**Vichaar: An Online Production Exploring the Convergence Between Bharatanatyam and Neuroscience**

**Episode 1: Introduction**

Welcome to my online production called Vichaar. My name is Sloka Iyengar. And I am a neuroscientist and a Bharatanatyam dancer. This online production, “Vichaar” aims to analyze and explore the points of convergence between neuroscience and Bharatanatyam, the two passions of my life. Neuroscience is the study of the structure and the function of the brain and the nervous system. Bharatanatyam is a classical Indian dance form that originated in South India. This dance form has a very rich vocabulary of music, rhythm, percussion, facial expressions, hand gestures, and a very rich vocabulary of storytelling and narration. “Vichaar” is a Sanskrit word, which means: thought perception, reflection, or contemplation. And in this series, what I will do is each month, take an aspect of Bharatanatyam and then talk about its neuroscientific basis. A few topics I hope to explore are the effect of music, rhythm, imagination, creativity, pedagogy, movement, proprioception (how do we know where we are in space), as well as the role of dance in society.

I really would be remiss if I didn't mention my gurus: Smt. Maheshwari Nagarajan, Smt. Vanitha Jayan, Sri Jayan Sir, and Sri Nagarajan sir who have really have taught me, guided me through so many years. This whole feeling that dance is something that can go be beyond one's body and one's mind and really into one's community and affect the world at large is something that I have seen from looking at them throughout the years.

For today's episode, what I'll do is short excerpts from two pieces. The first piece is the Ganapati Stuti and is an invocatory piece. So, what you will see is many disparate aspects of dance coming together. You'll have music, movement, proprioception, rhythm to all come together and make a cohesive dance experience. Ganapati Stuti is an invocatory piece; so, we are inviting Lord Ganapati, who is the son of Lord Shiva (or Lord Nataraja) and Parvati.

*Sloka performs the first piece (Ganapati Stuti)*
This was the first piece. I hope you were able to parse out some of the aspect of dance and then really appreciate how, how the brain makes it into one cohesive form for us to enjoy and look at. For the piece that I just did as well as the piece that I'm going to do now, details about the song and the music: the raga (melodic structure the song is set in), tala (the rhythmic pattern), as well as details about the composer of the song, the choreographer of the dance piece can be found at the end of this presentation.

The second piece I will show today has a lot of storytelling aspects. You will see me use my facial gestures and my hand gestures to tell a story about little baby Kartikeya. Kartikeya us somebody who is shown in many ways. *(Sloka shows one way Karthikeya is shown*). He is is actually the brother of Lord Ganesha, he's also the son Lord Shiva and Parvati. You will see me describe this cute little baby in the second picture.

*Sloka performs the second piece (Tiruparam Kundra Vela)*
This was the second piece. When thinking of what the brain is doing, it's so interesting to think of why is it that we find stories and storytellers so compelling and how is it that the brain can imagine things, visualize things that are not right in front of us to really create this holistic dance experience.

These were the two pieces that I did today. I hope this gives you a flavor for what's to come next month. Next month, what I'll do is take an aspect of Bharatanatyam and then go a little bit in more detail about how the brain actually makes it all happen.

There are many reasons I think that this work or this work of looking at the convergence of Bharatanatyam and neuroscience, but more broadly, the convergence of arts and sciences is interesting and impactful.

The first one being that, you know, science and dance or science and arts are really all around us. While the output of the scientific enterprise might be more evident; for example, the way I'm talking to you through technology today, still, even, even dance, movement, and motion are really all around us.

When we think of a leaf that is rustling in the wind, from the waves of the ocean, to the ions that travel in our brains to create thought movement perception that really make us who we are, we are surrounded by and subsisted by movement and motion.

The second reason is (or least the second reason I feel this work is important) that arts and sciences really can bring people together. They give a common vocabulary and a common language by which people can really understand and perceive the world around us.

This brings me to the end of today's episode. I hope you enjoy getting this little flavor of what's to come next. If you have any thoughts, suggestions, if you just want to say hi, please reach out. My website is [www.slokaiyengar.net](http://www.slokaiyengar.net).

I hope to see you next month and thank you for watching!