

# Why i dance assignment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

I remember as if it was yesterday, that brisk, chilly, October evening, clutching tightly onto my mother's hand as she and I strolled into the small, quaint building. As a timid child of five, I stood there cowering behind my mother while listening to her converse with an unfamiliar woman dressed in traditional Indian attire. After a few minutes, the woman turned toward me with a glowing smile, to whom I did not realize then that I would grow accustomed. She looked into my eyes, and told my mother, " She certainly does have the deep, expressive, soulful eyes of a true Indian Classical dancer. " She then asked me if I really liked to dance and I nodded vigorously, as she then took my hand and lead me to my first Indian dance class.

Thinking back upon the past thirteen years has really helped me to realize what I truly had gained as a student of the Kalashri School of Arts. Even from the very beginning, I restlessly looked forward to Sunday afternoons, impatient to learn new routines. I was so eager for class, that throughout the week itself, I would set aside thirty minutes each day to practice what I had been taught. I still remember how embarrassed I would feel whenever my dance guru, Ms. Bina Menon, would comment on how attentive I was or how apparent it was that I had practiced thoroughly during the week.

I have to admit though; it always did make me secretly proud when Bina Aunty would compliment me. I recall my first performance rather perfectly, the exhilaration I felt. I had just turned six years old and there was a show approaching in September. The show was for the festival of Onam, the beautiful festival of the southernmost state of Kerala, India, which the people of Kerala mark as the beginning of their harvest season. Even as a young

child of six, I learned the importance of practicing regularly, moreover, I knew my guru wanted us to enjoy this.

I remember being so excited that I bothered my mother endlessly until she let me prance around the house in my dance costume the night before and the day of the show. I was so infatuated with the periwinkle blue and silver colors of my bhangra costume that I just did not want to take it off. As my fellow girls and I were lolling about in the dressing room as our moms and dance teacher were busy getting us ready, the moms busted out the old fashioned cameras to preserve this moment forever in their memories. The moms took our pictures and quickly filed out of the room so our teacher, Ms. Bina Menon, could give us a pep talk. I still remember that pep talk, the first of many. She told us, “ Girls, I am so proud of how far all of you have come, if I were not, I would not have let you all perform tonight. This will be the first performance of many so just go out there, have fun, and always keep in mind how hard all of you have worked to arrive here. ” Then, minutes later, the other girls and I stepped onto the large, shiny, wooden stage and as I waited for our song to play, I scanned the audience beginning to feel slightly nervous- I could feel the butterflies in my stomach even dancing around.

Scratch that, a lot nervous; but I rewound in my mind what my dance teacher had said, took a deep breath, and began dancing, forgetting the intimidating audience, and letting myself go with the music. It was at that moment I acknowledged that dance would always have some impact on my life. That was simply the beginning; from then on, I took part in show after show and was even ready to compete in group and solo dances. Rehearsing

for each and every performance and competition allowed me to hone my skills, but my most importantly, let me shine at what I did well all the while enjoying myself and creating everlasting memories with the girls.

In the midst of rehearsing came the fateful day after freshmen year of high school had ended in June, when my dance teacher told my parents that I was ready to move on; it was time for me to receive my Arangetram, the graduation from Indian Classical dance. Beginning with the first pooja [Hindu prayer that begins major religious and dance events] on July 4, 2005, my training for the graduation continued till mid October 2005. It was during those months of practice that my dance teacher, Mrs. Bina Menon, became more than a simple instructor to me, instead she had evolved into a second mother.

She had become someone who had been there to lecture me, laugh with me, advise me, and simply be another source of comfort. She was there to offer guidance and believe in me during those four months of strenuous rehearsal. Bina Aunty had taught me to persevere no matter what fell in my path as hindrances, especially when I would fall sick with the flu or when my scoliosis would reach its peak. During the intermission of my Arangetram, when my guru walked onto the stage to give her speech, she brought with her the pair of strapped, anklet bells I had worn on my feet since the age of five.

It was at my dress rehearsal that the last of the bells on it had fallen off, stripping the bells of sound. She showed them to the audience in her attempt to explain how I was the only student of hers who had diligently worn the anklet bells to class, thus exemplifying responsibility- the most vital quality

she felt one should possess. It was because of her that on the night of my graduation, on October 30, 2005, I was able to perform my seven long dances, smiling out into the audience, glowing with pure bliss.

Throughout the many years devoted to dancing, the gorgeous ballroom/restaurant of the Essex House in West Orange, NJ, grew to become a second home for me. I grew up with the girls I can proudly call my “lifelong friends”. We shared so much more than just dancing; tears, joy, happiness, anger, sorrow that we all shed contributed to the memories I know we all keep dear to our hearts. Although I had graduated nearly two years ago, I still continue performing to spend time with the woman who has enriched my life with her passion.

To this day, I tend to go to the room in my basement where all my trophies are kept and just sit there, pondering of the thirteen years that have passed. These thirteen years have shed a considerable amount of light on my life, and throughout it all, one thing has remained constant- dance. Dance has taught me to fully embrace my culture and understand that dedication really is worth it. It helped me to transition into a more assertive girl. Before I entered the realm of dance and even during the early years of my childhood, I was a rather reserved little girl; constantly retreating backwards and letting others trample over me.

Yet, dancing had allowed me to take hold of one of my most prominent talents and in essence allowed me to open up and show whom Amy Jacob really was. Dancing has proven to be my anti-drug; yes, it may sound so cliché, but it really has provided me with an outlet for my feelings. Whether

it is extreme bliss, distress, bewilderment, anger, I know if I blasted some music and simply danced around, I would be able to shake off some of my anxiety. My dance lessons have taught me to value what I have near and dear to me, and I don't plan on letting any of that go even as I embark on this new chapter of my life.