

Breaking the mould

Aparna Sindhoor's dance dramas blend several elements of theatre, dance and music to tell stories on issues of importance

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A highly accomplished Bharatanatyam danseuse, she opted to expand her oeuvre beyond Indian classical dance to lend more meaning and depth to her dance dramas. But then, for Boston-based theatre artiste and dancer Aparna Sindhoor, breaking the mould has always been necessary to tell simple, meaningful stories on issues of importance.

A case in point is 'A Story and A Song', the work presented by the Aparna Sindhoor Dance Theatre troupe on Friday evening at the 'Theatre Beyond Words' festival at the Yashwantrao Chavan auditorium. The three-day festival began on Friday.

Based on Kannada folklore, the lyrical and entertaining work weaves together themes like women's issues, nature, sensuality and love. It tells the story of a woman with the uncanny ability to turn into a tree using two pails of water. Sindhoor's oeuvre has always been characterised by originality both in terms of technique and theme. For her, conventional ballets and dance dramas are passé. "They don't work for me," she says.

So, Sindhoor's full-length dance dramas — numbering 16 in all — synthesise Indian classical and folk dances, western and Indian theatre, world music, Kalaripayattu, the martial art from Kerala, yoga and live singing.

Present-day events and happenings also often find their way into a Bharatanatyam piece. And her work on the theme of racial conflict has gone down especially well with her American audience.

"I try to explore themes such as violence against women, environmental degradation, human rights and social justice issues," says Sindhoor, who is a member of the Forum of Progressive Artists, a collective of artistes and others devoted to cultural activism.

Hailing from Mysore, she grew up closely watching her mother, a busy theatre professional. B V Karanth's theatrical works were another major influence.

Sindhoor even presented a woman's gang rape in a Bharatanatyam

sequence before a Mysore audience in 1997. Called 'The Incident and After,' the performance raised many an eyebrow in India and the US.

"I was told, 'Bharata (who wrote the 'Natya Shastra', an ancient treatise on dance) said you can't present a rape scene with Bharatanatyam. But I said, Bharata is right in his place. But why stop there. There's much more to dance than just rules,'" Sindhoor states.

She also relates how she once had to deal with a chauvinistic male American audience member. "He asked me why am I showing an Indian woman's rape to an American audience. But a rape is an issue any woman on this planet will relate to."

It's time we move beyond clichés, she declares.



Sindhoor