Spreading Joy through Dance
Category : May/June 2001
Published by Anonymous on May. 01, 2001

DANCE

# Spreading Joy through Dance

## Sharanya Mukhopadhyay, 13, wins Princess Grace Award

On October 23, 2000 at the famous Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, New York, Sharanya Mukhopadhyay won the Princess Grace Award for excellence in dance. This yearly award is gifted from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA to young artists. It is named in honor of Princess Grace of Monaco, who was deeply committed to helping aspiring artists. The event was like a "mini Oscar"according to her father, Sanmay. As part of the award, she received US$5,000 to help with her dance studies. Excerpts follow ofHINDUISMT ODAY's interview with Sharanya.

## The value of dance

Dancing is an art form that links me to my own culture. It is fun and, of course, a challenge in many ways, especially during competitions and auditions. However, I also take it in a very religious way. I tell the stories of our Hindu Gods through dance. It teaches me humility and Hindu values that carry me and will carry me through my future. I believe it's God's wish that I can bring happiness and peace on Earth through my dance.

## What it takes to dance

I took up dancing because my mother used to dance Odissi and she decided to put me in that dance form. I started dancing and performing with folk music at age three but gradually started training in the much more rigorous classical dance form at six. Since then I have been learning from my guru Nandita Behera and Monoranjan Pradhan whenever I visit India. At home I practice about one hour every day. Before performances, I train much harder. After school, I practice every day and then start with my homework. My house has several rules. For example, I do not phone any friends on weekdays. Also, I have been brought up with the idea that television is a waste of time. I listen to music all the time. I watch videos of performances. I speak my language, Bengali, at home. I also regularly pray, sitting in front of the little temple we have in our house. I do socialize, but in a very limited way. Odissi

is a performing art, and to bring out the real Ã±soul' of the dance form, you have to understand and deeply be involved in the culture, religion and languages of India. Without that understanding, these dances will become very physical without the spiritual and expressional parts.

My advice to young dancers

Let dancing be an inspiration to you, not just a chore. To be a true Indian dancer, you have to love the language, history, culture, art, Hindu religion, spirituality and mythology. Indian dance is not just physical movements. It is deep and spiritual. You can give happiness to other people through your dancing if you receive happiness when you dance!

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