# A PATH-BREAKING MOVEMENT STUDIES PROGRAMME

## BHARATHA TO BARTENIEFF AND BEYOND

## FASCIANATYA

***by Dr. Rajyashree Ramesh***

Photo: Marion Borriss

# OVERVIEW

The Indian corporeal practises, are replete with different streams of knowledge and ancient wisdom about the body-mind complex. Essentially, they continue to stand forth as embodied practices in the first place, revealing richness in form and content that have informed each other over a long period of varied cultural, religious and historical influences. And as they continue to evolve, it becomes necessary to tap the potential they hold for today's understanding of embodiment. Particularly in terms of fundamental knowledge they entail as corporeal traditions, that often remains implicit. Tracing the theory and practise of these traditions to the very fundamentals of human movement in its multidimensional function is proving to be a powerful tangible tool with a vision for the future.

How can the common denominator, movement, help comprehend the multifaceted deep insights that the corporeal traditions hold? How can knowledge about the fundamental functional, structural and expressive aspects of movement enrich the practitioner‘s abilities to apply an inherently broad-based dance knowledge in today‘s world and global set-ups? And in doing so, enhance transcultural communication whilst preserving the cultural specificities of a handed-down wisdom? And most importantly, what makes dance that meaningful, meaning-making primordial? Finally, what methodological and analytical tools are available to enrich the process?

These and further questions were the driving force behind the research and development of a unique Dance and Movement Studies Programme by Dr. Rajyashree Ramesh. What began as the “Bharatha-to-Bartenieff” movement-analytic methodology in 2010 evolved over several years of experimental and empirical explorations supported by academic research into a trans-disciplinary approach. It brings the theory and practice of Indian performing arts tradition Nāṭya into the framework of several current fields of research ranging from Linguistic Gesture Studies to Brain Research on Emotions, from Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies to current Fascia Research.

The outcome of integrating all these fields is a practically applicable methodology for the benefit of practitioners and scholars alike, specifically for those looking for an integration of dance and movement science from transcultural and trans-disciplinary perspectives. It proves to be particularly relevant for everyone interested in ways of applying dance-based body and movement knowledge in their respective fields of work. In general, movement itself gets addressed in this approach, not in the sense of any particular technique, but how it defines any given technique. This Dance and Movement Studies Programme is thus useful for professionals from varied backgrounds.

## WHY MOVEMENT?

Movement is a fundamental act of all that is living. It is a primary means of expression and communication. An artistic presentation in particular is dependent on the performer's ability to convey through movement, be it through gestures or expressions. Each of these movements is essentially an output of intricate alterations, specifically in bodily, spatial and qualitative terms.

As the empirical research by Dr. Rajyashree Ramesh exemplifies, methodological and analytic tools are needed to provide a nuanced understanding and practice of movement from such a broad-based perspective. In-depth knowledge about and awareness of one's own movement can bring not only effective results at various levels, but also an experience and understanding to the individual, that is profound, bringing both meaning and joy. Meaning and joy are the primary goals of Indian Performing Arts traditions, and embodied meaning-making is at the core of cognitive capacities. Hence Movement Studies as an integral aspect of training is highly imperative and needs addressing from various interwoven perspectives.

## ABOUT DR. RAJYASHREE RAMESH

Dr. Rajyashree Ramesh is a dancer choreographer, master teacher, Certified Laban Movement Analyst (CLMA) and movement researcher. Born in Pune, raised in Mumbai and Bangalore, India and living in Berlin, Germany since 1977, she was trained from early childhood in the Indian solo dance theatre forms of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi, and classical Carnatic music.

Her further studies in the West included Yoga, Breathing Therapy (Middendorf), a Certification in Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis, a Certification in holistic Fascia Training, and finally academic research that relates movement to embodiment, cognition and emotions (Masters and Ph.D at the Europa University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder). Her research has identified the very nature of primary emergent movement. Dr. Rajyashree has over five decades of collective experience in performing, research, teaching, and lecturing, across the globe.

**Dr. Rajyashree has now brought together several years of experience of her pioneering artistic work as a Bharatanatyam dancer, as a Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analyst, transcultural teacher, and research scholar, to create a unique Movement Studies Programme - a practical application of her path-breaking academic research that can transform the way an individual learns and experiences movement and dance.**

## *CONCEPTS & PROGRAMMES*

"Bharata to Bartenieff and Beyond" is the trans-disciplinary and movement-analytic approach that is offered by Dr. Rajyashree Ramesh since 2015. Based on the rich vocabulary of Indian movement traditions this unique approach dileanates the notion of embodiment through an organic integration of several current fields of research. Latest insights from Linguistic Gesture Studies and Brain Research on Emotions, from a Movement Studies and current Fascia Research perspective, enable a broad-based application of the traditional vocabulary.

This approach particularly defines factors of Indian dance traditions from both a functional and structural perspective, as much as the expressive perspective on movement. In addressing, movement itself not in the sense of any particular technique, but how it defines any given technique, such an approach enables dancers to become lively and expressive performers, imaginative choreographers and effective teachers.

This broad-based movement studies programme is also relevant to anyone interested in trans-cultural ways of applying dance/movement in their respective fields of work, whether theatre, pedagogy, therapy or scientific practise-based research. This programme is particularly useful for movement professionals not necessarily trained in Indian dance forms.

# CERTIFICATION COURSE IN "FASCIANATYA" METHODOLOGY

A first-of-its-kind programme designed by Dr. Rajyashree Ramesh, the FasciaNatya methodology offers pioneering and visionary ways of applying movement science knowledge to Indian disciplines both in approach and methodology. Application of the learnings from this course extends to teaching/pedagogy, performance/choreography and dance/movement therapy.

This course helps break down the concept of movement into its fundamentals, helping develop a greater, in-depth understanding of one's body. Participants of FasciaNatya will not only explore movement principles defined in Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis in relation to pure dance (nritta) and expressive aspects (abhinaya) of Nāṭya, but will also learn to experientially understand how it relates to fascia behaviour, by exploring the plethora of movements that form the foundation of dance vocabulary. The programme looks into the very basics, be it stances, glances, gaits or more, and subtle movement nuances that go into it thereby giving you the knowledge to understand and execute movement in a manner that is most efficient and effective.

Like the way alphabets aid our understanding of language, this approach helps dancers break down their individual body alphabets in their language of artistic movement. Nāṭya or theatrical dance is directed by movement, and movement is organised in neuro-muscular patterns, which in turn, are governed by the fascia (the connective tissue). Given their interdependence it feels natural to draw the connection between Fascia and Nāṭya.

However, never before have dancers, specifically Indian classical dancers explored the crucial role fascia plays in dance. Imagine the marvel of truly understanding your movement right from the fundamental micro-levels of the body! This, when understood enables dancers and movement-oriented professionals to master their art and bring a natural sense of flow and rhythm to their performance and develop a deeper understanding of the physical and spatial aspects.

## THEMATIC IMMERSION MODULES

Given Rajyashree Ramesh's researched insights on the relevance of gestures and emotions for embodied meaning-making, several themes focus on nuanced aspects of the Indian performative practises. The below modules can be undertaken individually or in conjunction with the above-mentioned courses.

a) "**Speaking Hands**" brings new perspectives into the well-formulated traditional practise of gestural depictions with hands, Hastabhinaya. Built upon Rajyashree's research in Linguistic Gesture Studies, this course is offered as Basic for non-Indian dancers and Advanced and Professional for Indian dancers.

b) "**CoreConcepts**" is designed to provide a deep "Sensing&Shaping" of the emotive, narrative practice of Abhinaya. The emotive expressivity defined in terms of bhava, rasa, and refined gestures is approached from the perspective of movement, fascia, and most importantly neuroscience. This course is also offered as Basic for non-Indian dancers and Advanced and Professional for Indian dancers.

c) "**Cosmic Body**" is for everyone wanting to explore the potential of the performative body from a broad range of perspectives such as Indian dance traditions, Yoga knowledge, Indian Cosmology and the Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies. It explores the integration of the fundamental learnings from all these practices to enable participants a holistic understanding of their body. It is open to all interested.

## KEY LEARNINGS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- More nuanced understanding of movement in relation to the emotional and physical leading to empowering oneself.
- Learnings can be applied across various scenarios including performance for the proscenium, as a pedagogical tool, or as a therapeutic practice.
- First-ever and new perspectives on harnessing inherent embodied knowledge in Indian corporeal practises for global applications.
- By understanding the function that dance based movement holds for emotive-kinetic-cognitive processes, making it more accessible to everyone in ways that address our everyday life.

# *TESTIMONIALS*

Like most other bharatanatyam dancers, I constantly found myself battling with a painful knee and an ideal *araimandi*. This workshop has been eye-opening for me in terms of learning the proper techniques like “grounding of the heel joint” and “ head tail connectivity” and more such concepts that helped me stabilise my body. Now dancing brings me more joy and helps me lead a better life in general.

ESHA

I start by saying thank you to Rajyashree Ma’am for bringing about these concepts and modules into my life. As a dancer and a doctor, I have always heard people’s misconceptions that muscle memory will help a comeback in dance after an injury and rehab. This is when the concept of FasciaNatya helps. The concept teaches us to listen to our bodies. As a doctor, I have personally started using this principle with my patients with upper body pain and post surgical procedures.

DR. ANOOSHA

Growing up with blocks, pains and other limitations, I have always danced with the head and not my heart and with time, it tired me out. Working with Rajyashree *akka* helped me identify the blocks and become more aware on how to work on them. Moving from ‘unhealthy’ to ‘healthy’ movements has been a liberating experience for me, making me more conscious and in tune with the body. Now, I dance from the heart!

RITU

As dancers, we are told a lot about engaging core increasing stamina, stability and efficiency. I was amazed to see how the diaphragm functions like a central power house and connects to various organs such as heart, lungs and breath supporting the fascia movements. Knowing the body in depth and the anatomical explanations through this course has helped me a long way in building the awareness about where your movements initiate. I now feel a smooth transition of movement and it feels effortless.

DEEPA

# *TESTIMONIALS*

When I pull my pupils into my head, because I like to feel gentleness for instance, I feel the pulling in of my eyes from the back of my head on my spine to my tailbone almost. Definitely down to the last vertebrae of my spine!

REA KURMANN

I appreciate this dance not only for putting everything together. I feel complete and connected on a deeper level of consciousness. This dance journey is a never ending process to health, coherence and beautiful expression. Thank you teacher for our encounter. The future is in us."

JOSCHLA WEISS

Thank you so much for rekindling my interest in *Bharatnatyam* and for giving me such a wonderful opportunity to continue learning dance from someone so passionate like you. You've been helping me understand the dance form in a whole new way and help me build from scratch which has also been so refreshing.

NATASHA

Being a dancer who got back to dance after a long break, I came back to dancing thinking my muscle memory will help me through but I was surely mistaken. This course has been helpful in understanding the body better beyond the boundaries of dance. I definitely recommend this course for all dancers, teachers and movement analysts. The assignments were so well thought out and useful as well. The course did not favour any single style of dance . No matter which style one is from, it helped to adapt and hence learn to improve style and movement.

RAMYA

# *TESTIMONIALS*

With a European body working on Bharatanatyam, an Indian art-form, the biggest myth this course broke for me was movements have nothing to do with the region, it is pure fascial. Learning spatial orientation helped reorient the body even though I had an eye issue. Learning how to use my weight and using the upper and lower body intelligently freed me of my persistent knee pain. This course helped me learn how to use total body connectivity and to redistribute weight. I learned to detach myself by staying fluid inside and strong outside. This helped a lot in life and dance.

EVA

I tore my ACL a few years ago and underwent a complete reconstruction surgery. Although the surgery and recovery were very successful, the nerve synapses had severed post surgery and any auto suggestion to the knee from the brain refused to work. Dr. Rajyashree Ramesh, a movement analyst and bharatanatyam teacher introduced me to her well researched FasciaNatya methodology and worked with me to integrate anatomy and movement. I gained insight and understanding into the existence of fascia and that this connective band throughout the body can enhance and support all our movement if done with the right awareness.

This dramatically changed the way and ease with which my body could move and hold postures. I have come to realise that this is the right way to do any movement-without abusing the body, using it efficiently and being injury free.

BHOOMIJA

# INTERESTED TO LEARN MORE?

WRITE TO

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