



# Kali Wants to Dance

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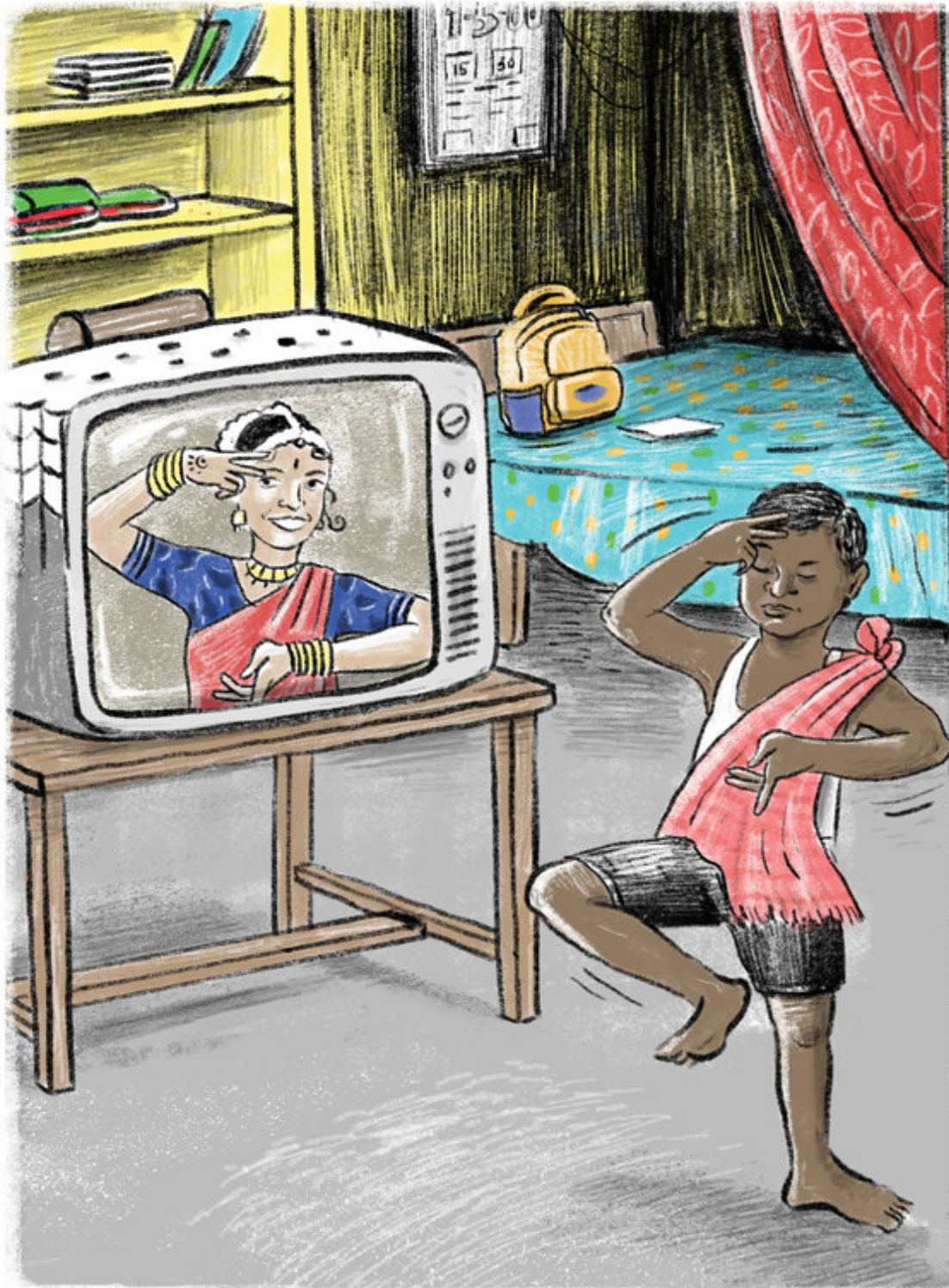
Level 4





In the fishing village of Kovalam, Kali Veerapathiran is a hero.  
Not because he is an actor.  
Not because he has fought off villains.  
He's a hero because he learnt to dance.





It's the year 2000 and Kali is eight years old. Like many boys, he goes to school, plays with his friends, watches TV. Unlike many boys, Kali also dances.

Kali loves to watch Padmini dance on TV. She is a famous actor and a fantastic dancer. He pretends to wear a salangai (ankle bells) and dances Bharatanatyam, just like her.

*Thari thana jonnu thimi  
Thaka thari kita thaka  
Thathinginathom  
Thathinginathom  
Thathinginathom*



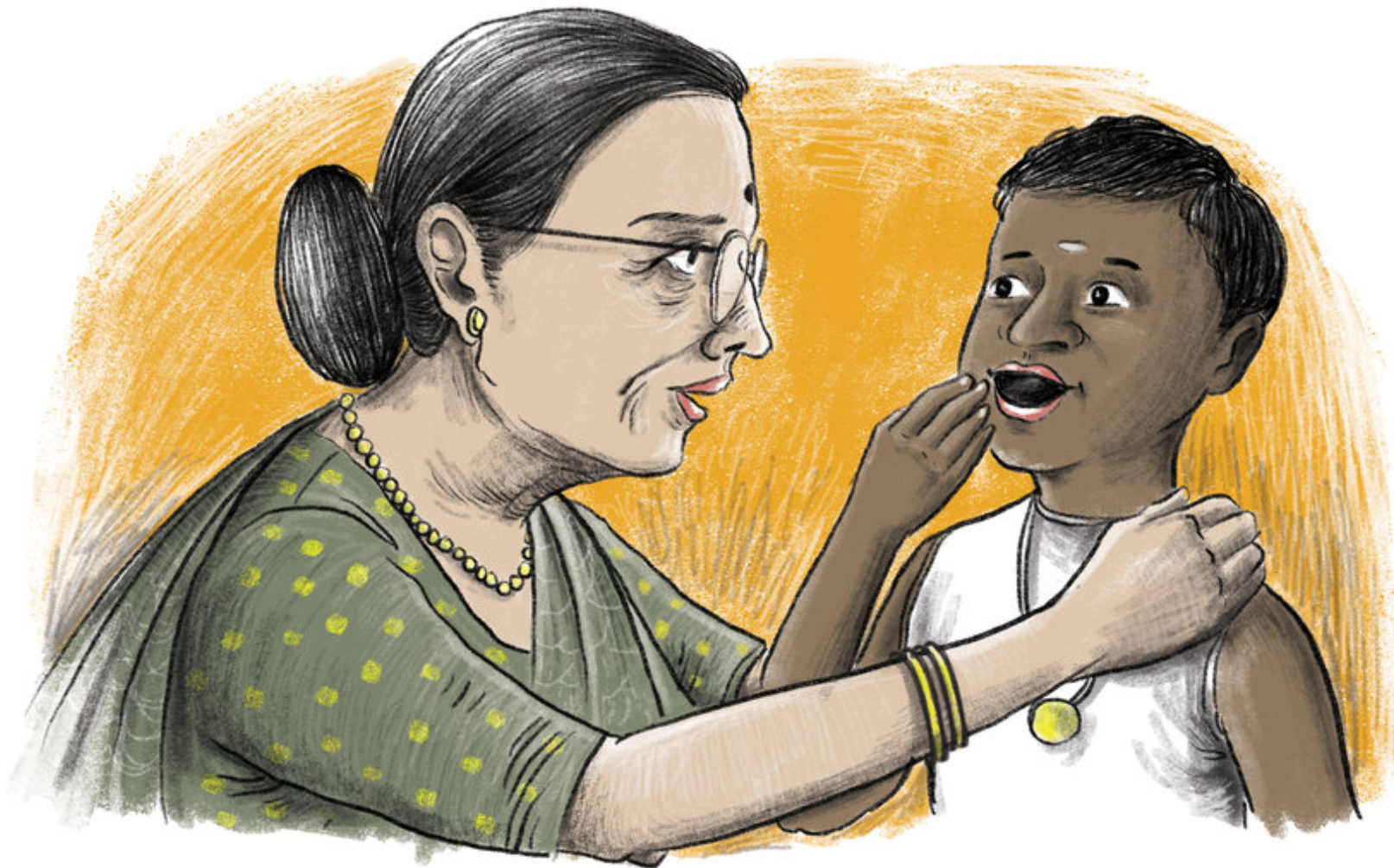
Kali becomes such a good dancer that his teachers ask him to perform at school programmes. Soon, he is known in the little fishing village as a Bharatanatyam dancer.

One day, Sarah Chanda, who manages a hospital in Chennai, sees him perform on stage. *Ditheiyum tha thaa thei, Ditheiyum tha thaa thei*

She's astonished to see such a talented boy, and is moved that he's gotten so far by himself.







“Would you like to learn Bharatanatyam in Kalakshetra?” she asks him after the performance. Kali laughs at first. Dance? The Dalit community rarely had the opportunity to learn, let alone master, Bharatanatyam. In Kali’s family, there is never enough money to spare for dance classes. And who has heard of boys dancing for a living?

But Sarah is serious. “You must learn Bharatanatyam in a proper school, Kali,” she says. “I will pay your fees.”





Sarah arranges for Kali to visit Kalakshetra, one of the best dance schools in the country. It is a beautiful place in Chennai with lots of trees.

Leela Samson, the head of Kalakshetra who is also a renowned Bharatanatyam dancer, tells Kali to perform for them.

Kali ties a saree crookedly over his trousers and dances to a film song. The teachers think he has the makings of a classical dancer.





But Kali can't decide what he wants to be when he grows up. Should he be an actor, a Collector, a teacher, a biotechnologist, or a dancer? His friends and family don't really help.

"Who has ever learnt dance and made any money afterwards? It's a waste of time!" growls Kali's maama.

"Only girls dance! You'll become girlish," his friends tease him.





Amma asks Kali what his heart wants. “Do you love dancing? Does it make you feel good? Is that what you want to do always?”

“Yes! Dance is all that and more for me, Amma,” he replies.

“Then don’t listen to anyone. If it makes you happy, learn dancing.” As usual, Amma has all the answers.





So after his final school exams, Kali begins to learn three kinds of folk dances at DakshinaChitra.

### **Oyilaatam**

*Dimtha nakadi naka  
dhina dhina  
Dimtha nakadi naka  
dhina dhina*

### **Thapattam**

*Tha kukuku tha kukuku  
tha kukuku thaa tha  
Tha kukuku tha kukuku  
tha kukuku thaa tha*

### **Karagattam**

*Datta daguna, daguna  
Datta daguna, daguna*



Next month, Kali begins learning Bharatanatyam at Kalakshetra. The first few days in school are scary and quiet.

When the work gets too much, and his legs hurt, he cries to Amma.

“Do you want to herd buffaloes?” Amma asks him sternly.

“No!”

“Then go back and do your best.”







Kali begins to adjust to this new world. He makes friends. When language is a problem – not all his classmates know Tamil – Kali speaks using mudras.

“Did you go home for the holidays?”

“Have you eaten?”





At Kalakshetra, he becomes a skilful dancer. He becomes lean and fit and full of energy. He can now dance for hours. He learns Carnatic music as well.

He makes many friends among the students who have come from all over the country and the world. They share their hopes, dreams, and even the food they bring from their homes!





Kali starts getting invitations to perform all across India and the world. He travels by bus, train and aeroplane to many places.

His akkas tease him. “Do you remember you could not even sit in a bus without throwing up?” Kali laughs as well. It is true. As a child, he would carry a lemon and a plastic bag with him on bus rides.

As the years pass, Kali wins awards for his performances. He starts a dance school called Koothambalam in Kovalam.





Now, Kali is ready for another performance.  
He puts on his make-up carefully.  
He wears his costume with ease.  
The velvet curtain goes up.  
Kali begins to dance.



## Kali the dancer

At the age of 25, Kali Veerapathiran is perhaps the only male dancer who has mastered the classical dance form Bharatanatyam, as well as three ancient Tamil folk dance forms, according to The People's Archive of Rural India.

Born in Kovalam, a struggling fishing village not far from Chennai in Tamil Nadu, Kali lost his father very young. It was his mother Ellamalli Veerapathiran, a construction labourer, who worked doubly hard to raise him and his many siblings.

Sarah Chanda who is a member of the managing committee of Gremaltes Hospital in Chennai, sponsored his education at Kalakshetra, India's premier dance school.







He has also studied at DakshinaChitra under Kannan Kumar.

Having completed his PG Diploma in dance, Kali has started Koothambalam, a dance school in Kovalam.

Kali was featured in a documentary film by the People's Archive of Rural India; many newspapers and TV channels have carried his interviews.

He's won awards for his dance, including the Music Academy's 'Spirit of Youth' award.



## **About The People's Archive of Rural India (PARI)**

The People's Archive of Rural India is a living journal on, and an archive of, the world's most complex countryside. The Founder-Editor P. Sainath and his team, including an army of volunteers, hope to document the stories of 833 million people speaking well over 700 languages.

PARI is also writing the textbooks of the future. That's happening with the numerous stories, photos, videos and audio material going up on the site [www.ruralindiaonline.org](http://www.ruralindiaonline.org).



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# Kali Wants to Dance

(English)

All Kali wanted to do was dance. But how could he? After all, in his village, boys did not dance, especially not Bharatanatyam. A story about dreams and aspirations and believing in them.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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