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# Nurturing arts as a core strength

*It is time for policy makers to take cognisance of the power of an art or sport, and provide for their equal engagement in school curricula.*



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By Ananda Shankar Jayant

Last week, ace gymnast Dipa Karmakar won the gold at the World Challenge Cup in Turkey. Dipa had returned to international competition after an excruciating knee surgery and we saluted her heroic spirit. Like many more such stories of extraordinary grit in the field of sports, the performing arts arena is also replete with stories of artists at the top of their game, assailed by a physical or emotional trauma. And yet they rose like the proverbial phoenix to make stunning comebacks.

One name that stands as an icon of the human spirit is recently nominated Rajya Sabha member Sonal Mansingh, who went back to dance after a debilitating accident that had doctors say she wouldn't walk. A two-year hiatus, and she was back dancing on stage!

A ligament tear and surgery had well-known dancer Rama Vaidyanathan work her way back through pain and gruelling physiotherapy to return to the stage after six months. Senior dancer Roja Kannan found refuge in her Guru Adyar Lakshman and dance, after her husband's untimely death, to soon comeback as a sought-after dancer and teacher.



Artists Sonal Mansingh, Rama Vaikunathan and Roja Kannan, who fought all odds to return to their passion

National Youth awardee Uma Sathyanarayanan, who lost her husband to an accident, credits her dance and Guru Chitra Visweswaran to help her overcome the trauma. And it got me thinking, what is it that drives a person to transcend agonising pain and return to the arena of one's passion. Does this power come from the individual? Or is it the power of one's passion that gives the courage?

What is it that makes some look life's challenges in the eye, deal with them, and return to the stage? And what causes others to give up at the slightest whiff of a visiting emergency?

I have always believed that the business of life is to challenge us. And to deal with obstacles, we need to nurture our core strength—a strength that a passion bestows upon us. It is anything that animates and motivates us to become one's own crucible of energy.

My own tryst with cancer had me drawing upon the power of my passion to dance through two years of cancer therapy. Are only a few of us differently enabled genetically to handle crises better? I don't think so. I think the answer may lie in the nurturing of a passion, what I call core strength.

Wouldn't we want this strength of purpose and character available to all our youth? Of course, yes! However, as a society we mostly prioritise honing core competency, defined as academic brilliance leading to monetisable degrees, even as we marginalise an alternate passion—a core strength that may or cannot be monetised. We look at the tangible results only, forgetting that the intangible power of a passion is what will handhold us through life.

It is time for policy makers to take cognisance of the power of an art or sport, and provide for their equal engagement in school curricula. As a nation we must enable the equal nurturing of core competency (academic brilliance) and core strength (pursuit of an alternate passion) at the basic level to empower our youth with skill sets, and strength of character.

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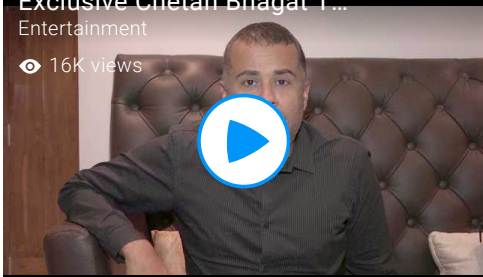
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