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Melbourne's young talent Shakkthi has more to 'Give'

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Twelve-year old Shakkthi Kannan may come across as any ordinary kid, but there is more than meets the eye. Besides being an extra ordinary Bharathanatyam dancer, she is also involved in helping a charitable organisation called GIVE to raise funds for poor children in India and Sri Lanka.

Shakkthi commenced her training in this ancient dance form in 2005 at the tender age of three and half. "Sometimes I didn't know what I was doing when I was small, then I started enjoying as I grew older," she says. Currently Shakkthi is training under Meena Elankumaran, Nadanalaya Academy of Indian Classical Dance.

In March 2010, Shakkthi had her first opportunity to perform in India at the age of eight to become the youngest participant selected from over 950 applicants for a solo performance at the annual "Mayilai Natyanjali" dance festival in Chennai. The festival is dedicated to Lord Nataraja on the occasion of Maha Shivarathri. The audience included over 2000 people and an even greater number on live television.

The next opportunity to perform in India came during December-January 2010-11. The time of the year coincided with the Tamil calendar month "Margazhi" (December) and is a period when the city of Chennai is abuzz with music and dance recitals. Shakkthi became the youngest artist from Australia to present a two- hour solo dance recital at the annual Dance Extravaganza at Vani Mahaal.

A further year of dedicated training and encouragement from her gurus saw Shakkthi back at Chennai with her family as she was invited to perform at an impressive ten sabhas during the 2011-12 Margazhi season. This is believed to be an unprecedented achievement for such a young resident of Australia.

A smiling face, crisp execution of adavus, sense of rhythm and timing as well as an impressive range of emotions made her spark of genius evident to all who were saw Shakkthi's performances. She also demonstrated her ability to adept at fast and slow paced numbers. Several accolades followed as she danced her way through the Margazhi season. At the conclusion of her performance at the Rani Seethai Hall, Shree Vaari fine Arts conferred a Merit Award on her for her "histrionic talent in Bharatnatyam".

Interestingly, during Shakkthi's performance at the Music Academy, she was approached by a Tamil Film producer Govindan to star in a movie, an offer initially declined by her parents due to her busy schedule. However, Govindan's persistence paid off when Shakkthi and her parents returned to Chennai later. The shooting was held for two days in Chennai for the movie "Esapatukkaari", where Shakkthi plays the role of the child version of the heroine (who is a singer /dancer). The film was released last October.

In Melbourne, Shakkthi continues to perform for various events. Most importantly, Shakkthi is now part of DANCE to GIVE, an initiative by the artistic children of Melbourne, sharing their talents to support destitute, disabled, and orphaned children in India and Sri Lanka through classical Indian Dance. On August, Shakkti performed amid a huge crowd in a GIVE event in aid of "Arivagam" – a home for mentally impaired and physically handicapped children in South India and the "Children Benevolent Fund", this provides assistance to wider groups of children in dire need of nutritious food, medication, rehabilitation and basic education in North East Sri Lanka.

In the years to come we can happily look forward to seeing this child blossom into an even more accomplished dancer and making valuable contributions to the art of Bharathanatyam.

(G'day India desk)