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### Tracing a dance diva's trail

By Ananda Shankar Jayant | Published: 20th May 2017 10:00 PM | Last Updated: 18th May 2017 10:38 PM | A+ A A- |

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Sonal Mansingh

In the artistic firmament of India's cultural history, if there is one name that continues to ins of artists, it is Sonal Mansingh—on, off and beyond the stage. Dancing since she was four, Mansingh has been the lode star of dance for over five decades. I she rose like a phoenix from a debilitating accident that had doctors say she wouldn't wa come back and own the stage like she had never left it. Celebrated by the who's who of t lightly, charming us all, with her warmth and love for fellow artists.



Over the years, I had the chance to meet the Dance Diva at several occasions. In 2008, I conceived and curated a Sangeet Natak Akademi festival on Sankhya (number: with dancers interpreting and choreographing a chosen number. Mansingh chose the mo esoteric of them all—the number zero—as she drew on ephemeral and enigmatic ideas, ar energies illuminating with ease the power of Shoonya or nothingness. Her razor-sha intellect blew me away then, as did her wit and humour, as she seamlessly wove her ov experiences, into Sita Swayamvar at the weeklong Ramayana conference that I had convene the same year.

Her artistic ouvre has spanned the spectrum of searing solos, choreographies on soci empowerment and environment, philosophical yearnings, and the vagaries of hum:

situation, reflecting her belief, 'If an art form does not reflect the existing milieu, it stagnates'. And it doesn't stagnate, as this polymath engages constant manthan—roil, shake, whip and churn she does, of her life experiences, her understanding of the shastras, knowledge of Sanskrit, philosoph poetics, music, Pakhawaj, Mridangam, et al—as she dissolves barriers and bends genres, aligning art for its original purpose; sans silos and ivory tower She puts it succinctly, "Culture is like the jelly-like substance which keeps our joints well-oiled. My quest is to try and retain this culture among as mai individuals as I can."

And this quest, this manthan has resulted in Ekal Natya (solo theatre), multi-dimensional and multi-hued, through the powerful Abhinaya, Natya ar Katha of this modern global woman, who unapologetically brings India's wisdom of centuries, melding myth, legend, history, and the human condition the fore, in daring narratives, retelling and reenacting the many primordial truths for contemporary audiences. And I have been witness to this, as well seeing this very lofty knowledge, melt into fun and frolic, as this only 73-year-old young guru matches mood, steps and lingo with teenagers at her Cent for Indian Classical Dances, adding new dimensions and perceptions to generations of students.

Books, films, awards and much more have tried to capture the strength, knowledge, artistry, wisdom and humaneness of this shining star called Son Mansingh.

But who I found was an extremely caring, loving, gorgeous, warm, candid, wickedly funny, in love with life diva, one whom I looked up to for inspiratio during my own tryst with cancer. She does inspire every artist, who wishes to go into the microcosm of her art, so that her art can grow beyond tl clammy confines of the stage to embrace the macrocosm of the human attempting to be divine.

Sonal ji, yes yours is A Life Like No Other (title of the book on Mansingh by Sujata Prasad released recently).

Jayant is a bureaucrat, classical dancer, choreographer and dance scholar ananda.jayant@gmail.com

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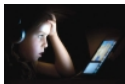
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