



Darshana Jhaveri, leading Manipuri exponent

# Manipuri dances

Award-winning choreographer and teacher, **Priti Patel**, introduces Manipuri dance and describes the development of Anjika, her school in Kolkata

**In Manipur, dance is not just a form of art, but a way of life.** Dance is a medium of expression, which is so closely interwoven with the social fabric of the society that it is impossible to study one without the other. Manipuri dance is believed to be the creation of Gods. In Manipuri, texts date back before 33 A.D., the legend goes that when the Supreme God, Lai Guru Sidaba, created the earth, He created seven Laibangthous (Gods) and seven Lainuras (Goddesses) and these celestial beings levelled the uneven surfaces of the earth with their celestial dance. The Classical Manipuri dance form has developed and derived from the two most popular movement traditions of Manipur, Valshnavite Natasankritan by male dancers and Rasalila by female dancers.

Dance is considered by the Manipuris as a form of worship, because of which dance holds an extremely revered, sacrosanct status in Manipuri culture. The study of Manipuri dance has been imparted over the ages in the 'Guru-shishya parampara'; through a holistic approach, where students take lessons not just in dance but also on the values of life.

I was initiated into the world of dance and at the age of 12, I started learning dance from eminent Manipuri dance gurus, Guru Bipin Singh and his disciples the Jhaveri Sisters.

My quest in dance made me delve deep into the study of the Manipuri dance tradition. I studied the Martial Art form. Living and working in Kolkata I regularly visited Manipur to soak myself in its multi-splendored facets and beauty of Manipuri dance, living with Manipuri community.

A major turning point came in my life when in November 1995, through the efforts of Pandit N. Khelchandra Singh

and Maharaj Kumari Binodini Devi, when I was asked to teach Manipuri dance to students outside Manipur. This was the start of my school called 'Anjika' in Kolkata where students are taught Manipuri dance in the tradition that has been followed for generations.

Anjika, as a school, has a dual curriculum. It is a school for Manipuri dance and a school for Movement Therapy for children with Cerebral Palsy. I have developed an approach where children with a motor coordination disorder are given movement therapy through the medium of Manipuri dance.

Anjika operates from Kolkata, where besides me, the staff includes some very skilled young artists, from Manipur. The school also imparts formal education and training in the dance form, besides being a resource centre of artists for all its performances. The Imphal chapter of Anjika, which was initially intended to be only a resource centre for artists for shows and performances, has also recently started functioning as an informal training centre for young students in Manipur. Anjika also conducts research and documentation in this dance form and has its own humble library of literature, audio and video cassettes on this form of art. Anjika has performed in several prestigious dance shows all over the world and has won laurels and accolades for itself. I have been fortunate to receive several awards in appreciation of my work and excellence in this dance form.

Anjika has not only been invited to lead Manipuri dance in Kolkata but also invited to run a training centre back in Manipur in the capital Imphal. This includes a centre for research, documentation and a media library as well as leading performance development in India and beyond.

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