

From the Head's desk - December 2020



Dear parent,

November. Where did that go! It really did whiz past. Faster than March to October.

I think that one of the reasons could be the number of festivities and celebrations that were packed into November: Dussehra, Diwali, Halloween, Children's Day, ThanksGiving, Karthigai. And for our students (should I add Parents too), Thiran 2.0 filled their days and thoughts.

Celebrations and events were always a part of the learning at AAIS. And the staff of AAIS did such a commendable job of celebrating our children through the different celebrations they conceived, planned and executed to perfection - Childrens' Day, International Theme Day, Thiran. And now all I say is please wait with bated breath for the Sports Day where you, me and all of us are going to come together yet again.

One other celebration that happens in the city every year has been the *Margazhi Mahotsavam*. I remember almost four decades ago, as a young student of dance, I used to watch my *Guru* and seniors at class, practice and talk in much excitement about the 'season'. In a few years, at an unexpected moment, my *Guru* reached out to my parents and said she wanted me to be a part of her productions and the next thing I knew I was dancing with my *Guru* in her productions, both within the city and across India. This happened right through my Grade 10, Grade 12 and college years as well. Today, when I reflect on how I managed this, the thought that comes rushing to my mind is about students entering Grade 9 who let go of their artistic pursuits, stop their Sports practice, and instead fill their day, and sometimes nights, with tuition classes. The whole family gets into a sober and morose environment, where each person seems to be holding their breath and the common mantra I hear is "S/he is Grade 10 or Grade 12."

My parents always insisted on good grades, that was a non-negotiable. It extended into my Basketball training, swimming, Veena and of course, dance. Being on the School teams, we had regular matches and practices, but when my dance took a different turn and I started to show keener interest, I did shift my focus into my artistic pursuits and restricted my interest in Sports to participation in School competitions. The expectations from my dance teacher were similar too. Importance of formal School education was emphasised on and she would often say you "learn from both schooling and dance classes and you cross apply the learning." That was true, it is still true.



Our '*Natyashastra*' classes involved rote learning of verses and texts and our practice sessions would involve applying, analysing, interpreting those texts in the items we performed. There was a balance that we, later learnt, existed between the theory and practical aspects of learning. Many times, my *Guru* would walk in to one of our rehearsals and suggest another piece to dance instead of what we had chosen. She would give us a broad outline of what the song conveyed and would ask us to explore and attempt to perform it. That was a challenge, because I wasn't prepared for it or it came out of the blue or my mind was already set on another song, or I hadn't been taught it formally or the sheer fact that she was sitting and watching me with many others witnessing this too. I had to push my limits and attempt something. It didn't matter if I was right or wrong or faltered. A non-judgemental environment allowed me to slowly experiment with my ideas and approach to the song. It mostly stemmed from my own personal experience. Once I took that initial step, she would prod me, walk along, encouraging, correcting, suggesting different ways of dealing with the song. She would still largely leave the intricacies to me. Many times, as she walked out of the class, she would say, "surprise me".

Today, as an educator, when I look at learning, I believe it must be engaging, intriguing, kindling that curiosity, nudging and nurturing the minds to become true inquirers, analytical, critical thinkers, effective communicators, focussed. It should also develop the sense of commitment, respect, adaptability and much more.

But beyond all this, pursuing the interests, be it an art or a sport or both, it makes best sense to make it a part of one's life, instead of treating it as a chore or an extra class. Believe me, once something becomes a routine, one will find the time, interest and motivation to pursue it. As one delves deeper in the pursuit, one recognises that at the core of learning any discipline, the skills it helps develop are the same; those skills are what stand you good stead, in the years to come.

So to every reader of this note, join us on our Sports Day, celebrate Christmas and our other events with our learners, pursue your passion and interests with the true spirit of learning. It's almost time for a new year resolution.

And, support those who have made this their livelihood by watching a programme or telecast live. It is our duty and privilege to support each other.

Signing off 2020 with the best wishes from Team AAIS to you and your family as we gear to take on the new year in less than four weeks.

Regards

Priya S Dixit



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