

## **Ballroom Dance Teachers of India**

By: Dolly Tavasieff, June 2009

May has always been a month of excitement and new beginnings, and this year was no exception. As a new series of teacher training classes began in the bay area, Diane Jarmolow and Alex Ivanov travelled halfway around the world to help begin the first ever Ballroom Dance Teachers College of India!

“It was phenomenal,” says Diane, “This was the trip of a lifetime. It was transformative for BDTC, and for me as well.”

The impetus for this incredible journey came from an irrepressible young couple named M.V. Santhosh and Akshatha Rao. They live in Bangalore, the “Silicon Valley” of India, and had been very happy leading adventure tours for corporate groups. Then they took a Salsa lesson, and fell in love with the joy and exuberance of the dance. They realized they wanted to devote their lives to dancing and teaching ballroom dance.

But they had a big problem—there were no experienced Salsa or ballroom teachers in India. Although the country has an incredibly rich tradition of classical dance, there was no formalized ballroom training programs anywhere. So Santhosh and Akshatha went to the Internet, and discovered BDTC and Diane.

“They knew immediately that we had the systematic training program they were looking for,” says Diane. “And even though California was half way around the world, they contacted us and made plans to come to the Bay Area and train as teachers.”

Unfortunately, there was a problem obtaining Visas. Undaunted, Santhosh and Akshatha came up with Plan B: Bring a BDTC Examiner (Diane) and trainer (Alex Ivanov) to India! So Diane and Alex packed up their BDTC manuals and took off.

After twenty hours on a plane, Diane arrived in Bangalore at 3:00 a.m. And there, waiting to greet her, were Santhosh and Akshatha, absolutely beaming. “Even in the middle of the night,” says Diane, “they both radiated joy and enthusiasm. I could tell right then that this was going to be a terrific experience.”

Diane stayed at the apartment of their friend, Cheetrah, and the training began right away. The couple had been very busy preparing. They had purchased all the DVIDA Syllabus manuals and had been memorizing the elements of each figure, step by step. An entire wall of their apartment was covered with yellow post-its outlining a course of study and a plan to master each figure.

“Their diligence was amazing,” says Diane. “It’s my dream to have all ballroom teachers take their studies this seriously.”

Santhosh and Akshatha trained for several hours each day, working on Salsa and the International Latin Syllabus with Alex. Diane helped them to prepare for their professional certification exams. With Diane's guidance, the couple plans to start the first ballroom dance teacher training program and eventually bring ballroom dancing to all of India.

This was very big news in Bangalore, and Diane and Alex were invited to a large press conference and interviewed on the Indian national television news!

In their free time, the couple led Diane and Alex on their on adventure tour of the magnificent country of India.

"I'm completely in love with the culture," says Diane. "This was one of the peak experiences of my life."

Each morning, they walked in the Botanical Gardens near their apartment, where monkeys played in the trees and yogis held open air yoga classes for their followers. Akshatha, an amazing cook, prepared gorgeous vegetarian food, and Diane and Alex shared meals with the couple, eating as they did, on the floor, with their hands. No silverware or napkins allowed!

They also travelled to Mysore to meet Akshatha's lovely family. They toured magnificent temples and bustling street markets. The only stress, Diane says, was the driving!

"Between the cows, the horns, the cars going the wrong way at full speed, I just had to close my eyes and trust that we'd arrive safely."

At the end of the trip, Santhosh and Akshatha passed their Junior Associate Latin Exam and their Associate Salsa Exam with flying colors. They loved dancing their choreographed routine so much, Akshatha asked Diane if they could do it a second time, for the sheer joy of the dance.

"This is what ballroom dancing should be, in the best of all worlds," Diane says. "The couples' hard work and diligence enabled them to find the grace and joy of the dance."

Santhosh and Akshatha are busy teaching Salsa classes to their first groups, and are planning to come to California this fall to complete their certification training. Once that is done, there are no more obstacles to their opening their own teacher training academy which will be called: The Ballroom Dance Teachers College of India.