

“Umeed, one of the ‘Danced Poems’ Created during Corona Times Dance and Choreography by Odissi Danseuse Jyoti Shrivastava and Poetry by Dr.Arshiya Sethi.



During the period of Corona restrictions, Kri Foundation found a new and unexpected way to promote the arts and creativity. Lockdown ensured that we were restricted to our homes. Social distancing ensured that we could not gather together, even for artistic purposes. It had a shocking impact on the artists. Most people felt shaken, unable to comprehend what was happening and fearful of the unknown powerful, pandemic. Then commenced challenges to livelihoods and the onset of anxieties that accompany the loss of a familiar way of life. It was amplified by the uncertainties of the future. But what was also palpable is that the artistes were missing the stage. Was it only about the limelight or the thrilling sound of applause, one wondered?

Dr. Arshiya Sethi, who had been writing poetry as a hobby for many years, but only as a dabbler, experienced the powerful changes wrought by the prevailing circumstances. It created a churning that compelled her to write, and this writing took the form of poetry. “I am technically not a dancer, having only learnt dance for the love of it, and not to perform. Yet I could see dance even as I wrote in words,” says Sethi. Indeed, the structure, with the repeating lines, the rhyming words, and the metaphors of the world of the arts, music, painting, and sculpture, all suggest dance. “I believe that these are poems that work with double authorship. The poet is the primary author but these poems only get completed through dance. Hence the dancer or choreographer is its secondary author. Hence, I refer to them as ‘Danced poems’ ” admits Dr. Sethi.

On the other hand Odissi Danseuse Jyoti Shrivastava and also the Founder of Director at Vaishali Kala Kendra who has done the Dance and Choreography for “UMEED” said We have create and dedicated the concept to every artist because we feel every artist should not lose the hope and expectation. Due to this pandemic problem, Events are not happening anywhere. Artist are losing their hope because they are missing the stage. In “Umeed” we wants to give the message to all artist that Not to loose hope and expectation. Always think positive than you will always receive a positive outcome

The artistes, may be even without realising it, were playing a life asserting, life preserving, and life valuing role. The poem titled “Umeed Udasi ka Virodhabhaasi Safar” was written by Dr. Arshiya Sethi and sent to artistes of different styles, who had, during the days of the pandemic, asked her to give them a poem they could choreograph and dance on. The restrictions of movement in quarantine, stay at home and lockdown, and the anxieties of the invisible attack of COVID-19, had certainly lead many to introspect and realise that while no one can predict the trajectory of life, that meanders as per ‘the big design’, those of us who are fortunate enough to live our lives surrounded by melodies and rhythms, have a deep lesson to learn from these teachers – the lesson of integration and working together in every situation, just as ‘sur’ and ‘taal’ live, work and play in concordia. It also imposes a moral mandate on us artistes, to carry forward this message, through the arts, and help people live harmoniously and hopefully, through difficult times and uncertainties along life’s unpredictable journey. This is what makes the artist truly blessed. That is why I felt that this message was one that many artists could give.

She chose to do abhinaya to the recitation of the poem in Sethi’s voice and also, set the poem to Odissi dance music by Saroj Mohanty. This was the first time any of the dancers who had worked on the danced poems project of Covid times had decided to tune the poem like a traditional dance composition. Most had, accepting the limitations of the satiation, used the material and resources available as creatively as they could, but with this decision to set the poem to Odissi dance music, Jyoti infused into the poem a longevity that will allow her to keep this poem in her particular and personal repertoire, as an example of the way the repertoire of Indian dance can be expanded.

One more aspect that deserves to be mentioned is Jyoti Shrivastava's choice of dance photographer, Innee Singh, to shoot the dance video is also a significant reason for its appeal. Innee is a whiz dance photographer, the new generation Avinash Pasricha! He is also a 'gandabandh' student of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, allows him an insight into musical structure as well and allows him to shoot while being sensitive to both the dance and its music. This mixed- indoor outdoor treatment, the use of a mirror that carefully keeps the camera out of the frame, adds to the appeal, and Jyoti's mature abhinaya embellishes it. Abhinaya is probably the best part of dance when viewed through the camera lens. So choosing to focus on the abhinaya, while not ignoring the long shot that sets, artistically, a vertical body in a horizontal frame, is the highlight of this production. You can see Jyoti's production, which she has titled "Umeed" in a play with the original title, here. <https://youtu.be/LrugVFA8rhM>.

"In the future, I would like these poems being translated into as many languages as possible, and performed in dance or movement art. I would love to explore how they inspire any other form of art", says Dr. Arshiya Sethi.