

Sritha Cheemerla  
Finding a Balance

Dr. Rathna Kumar. A name that resonates through many Houstonians as a beacon of the arts; Known for merging Indian classical dance with the western world. On November 17th at India House, students of the Youth Leadership Development Program had the privilege to listen to Dr. Kumar talk about her journey to her position as the artistic director of the Anjali Center of Performing Arts along with her other many accolades. From her life as an English professor in India to a classical dance teacher in the United States, Dr. Kumar eloquently shared anecdotes from her life filled with lessons on finding a family-passion balance and the effective leadership that result from that balance.

Something every student could relate to was Dr. Kumar's struggle to please her father's wishes for her academic future while pursuing her passion for dance. As Indian-Americans, there's often a sizable amount of pressure placed on us to get excellent grades and to get into a reputable college and to get a respectable job; passion is always the factor left on the back burner. Dr. Kumar talked about the importance of a balance between the two; the only way one can achieve true happiness and go on to be successful leaders in his/her life is to find that balance of pleasing family and chasing passion. She described how she achieved this seemingly impossible balance by being an English professor while going to dance class every day and performing on weekends.

Something I felt was equally crucial to Dr. Kumar's incredible journey and applicable to our lives was her adaptive capacity, perseverance, and integrity. As a way to cope with the lack of arts in the US in the 1970s, Dr. Kumar became a dance teacher at a time when no one else in Texas was teaching Indian classical dance, personifying these values. A leader needs to be able to adapt to any unexpected circumstances thrown towards him/her and navigate accordingly and effectively. A leader needs to be resilient and willing to do anything it takes to get the job done. And most importantly, a leader needs to have moral and ethical values to keep them on the right path at all times.

Dr. Kumar's words are a lesson for us all to not be afraid to follow our passions while keeping our values in mind, a true balance leading to happiness.