides by her Odissi Guru Madhavi Mudgal's advice: "It is our responsibility to cultivate the audience."

—BGR

