

### #INSPIRATION

## A DOCTOR'S PALETTE

A seasoned doctor, Dr. Sushma Mahajan discovered her innate talent and passion for art during the lockdown, proving that creativity can flourish even in the most unexpected circumstances. With six successful art exhibitions under her belt, alongside fulfilling the demands of her medical career, she shares her journey as an artist and how she skillfully balances both the worlds of white coats and vibrant canvases in an exclusive conversation with Arbit.



Tusharika Singh

amid the turbulent seas of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the world grappled with confinement and pervasive negativity. Dr. Sushma Mahajan embarked on a transformative odyssey. A seasoned medical professional with over three decades of commitment to her career, Dr. Mahajan ventured into the realm of art. Little did she anticipate that her newfound hobby would catalyze a remarkable journey, characterized by a string of successful exhibitions and a growing demand for her art, all while maintaining her steadfast dedication to her medical profession.

### An Artistic Awakening

Dr. Mahajan's artistic journey began when her daughter's fine arts school project required a water colour poster. To help her daughter with the project, she started watching online tutorials. The lockdown in March 2020, which followed soon after, presented an unexpected opportunity for her to delve deeper into painting. However, her early works were hampered by limited supplies of paint and paper. Undeterred, she persevered and, once the lockdown lifted, invested in high-quality materials that elevated the quality of her art.

### Finesse her skills

With each stroke of the brush, Dr. Mahajan's skills improved, and she embraced the learning process, taking valuable lessons from her mistakes. Her husband's encouragement and support and the values instilled in her by her father—punctuality, discipline, and hard work—played a pivotal role in honing her artistic abilities. She also sought feedback from an online global fine arts review website, gaining helpful insights into her work.

### Spectrum of Life

As Dr. Mahajan prepares for her seventh exhibition, to be held at Jaipur's iconic Rambhagh Palace, she explores the theme of 'Spectrum of Life.' When asked about her creative process and how she deals with creative blocks, she reveals her commitment to her craft. She does not wait for inspiration or motivation; instead, painting has become an integral part of her lifestyle. "I do not give myself the choice to not paint and I have made it a way of life," she says. Dr. Sushma Mahajan's incredible journey from medicine to art serves as a testament to the limitless potential of human determination and the power of pursuing one's passion. Her story reminds us that age is no barrier to mastering new skills, and with dedication and hard work, we can achieve greatness at any stage of life.



cess, selling out in its entirety. To date, Dr. Mahajan has orchestrated an impressive total of six exhibitions, including a prestigious showcase at the India Habitat Center in New Delhi.

### Art as Liberation

Amid the rigorous demands of the medical profession, Dr. Mahajan discovered solace and liberation in art. After her daily 9-to-5 medical duties, she dedicates 2 to 3 hours every day to painting. While initially favouring safe and subjects like still life and nature, she later embraced the challenge of portraits and landscapes. Her artistic style leans towards realism, aiming to evoke feelings of positivity and happiness in her viewers, transporting them into the world depicted on her canvases. On an average, she completes one painting per week.

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What we would really like is a God who never destroys what he has created. Or if there must be pain and death, let them be meted out by a God of righteousness, who will punish the wicked and reward the good with everlasting happiness. But in fact, the good get hurt, the innocent suffer. Then let there be a god who sympathizes and brings comfort. But Nataraja only dances. His play is a play impartially of death and of life, of all evils as well as of all goods. He dances this way—what happiness! Dances that way—and oh, the pain, the hideous fear, the desolation! Then hop, skip, and jump. Hop into perfect health. Skip into cancer and senility. Jump out of the fullness of life into nothingness, out of nothingness again into life. For Nataraja it's all play and the play is end in itself, everlastingly purposeless. He dances because he dances, and the dance is his maha-sukha, his infinite and eternal bliss. Eternal bliss," Dr. Biswas repeated "For us there's no bliss, only the oscillation between happiness and terror and a sense of outrage at the thought that our pains are as integral a part of Nataraja's dance as our pleasures, our dying as our living.

# Shiva Nataraja's Ananda Tandava



Maj Chandrakant Singh Vrc (Retd) Military Historian

ou the creator, you the destroyer, you who sustain and make an end, Who in sunlight dance among the birds and the children at play. Who at midnight dance among the burning grounds, You, Shiva, you dark and terrible Bhairava, You Suchness and Illusion, the Void and All Things, You are the lord of life, and therefore I have brought you flowers; You are the lord of death, and therefore I have brought you my heart—This heart that is now your burning ground. Ignorance there and self shall be consumed with fire. That you may dance, Bhairava, among the ashes. That you may dance, Lord Shiva, in a place of flowers, And I dance with you.

(Aldous Huxley)

The most common and popular artifact on display in Indian homes and sometimes even in other countries is the statue of Nataraja. It is displayed for both its aesthetic appeal and spiritual symbolism. It is India's big moment from 8 to 10 September when it plays host to the G20 Summit in Delhi. It is the time when India will showcase itself to the leaders of the world's leading countries and our put on display the very best of our past and present. The past is appropriately represented by the 28 feet high replica of the statue of Nataraj of the Chola period—the Golden Age of Southern India. The Nataraj statue is installed at the entrance to the Convention Center where the leaders are to meet. Nearly everyone admires the beauty of this statue and the genius of the sculptor but few understand its symbolism, so I think it is time for me to try and present to the readers the significance and deep philosophical and spiritual symbolism of this great work of art.

My fascination with the Natraja figure and the symbolism was first aroused when the famous Bharatnatyam dancer Yamini Krishnamurti performed the Tandav Dance at the Kharajuroh Dance Festival sometime in the early nineteen eighties. She also explained its symbolism and some very interesting connected stories which require a full article by itself which is part 2 of this account. My second encounter with Nataraj was at the Bharat Kala Kendra at the BHU in Banaras where its Director Prof Biswas would always take time off from his work to show me the treasures held by his institute which includes the biggest and most valuable gold coin ever minted. It is about nine inches in diameter and weighs about a Kilogram and was minted by Jahangir. Amongst the other treasures are Taimur's drinking cup, miniature paintings from Bikaner, Roerich's paintings of Himalayan vistas and several others. But his and mine is the Chola Nataraj. Dr Biswas devotes eighteen periods to explain its symbolism to his students. Most of what follows in this account is what I remember from his talk. The image of Shiva dancing within a giant ring of fire is among the most beloved and awe-inspiring symbols of the conception of the nature of the cosmos in any civilization. Indeed, at the heart of this powerful sacred image, we find a symbolic distillation of the essence of Hindu spiritual consciousness. Beyond the specific historical, geographical, mythological and iconographic details associated with Shiva Nataraja, of course, any contemplation of the Dancing Shiva also brings with it a wealth of more general associations relating to dance as spiritual metaphor. More than with any other deity, dance is associated with the mythology of Shiva, forming in its most exalted aspect a metaphor for the cosmic cycle of creation and destruction and the individual cycle of birth and re-birth. The degree to which dance is integral to the image of Nataraja is one cannot separate the dancer from dancing. Just as one cannot separate God from the world or from ourselves.

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Delving further into the notion of dance as spiritual metaphor, one finds that the ideas of rhythm and movement take on symbolic importance, with rhythm reflecting the pattern of the primal energy of the cosmos and movement reflecting the effect of that patterned energy on all of the matter of the cosmos. Coomarswamy speaks of the relationship of rhythm to sacred dances when he writes that "the root idea behind all of these dances is more or less one and the same, the manifestation of primal rhythmic energy." Apart from the long tradition within Hindu culture of associating the act of dancing with spiritual evolution, there are numerous other instances of dance playing an intrinsic role in spiritual practices ranging from the whirling dances of the Sufi dervishes to the communal dancing of the Shakers. Looking back to the origins of dance as a sacred activity, Dancing is an ancient form of magic. Power at the root of sacred dance, noting that through the motion of dance, the participant "becomes amplified into a being endowed with supra-normal powers. His personality is transformed. Like yoga, the dance induces trance, ecstasy, and experience of the divine, the realization of one's own spiritual nature, and, finally, mergence in to the divine essence."

Complex symbolism In exploring the universal meaning of Shiva Nataraja as an image which has captured the imagination of people all over the world, one first needs to grasp the principal details of the iconography of this image as it is understood by Hindus. The complex symbolism of this highly ornamented image, in turn, invokes a wealth of connections with the rich mythology of Shiva, Shiva Nataraja "is a veritable encyclopedia of mythological references". In particular, to appreciate the image of Nataraja, one needs to know the particular Hindu myth which explains how Shiva first came to dance the Ananda Tandava and assume his role as Lord of the Dance. This myth, which also explains how Shiva Nataraja came to be associated with Chidambaram, was originally related in its complete form in the twelfth-century, first in a Sanskrit text called the Chidambara Mahatmya and shortly thereafter in the Tamil version of this work, called the Koyil Puranam. The following retelling of this myth is based on sections of the Chidambara Mahatmya.



The myth begins with the great god Vishnu—Shiva's "other-self," reclining in yoga nidra on the great serpent Sesha, floating on "the waters of undifferentiated matter during the period between the destruction and creation of the universe." Lost in the bliss of dreaming about Shiva, Vishnu then awakens from his reverie and relates the remainder of the story to Sesha. On the previous cosmic day, Vishnu tells Sesha, when he went to pay his daily respects to Shiva, the latter told him of a host of ten thousand self-righteous rishis, or Hindu holy men, living in the Daruka Forest in Tillai near Chidambaram. These rishis were so sure of their own holiness that they began to believe that their great wisdom was the result of their own sanctity rather than being a gift from the gods. As a result, Shiva decided that he and Vishnu should pay a visit to these false teachers and demonstrate the error of their ways. He instructs Vishnu to take on the form of Mohini, a beautiful enchantress, while he assumes the disguise of Bhikshatana, a handsome and charming wandering yogi. "I instantly became a woman," says Vishnu, "such that the great sages would think me neither chaste nor a courtesan, and beside me stood the Great Lord who was gently laughing". As soon as the two gods arrive in Tillai, the formerly ascetic rishis become instantly enamored

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### World Suicide Prevention Day

There's been a rising epidemic around the world, and that epidemic is suicide. If we don't know someone who had committed suicide, it's almost certain that we know someone who has attempted it. Suicide is a problem that affects all age groups, genders, and social strata, and it seems sometimes to be utterly inescapable. World Suicide Prevention Day raises awareness about this tragic issue and works to prevent it through education and support of those who struggle with suicidal ideation every day.

### #ICON

like the rays of the whirling sun. At the sight of this cosmic spectacle, the rishis were finally overcome by their willful ignorance and pride and fell to their knees in worship before this vision of divinity as Nataraja. The heavens opened up and the gods themselves came to watch the glorious dance. As the rhythm of the drumbeat quickened and the motion of the arms and legs became more vigorous, "All that was not Shiva began to fall apart, disintegrate, evaporate into the thin vapors of apparent nothingness, until at the climax of the nothingness only the audience of god remained. Then Shiva paused for a cosmic moment and, beginning again with a slow and stately rhythm, "as had danced the worlds out, now he danced them in again, flinging stars into their heavens, evoking life upon the earth, a kinaesthesia of overflowing grace and love."

Distraught at the thought of never seeing this sublime vision for himself, Sesha begs Vishnu to be allowed to be reincarnated in human form to become a devotee of Shiva. Reborn as the sage Patanjali, Sesha takes up the life of an ascetic follower of Shiva and after many years is met by Shiva himself and offered the joys of heaven as a reward for his deep devotion and his many austerities. Instead, Patanjali asks to be allowed to witness the Ananda Tandava for himself, to which request Shiva accedes. Shiva then tells Patanjali to wait for him in Chidambaram where, he promise the sage, he will return to earth and dance the Ananda Tandava again for the salvation of all humankind.

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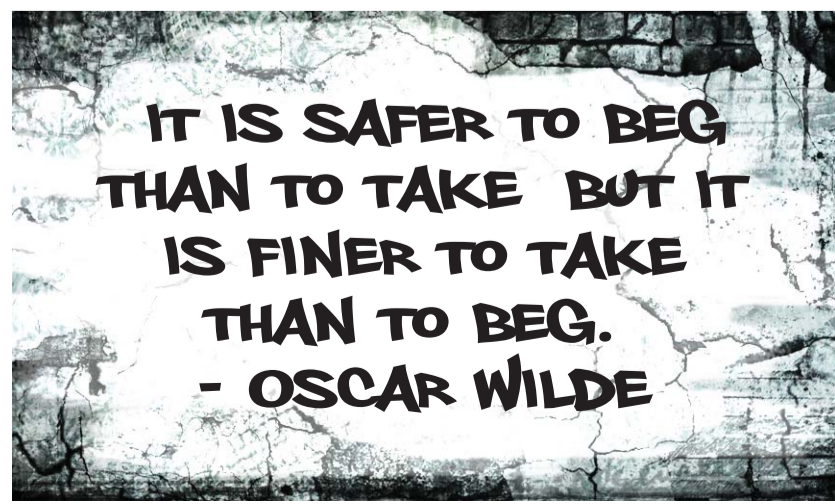
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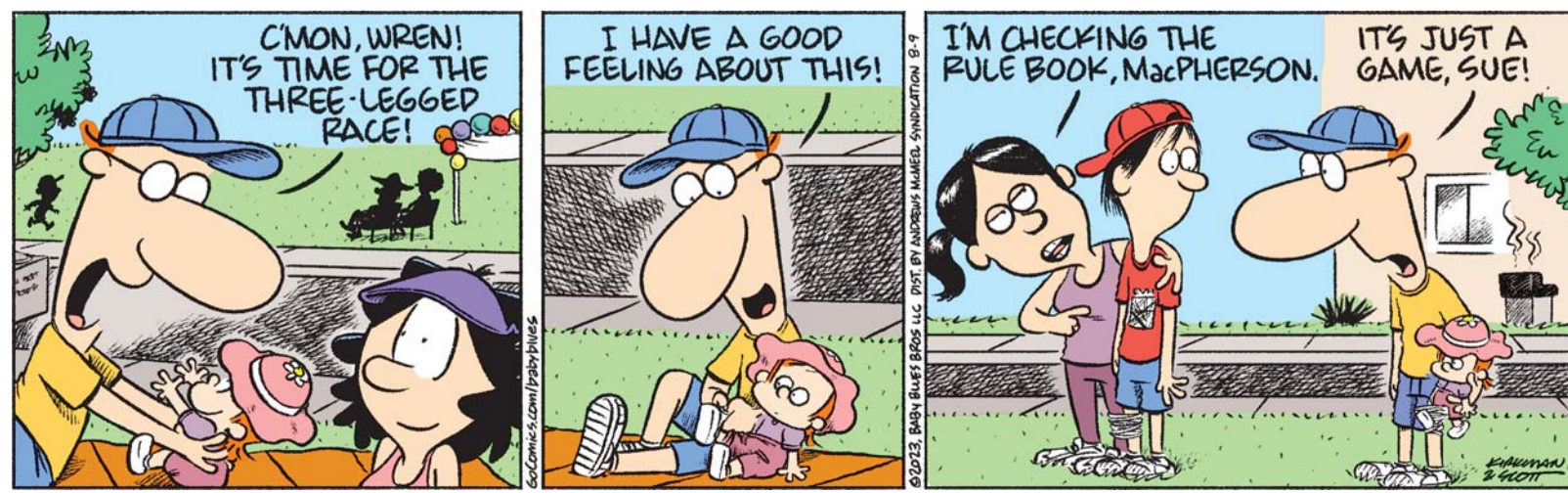
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### THE WALL



### BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

### ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman