

*A Profile of  
Dr. Vasundhara Doraswamy*



# Vasundhara... the danseuse

Dr Vasundhara Doraswamy- Founder/Director of Vasundhara Performing Arts Centre, Mysore (India), is a danseuse par excellence, versatile choreographer of repute and a venerated Guru of Bharatanatyam has turned very much a phenomenon in the Indian Classical dance scenario over the past five decades and more of her career.

She hails from the princely city of Mysore in India. Her performances are a manifestation of the profound terpsichorean ingenuity marked by impromptu improvisations, esoteric foot-work and bewitching histrionic propensities. Her myriad choreographies encompassing a wide spectrum of spiritual and secular themes are a striking paradigm of her inventive brilliance.

Dr Vasundhara is one of the pioneering disciples of renowned Guru Late Pattabhi Jois from Mysore in Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga and in 1988 earned a Ph D for her study on the correlation between Yoga and Bharatanatyam. She holds a post-graduate degree in Folklore and is a consummate exponent of the martial arts of 'Tang-ta' and 'Kalarippayattu' that vouches for her quest for multidisciplinary approach to dance.

As for her choreographies, 'Panchali' is noted for its singular adaptation of Yakshagana music (a form of folk music from the State of Karnataka) to Bharatanatyam. Solo productions like Ganga Lahari, Ambe, Dakshayani, ShakuntaKunjana (literary masterpieces of Udyavara Madhava Acharya) and now Smt Jyothi Shankar's Kshaatra Draupadi - with a strong female oriented theme have won acclaim from all quarters. She has been the only choreographer in Bharatanatyam who has ventured into a dance production of 'Sama Veda' - the fountain-head of Indian Classical music as the vedic pundits sat chanting in the Mamiyur Mahadevan temple, Guruvayoor in 1997. Vasundhara has also performed to the ancient scriptures of the archaeological inscriptions discovered around the Banavasi area.

Dr Vasundhara was recently honoured with "Natya Rani Shantala" Award - the highest state award for Dance by Govt of Karnataka. She has also been presented the Rajyotsava Award by the State Government and is the youngest recipient of the prestigious "Karnataka Kala Tilaka" award from the Karnataka Sangeetha Nrithya Academy. Dr Vasundhara is also the only recipient of "Aasthaana Nritya Ratna" from Shri Krishna Mutt, Udipi. She has also been honoured with "Chandana Award" by Doordarshan India, "Shreshta Kala Pracharak" from Padma Bushan Saroja Vaidyanathan (New Delhi), "Kala Vipanchi" by Padma Vibushan Shri Balamurali Krishna (Chennai), Natya Jyothi [Australia] and Artist of the Millennium Award [USA], just to name a few.



An A-Graded Artist in Doordarshan, She is presently a member of ten -member expert committee for Bharatanatyam appointed by the Department Of Culture, Govt. of India.

She is the only Bharatanatyam danseuse to have been invited from India to perform for 'WORLD PEACE' conference in Paris under aegis of UNESCO before an audience of 2500 representing 137 countries.

A globe-trotting dancer, Dr Vasundhara regularly conducts workshops in Bharatanatyam and Yoga in different countries. She has conducted summer camps for Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in the UK. She has travelled to Czech Republic, Poland, France, Germany, United Kingdom and Austria representing the ICCR [Indian Council for Cultural Relations]. Vasundhara's current tours are primarily based in the US, Singapore, Paris and Australia. Vasundhara is a visiting Guest Professor at Alabama University in the US. For the past 15+ years she has made Louisville her home every summer and has been conferred with the "Honorary Citizen of Louisville" & "Lifetime Achievement Award" in 2012 by The Mayor of Louisville, USA recognizing her contribution to the Art field of Louisville.

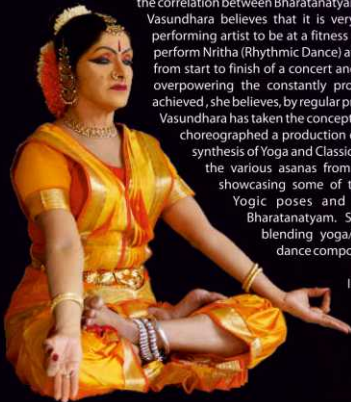
## *Dance and Yoga*

Vasundhara is one of the pioneer disciples of the renowned Guru Late Shri Pattabhi Jois from Mysuru in Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga and in 1988 earned a Phd for her exclusive study on the correlation between Bharatanatyam and Yoga.

Vasundhara believes that it is very important for a successful performing artist to be at a fitness level that enables him/her to perform Nritha (Rhythmic Dance) at the same degree of intensity from start to finish of a concert and let the abhinaya flow freely overpowering the constantly produced fatigue. This can be achieved, she believes, by regular practice of Yoga.

Vasundhara has taken the concept of "Soorya Namaskaram" and choreographed a production of over an hour, in a fabulous synthesis of Yoga and Classical Dance form, using many of the various asanas from Yoga. This is a visual treat showcasing some of the similarities between the Yogic poses and Adavus (basic steps) of Bharatanatyam. She has been successful in blending yoga/yogic poses in her various dance compositions as well.

In 2012, Dr Vasundhara also released a book "Natya Yoga Darshana" A Treatise on the Impact of Spiritual Practices on Bharatanatyam.



# Vasundhara Style

Dr Vasundhara gained her initial training in Pandanallur Style of Bharathanatyam. Over the years, with her experience and creativity, she has been able to give it a unique footprint of her own, which has been recognized by the dance fraternity and the art connoisseurs in her performances and that of her students. This transformation was never a drastic or intentional move but something that evolved into a beautiful piece of art over the years.

Tradition is not static and it embraces preservation, innovation and transmission. As a venerated Guru, Dr Vasundhara has been successful in generating (3 generations) disciples who have imbibed her every move, look (Drishti) & nuances needed etc in the way they perform.

What inspired Dr Vasundhara to experiment with the boundaries of the classical dance of Bharatanatyam was her strong footing in Yoga as a practitioner and further as an exponent of martial arts. Whereas incorporation of Yogic postures added to the gorgeousness of the dance form, regular practice of Yoga helped her in perfecting the geometry of the movements making the choreographies a visual treat. Martial arts provide inestimable vibrant energy to these movements. Use of singular hastas, alluring gaits, abhinaya which can communicate easily with the common man, modifications of the adavus, aharya, inimitable feather-touch footwork, all within the traditional framework, have led to a unique footprint that is today identified and recognised by one and all as "Vasundhara Style". The primary objective of the style is to use Angikabhinaya for aesthetic delineation. These innovations have been instrumental in taking Bharatanatyam to a wider audience.



# International Accreditations & Relations

Vasundhara travels around the world conducting workshops in Bharatanatyam and Yoga for anywhere between 3-4 months in a year. She performed for the 50th Indian Independence celebrations in Sydney & Melbourne. She has conducted summer camps for Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in the UK. She has travelled to Czech Republic, Poland, France, Germany, UK and Austria representing the ICCR [Indian Council for Cultural Relations]. Vasundhara's current tours are primarily based in the US, Singapore, France, Germany and Australia. She has a branch in Melbourne and tours Australia regularly on a yearly basis. Vasundhara is a visiting Guest Professor at Alabama University in the US. She was conferred the Honorary Citizen of Louisville and a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Mayor of Louisville, USA in 2012 where she has been spending 3 summer months every year for the last 2 decades.



## Community Work

In addition to grooming hundreds of young talents into professional dancers, the institute offers scholarships to deserving students. She has performed for numerous charity organisations regularly in the past and has worked successfully in a production for the blind and recently with the physically and mentally challenged kids.

# Vasundhara Performing Arts Centre



Vasundhara Performing Arts Centre, Mysuru of which she is the founding director, was established as early as in 1986. Since its inception, this institute of excellence continues to groom young talents in Bharatanatyam and Yoga and her disciples are a legion. The centre offers coaching in Nattuvanga, Bharatanatyam, Yoga and Classical Music. Experienced teachers/artistes with in-depth knowledge of the subject help train the students under the supervision of Dr. Vasundhara Doraswamy herself.

Regular Symposiums, Seminars, Workshops & Lecture Demonstrations are organised to benefit the students of VPAC, and Artists in general.

Encouragement Scholarships are awarded to deserving students. The institute has entered into M.O.U. with Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.

The four National Festivals organised every year offer a smorgasbord of Classical Dance and Music Artistes from all around India and recently from around the globe, also providing an unconventional learning environment.

# National Music & Dance Festivals



Over the past 3 decades, Vasundhara Performing Arts Centre has been conducting four Classical Music and Dance Festivals presenting a smorgasbord of imminent and eminent artistes to the connoisseurs of Art in the premier city of Mysuru.

**PALLAVOTHSAVA** - Young upcoming Artistes Festival

**NATARAJAOTHSAVA** - Male Dancers and Couple Dancers Festival

**PARANGATHOTHSAVA** - For established and renowned Artists of National & International Repute

**CHIGURU SANJE** - A festival of Classical Dance for children below twelve years.

Vasundhara Performing Arts Centre is honoured and privileged to have presented more than ten thousand Junior & Senior Artists of National and International repute to date. This is a vehement demonstration of her sincere pursuits to encourage the upcoming talents and honour the outstanding artists.

## Choreographies & Productions

Dr. Vasundhara has choreographed a myriad of dance features of which a few claim special mention having seen innumerable stage shows around the globe.

# Group productions

**Manmatha Dahana** – A Dance Drama detailing the story of the burning of Manmatha by Lord Shiva.

**Ramayana** – A story of Lord Rama from his birth to his Coronation.

**Shakuntala** – The beautiful story of Kalidasa's Shakuntala through Dance.

**Sapthagireesha Panigrahana** – A dance drama unfolding the events leading to the wedding of Lord Vishnu and Padmavathi.

**Vasundhara Kanda Kaarantha** – This was a Group production by students of Vasundhara Performing Arts Centre, involving various facets of Arts like music, dance and drama based on the works of Jnanapith Awardee and famous kannada writer Dr. Shivarama Karanth.

**Sri Krishna Tula Bhara** – A Dance drama narrating the story of Sri Krishna Tula Bhara performed by Satyabhama and Rukmini.

**Rani Kayikeyi** – A dance feature based on Sri Ramayana Darshanam by another Jnanapith Awardee and famous Kannada poet Kuvempu.

**Vidyunmadanika**

– A Group choreography where the Sculptor Jakkannachari sees his Sculptures come to life & dance with Lord Chennakeshava.

**Suryanamaskara** – An innovative group choreography combining Yoga & Dance in praise of the Sun God, showing the correlation between the two.

**Discovery of India** – This group production was based on Nehru's Discovery of India choreographed to commemorate 50 years of Indian Independence.





**Shive Shiva Navarasa** – A dance drama narrating the events leading to the display of the Navarasas in Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi.

**Gaana Nrutyanjali** – Dance choreography for the basics of Carnatic music and the much more complex music recital format.

**Hoysala Vaibhava** – A dance drama on the Hoysala King Vishnuvardhana and his queen Natyarani Shakuntala and their contribution to the development of Dance.

**Chalukya Vaibhava** – A dance feature narrating the grandeur of the Chalukya dynasty and its ruler King Pulikesi.

**Durga** – This group choreography narrates the story of Goddess Durga who brought an end to the terrorizing demon king – Mahishasura.

**Gurubhyo Namaha** – Another innovative choreography bringing together Dance, Yoga and the martial art form of Kalaripayattu.

**Sri Krishna Madhuryam** – A beautiful choreography telling the story of Lord Krishna using famous compositions from poets of various Indian Languages.

## *Solo Productions*

**Panchali** – A narration of the ordeal of the woman Panchali- This choreography saw the coming together of Yakshagana music & Bharatanatyam.

**Soundarya Lahari** – This is dance feature based on Shankaracharya's Soundarya Lahari.

**Ganga Lahari** – This choreography was a detailed narration of the story of Ganga.

**Shakuntakunjana** – A solo choreography on the story of Shakuntala.

**Ambe** – A solo dance feature narrating the story of the Queen Ambe who is seen voicing her opinion in the male dominated world.

**Dakshayini** – A beautiful narration of the humiliation of Dakshayini who jumps into the holy fire and sacrifices herself.

These solo productions or dance features are the literary masterpieces of Sri Udyavara Madhava Acharya.

**Kshaatra Draupadi** – A tale of the warrior princess who avenged every insult thrown at her without the use of arms/weapons based on Kumaravyasa's Bharatha and conceptualised by Smt Jyothi Shankar.



# Awards & Accolades

Awards & recognition have followed Dr. Vasundhara from a very young age and they continue to chase her even now, as ever.



- o Natya Rani Shanthala [Govt of Karnataka]
- o Abhinaya Shaarade [Tamilnadu]
- o Sringaara Mani – Mumbai
- o Rajyothsava Award [Govt of Karnataka]
- o Kalaa Vipanchee [Chennai]
- o Shresht Kala Prachaarak [Delhi]
- o Chandana Award – Doordarshan India
- o Natya Kalottunga [Karnataka]
- o Nritya Yogini – UNESCO/ Suttur Aasthana
- o Nritya Visharadae – Rotary Namana
- o Nritya Sundari – Karnataka
- o Natyanjali – Chennai
- o Natyajyothi – Australia
- o Natya Saraswathi – Shimoga
- o Natya Ratna – Chennai
- o Natya Rani - Rotary Rangson - Mysuru
- o Natya Mayuri – Chennai
- o Natya Rani - Rotary Rangson - Mysuru
- o Natya Mayuri – Chennai
- o Nada Laya Pravaha – Kerala
- o Millennium Excellence in Performing Arts – USA
- o Karnataka Kala Tilaka [Youngest recipient – Sangeetha Nritya Academy]
- o Darshana – Kerala
- o Aasthaana Nritya Ratna – Sri Krishna Mutt, Udupi
- o Aryabhata

# Press Tributes

## Dancing to Vedic Chants

But, the crowd of devotees that thronged Mammiyoor Sri Mahadeva temple, Guruvayur recently in connection with the 11- day Athirudra Mahayaga were enthralled to see the renowned dancer Vasundhara Doraswamy from Mysuru present a scintillating Bharatanatyam recital to the awe inspiring chants of Sama Veda. Many of them did not realise they were witness to such a historical event, as interpretation of Sama Veda through Bharatanatyam was unheard of in recent history.

Then second number embraced the nine Vishnu sookthas in Sama Veda that commenced with the ninth one. Delineation of Vishnu, Agni, Kavi, Drisyarooma, Vamana, Sarvavyapi, Nithyatwa, Vishwarooma and Sakthi following the traditional chanting style seemed quite operose, but Vasundhara known for her yogic exploit, accomplished them with uncanny ease. The musical presentation of the verse starting with "Idam Vishnu vichakshane...." Entailed Vamanavathara and Vishnu Viswarooma in sanchari bhavas in which the adavus full of verse and sculpturesque poses were praiseworthy.

-Scorpio, The Indian Express

Vasundhara proved an accomplished teacher who could kindle the curiosity of her listeners. She said, "there is a common thread running through all the performing arts of Indian origin and this is nothing but Yoga". The close similarity between adavus and asanas found expressions in the demonstration that ensued in quick succession.

For example, the adaptation of 'Surya Namaskaram' in Alaripu, "Urdhva dhanurasana" used to depict all the 14 'lokas'(worlds), "Uttitha hasta padangushtasana" employed in the Tandava adavus and "Veerabhadrasana" in Matsyavataram etc, provided an extra elegance to the conventional Bharatanatyam movements.

A noteworthy feature of her leg movements was the softness of the foot movements, especially, the feather - touch stamping throughout the performance. She ascribed this ability also to the various movements she could accomplish with Yoga.

-G.S.Paul, The Hindu

## Shanthala Recalled

On the whole one felt that in the organisers professed commitment to raising dance in Karnataka to heights appropriate to Queen Shanthala's land of Art, their choice of Vasundhara Doraswamy for the inauguration could not have been more appropriate.

-EconomicTimes, Bangalore

"Vasundhara Doraswamy from Mysuru gave a fine account of Bharatanatyam. Her Nritya has felicitous grace and sparkle. The long Dashavatharam number gave her enough scope to invest her abhinaya with appropriate dramatic histrionics. With an expressive visage, she registered subtle nuances in commendable manner".

-Sunil Kothari, The Times of India, Mumbai

## An Instance of Faultless Bharatanatyam

That Vasundhara is a well trained dancer and gifted Choreographer was evident from her delineation of Varnam in Karaharapriya. Though the Varnam is Ramayana in a capsule form, the interpretation covered almost all the major episodes.

-Subbudu, The States Man

Vasundhara Doraswamy who performed at the Mylapore Fine Arts Club on August 1st and the Rasika Ranjani Sabha on August 2nd, endeared herself to the audience by her simple choreography and sincere presentation of the items. Vasundhara had added many more new compositions to her repertoire without departing from the original idiom. There was nothing flamboyant about her style but imaginative and individualistic showmanship. The Padavarnam chosen as the main item was "Sami nemanamillind" in Sriranjani by Papanasham Shivan. This enabled Vasundhara to come out with delicate Sanchari bhavas, splendid adavus and precise foot work.

-T.S.Parthasarathy, Indian Express, Chennai

### **Marked by Precision**

"The only dancer in the festival to have a full evening to herself, Vasundhara has a well trained body which can negotiate easy nritta sequence at any speed and with the most demanding of arithmetical arrangements, full of flashy leg stretches sometimes raised to shoulder height, smooth sarukkal adavus and clean thattumettu. Vasundhara has an individualistic style which has drawn inspiration from Yogasana. Her dance was marked by precision and speed in the Virtuoso grandeur of rhythm.

-Leela Venkataraman, The Hindu, Delhi/Chennai

### **Adept Choreography**

Vasundhara's choreography was studded with nuances of sculpturesque friezes, ballet like kicks by the Upargas and pretty permutations of Anchita Kuncita Nritta. Vasundhara has again shown that it is up to the dancers to energise Bharathanatyam and shore its elan and elegance.

-Vasanth Iyer The Indian Express, New Delhi

### **Inspiring Recital by Vasundhara**

Vasundhara Doraswamy gave a lively, inspired recital of Bharatanatyam at TATA Theatre. She began the recital with a call to Ganapathi - favourite emissary of Nataraja, to fill the hall with boundless creative energy, so that the performer and the audience could participate in the totally involved experience.

The pure dance was at tremendous speed while the Abhinaya was also with emotions deep and intense. Vasundhara struck several exquisite poses. She was a petite ball of fire-energy flowing out of every movement. Her movements were taut as steel and yet flexible as a piece of elastic. An inner glow seemed to light up as she floated from Nritta to Nritya. IN her abhinaya she exercised a magnetic power over her audience.

Unlike most Bharatanatyam dancers, she fill the stage with lightening movements. This adds a welcome new dimension to Bharatanatyam. Another interesting feature is the high, light leap and the low leg stretch movements. IN her "Ashtapadi" she made an Indelible impact with her strange assertion of independence.

-Hima Devi, Femina, Bombay

### **Chiselled Poses, Unusual Hastas**

Vasundhara Doraswamy is both a scholar of dance as well as a serious practitioner of Bharatanatyam. Her Nritta manages to transcend the slight muscularity of arms and upper shoulder and assumes a sparkling precision. In her choreography "Namaskaram" at Triveni Chamber Theatre, Delhi, she studded the items with chiselled poses and unusual hastas, such as the variation in the flopping movements showing the elephant headed Ganesha or the ones establishing the Nandi Vahana of Lord Shiva.

The Charukesi Pada Varnam that followed its central focus on Lord Shanmukha, Rapid fire jathi sequences, pat on the beat and abhinaya that communicated the various shades of Shringara from Viraha to Madhura, came through un-laboured in this 30 minutes item.

-Shanta Serbjeet Singh, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi



*Vasundhara*  
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