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We are one

Where Mudras Are Performed Without Margins

For over a decade, the specially-abled dance ensemble, We Are One, has been challenging assumptions, dismantling preconceptions, and collecting accolades. Having performed on reality shows such as Dance India Dance, *Satyamev Jayate*, India's Got Talent, and several others, WAO is popular for its impactful reputation and transformative production of Indian classical dance on wheelchairs.

Pics: Devanshi Gupta, AIS Noida, XII G



The dance group performs one of their tricky formations

GROUND REPORTING



GT reporters with founder Husnain

The opening prayer

"When we first started, our performances were simple," explains Husnain, founder and director of We Are One. "With every act, we added our own uniqueness and creativity. That's how Bharatanatyam found its own expression on wheels." In its earliest days, the group was acutely mindful of every what-if. "We doubted whether our performances would be met with the enthusiasm they deserve." However, their first performance in 2016 - raw, unfiltered, and utterly sincere - erased all scepticism, both within the group and among spectators, marking the beginning of this inspiring movement.

Tools for trailblazers

For WAO, wheelchair is an expressive instrument, a crucial part of them. Specially customised, these wheelchairs are engineered into the choreography itself. Weighing nearly 30kg, the equipment camouflages completely into realistic props, frames, and even Arjuna's chariot in their famous Bhagavad Gita performance. Though inaudible to the deaf performers, not a single note of the Carnatic music is missed. In spite of their hearing impairment, they perform with precision that belies the sensory gap. Bharatnatyam is brought about by kinesthesia, a reflex that no disability can fully sever.

Global domination

Reforming rigid norms for over a decade, WAO has opened the door to stardom for all aspiring differently-abled dancers. A single room in Patparganj has since carried WAO to stages in over 15 countries - the USA, the UK, Canada, Italy, and many more. They have also earned recognition from the Honourable Presidents of India and Singapore. Additionally, Gulshan Kumar, the group's choreographer, holds a Guinness World Record for 63 manual wheelchair spins in a minute. Alongside performances, a core team of eight specialists run a social inclusion organisation for the training and holistic development of students.

Breaking the fourth wall

Messages conveyed through their art form are further amplified by ingenious methodology. Through their groundbreaking sets, WAO exemplifies depiction of all-abilities in dance as a united front against narrow-mindedness. "Our story is not pitiable," remarks Gulshan, revealing how spectators often lose track of time when watching their performances and ask for more. Logistics manager Vijay Kumar shares, "The crowd's shift in perception, admiration, and applause motivates us and confirms the impact even more."

The next margam

"Without my wheelchair, I am nothing," says Husnain, whose vision is to foster a world where a disabled person isn't underestimated. With a centre established in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, Husnain hopes to spread WAO branches across India, where every performer can be treated "like a celebrity." For WAO, the next *margam* (path) is hence not merely another performance, but another step towards a world where ability precedes the label. GT

Pics: Mahakk Sharma, AIS Noida, XI N

News Room HULCHUL



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