

In Tune with Her Rhythm:

A Journey from Birth to Arangetram

ONCE UPON A TIME, in a delivery room far, far away, a little bundle of joy named Nandini made her grand entrance into the world. Despite being a month premature, she was a force to be reckoned with, armed with the most captivating pair of eyes you could ever imagine. As fate would have it, the radio in the operating theatre was blaring Hema Malini's hit song "Dream Girl" on her birthday. I couldn't help but wonder if my little Nandini would follow in Hema Malini's footsteps and become a dance sensation!

The memories of those early days in the operating theatre remain hazy, as we brought Nandini home and life suddenly became twice as vibrant. Growing up, both Madhav and Nandini were immersed in a diverse range of arts and sports. They delved into vocal music, tabla, ballet, Bharatanatyam, drawing, painting, gymnastics, yoga, football, tennis, and more. I distinctly recall a moment when Nandini, just four years old, sat by her window, listening to intense music—perhaps the mellifluous strains of a sitar—her eyes brimming with tears. When asked why, she simply said, "The music makes me cry."



Nandini as little Krishna



Ready for her 1st stage performance

It wasn't until Nandini turned five that I began my quest to find a Bharatanatyam teacher nearby. Alas, our first attempt was thwarted, as the teacher deemed her too little. But that didn't dampen our spirits! Nine months later, just shy of seven, we returned, and this time, the teacher welcomed her with open arms. And so, Nandini's journey into the world of Bharatanatyam began, under the watchful guidance of her first Guru, Smt. Subbulakshmi Ganesh. With her mischievous eyes and playful nature, Nandini brought the character of

Little Krishna to life in those early years, enchanting everyone around her.

But Nandini's vibrant personality didn't stop at dance. She was a curious little soul, fearlessly approaching strangers and bombarding them with questions about their favourite colour or breakfast menu. She even ventured into the fish pond at her school, determined to understand the aquatic world. Her collection of stones and feathers overflowed as she nurtured a bohemian spirit. And yet, amidst her wild antics, Nandini discovered a sense of tranquility and grace when she danced. It was like watching a butterfly emerge from its cocoon.

Deep down, I had always dreamed that Nandini would become a dancer. But I also knew it wouldn't be an easy path. So, we introduced her to yoga and gymnastics from a young age, gently nudging her to explore other physical activities. Madhav, her ever-supportive brother and a natural athlete, led the way, and Nandini reluctantly followed suit.

People would often raise their eyebrows, wondering why this little girl was tackling intense football drills with her brother when she wasn't even a player. They'd chuckle and call her adorable when she joined me for yoga



Early years

classes or tagged along to my mountaineering training sessions, unaware that she might not be enjoying it as much. We didn't give her a choice—she had to embrace every physical education class out there.

As months turned into years, Nandini's love for Bharatanatyam blossomed, and she yearned to pursue her passion wholeheartedly. At thirteen, she was blessed to find her way to the esteemed Guru, Smt. Kanaka Srinivasan. This brought us one step closer to my dream of witnessing Nandini's arangetram. But I made a solemn promise to myself: I would never burden her with my expectations. This had to be her journey, driven by her own determination and love for the art form.

Just as this thought was gaining momentum, fate played its mischievous card. Kanaka ma'am, suddenly had to relocate to Chennai after residing in Delhi for over three decades. We were now faced with a new challenge. But they say where there's a will, there's a way!



Her personal make up team in Covid times

After Nandini's fifteenth birthday, we set our plan into motion. We ventured to Chennai, charting a course filled with excitement and adventure of rehearsals, shopping sprees, and scouting missions. Nandini's days were a whirlwind of studying, board exams, and dance practice, all while our fitness classes persisted. But a remarkable transformation occurred—Nandini began to recognize the vital role fitness played in enhancing her dance.

We lived and breathed dance in Chennai, with each day bringing

new lessons and insights. Ma'am's vast experience and meticulous approach inspired us all. Madhav and I found ourselves falling into a rhythm, balancing our own pursuits with Nandini's practice sessions. As she gracefully honed her skills, I busied myself with event planning for the grand day in Delhi, and Madhav took up a Python course. Gautam juggled his time between Delhi and Chennai.

Returning to Delhi just days before the arangetram, we threw ourselves into final rehearsals, venue preparations, and endless to-do lists. It felt like we were living in a dream, unable to fully grasp that the much-anticipated arangetram was just around the corner.

The last few days were a rollercoaster of emotions. We rehearsed tirelessly, anxiously awaiting the big day while warding off worries of possible mishaps. Would Nandini catch a cold or have a nosebleed, as she often did in her younger years? The pressure mounted, but we rallied together, keeping her spirits high and her fitness levels soaring. And let's not forget the Herculean task of resisting the allure of junk food, especially with guests and

a celebratory atmosphere at home. All the while, exhaustion threatened to claim us. Yet, amidst the chaos, we clung to the hope that everything would fall into place.

And fall into place it did! From the moment the ceremonial lamp was lit, I could feel the energy and excitement electrifying the air. My nerves settled as Nandini took the stage, transforming before my eyes. That shy and reserved girl became a radiant, confident performer, capturing the hearts of everyone in the audience.



But the arangetram is just the beginning. Many well-meaning souls cautioned me about the challenges of maintaining continuity in dance after such a grand event. Would Nandini be able to keep the flame alive? It was a question that lingered in my mind, but in that moment, I pushed those doubts aside and revelled in the pure joy of witnessing my daughter shine. Her leaps, jumps, expressive eyes, and radiant smile won the hearts of everyone present.

As I reflect on Nandini's incredible journey, I can't help but think back to that fateful day in the delivery room, when her eyes sparkled with promise. The seeds of dance were sown even before she entered the world, and with every step she takes, Nandini continues to weave her own magical tale—a tale of rhythm, passion, and boundless joy.

Divya

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The three pillars behind her Arangetram