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# Tina Vachani Shares Insights Of Virsa, India's Largest Cultural Programme

by **Shraddha Kamdar** | May 5, 2021, 15:00 IST

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Image courtesy: Tina Vachani



Imagine learning Kathak via a master class from maestro Pandit Birju Maharaj or attending one with Ustad Amjad Ali Khan. Sounds surreal, right? Well, it is not. School students across India not only attend these, but also take up learning modules on a host of topics from Indian art and culture – including Hindustani vocal, Carnatic vocal, Kathak, Bharatnatyam, *tabla*, *harmonium*, *sitar*, flute, guitar, keyboard, **yoga**, theatre, Maths, brain development and Punjabi literature. All this because their schools are a part of Project Virsa.

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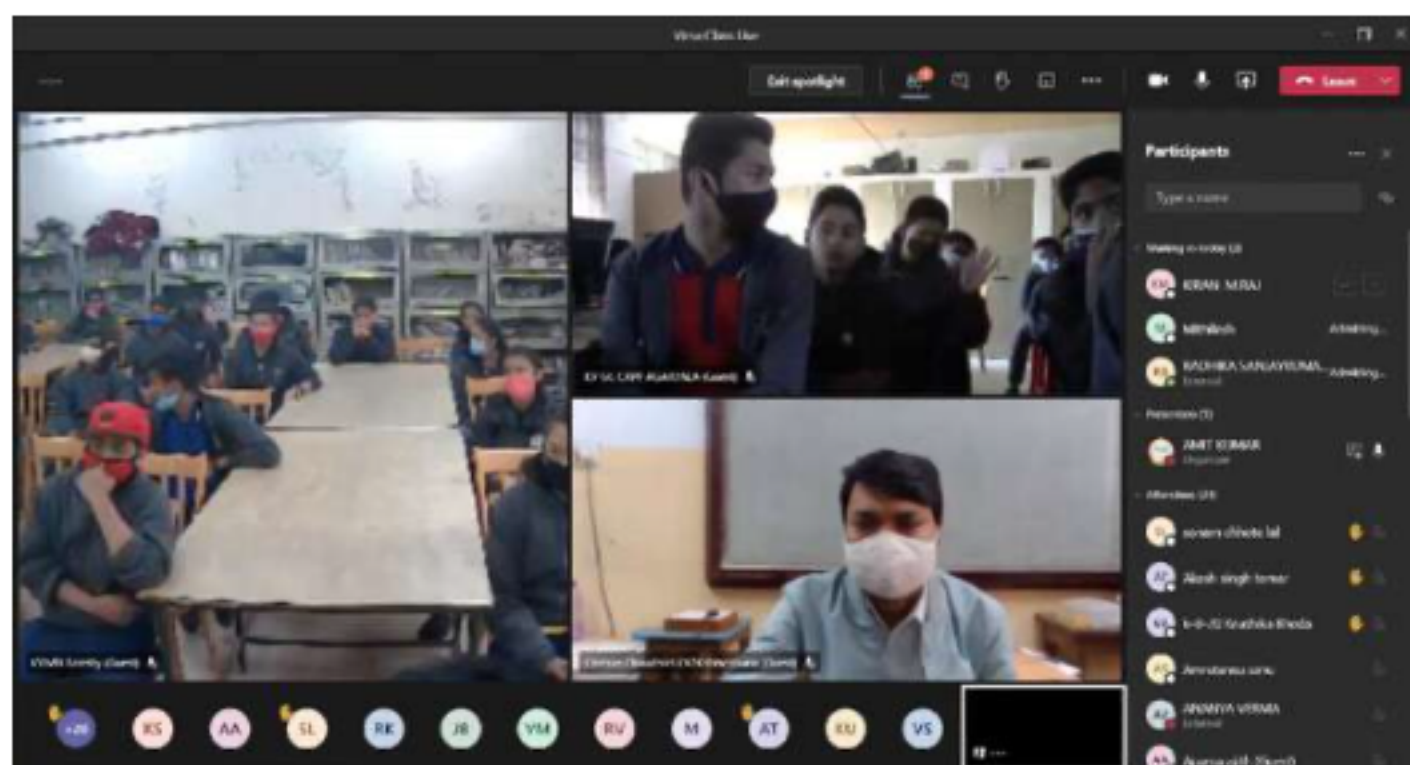


Image courtesy: Tina Vachani

As India's largest digital cultural programme, Virsa, an initiative started by NGO Routes 2 Roots, has reached over two crore students from all strata of society through 20,000 schools. It is an exclusive platform offering no cost digital learning classes in Indian culture and music students. "Our NGO has been engaging with schools to promoting peace and harmony through student exchange programmes. During this journey, we collected in-depth information about the fading education of rich art and culture of our country," says Tina Vachani, Co-founder, Routes 2 Roots and the mind behind Virsa.

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Image courtesy: Tina Vachani

She elaborates that at most schools, music teachers are engaged in preparing students for the annual functions, and the influence of films on these sessions can't be denied. Moreover, one teacher cannot possibly teach all the vast disciplines of Indian art and culture. "We felt at this pace, after a generation we may lose our cultural heritage, and to reach across the country the only way was by going digital. We conceptualised Virsa, derived from the word *virasat*, meaning heritage," she adds. The programme was launched in 2016 and has been going from strength to strength since then.





Image courtesy: Tina Vachani

Apart from its vast modules, and doyens who have helped develop the curriculum, a stand out feature at Virsa is the three-camera shoot for the presenter, which enables a wholesome view rather than a flat, passport photo-size view. Additionally, participants can show their performance to the teacher in live mode thus making it a virtual face-to-face teaching.

As challenging it was to finalise and implement the modules, the Virsa team managed it all, including creating the infrastructure within the campus of the participant schools, and troubleshooting during everyday classes, and most importantly, meeting their goal of making art and culture a part of the curriculum. That the New Education Policy defined it such, only provided further impetus to the Virsa team.



Image courtesy: Tina Vachani

With the primary aim to reintroduce authentic education of Indian art and culture among children, they have made it accessible to all in every corner of the country, at no cost. The idea is that art and culture cannot be priced. “If we look back in history, art was imparted free to the common public. Virsa has a similar goal,” Vachani informs. The team operates through grants and CSR funding for regular training classes as well as inter-school competitions.

In the bid to reach every corner of the country, the team made the programme accessible, and had it grow exponentially in the past five years. Along the way, Virsa made it to the Limca Book of Records as India’s largest digital cultural programme. “We had to reach every corner of the country so that our next generation is more tolerant and believes in inclusive growth. This goal took us to every district, taking the count to over 20000 schools impacting over two crore children,” a proud Vachani beams.





*Image courtesy: Tina Vachani*

With Virsa, Vachani envisions, the children will be connected to their roots, values, tradition and rich culture. "It gives us a great sense of gratification. The passing of our heritage to the new generation is satisfying in more ways than one. Today's youth are fast paced, with short attention spans, overload of information and restlessness. More recently, there is the additional psychological impact of the coronavirus on the mental health of the children," she says.

With the overwhelming resources and the response Virsa has had, the team is only grateful. "I believe music has no boundaries and that art and music connects the humanity through a bond of happiness. Indian classical music over a period of time has shrunk in its following, but there is hope that we can revive it," Vachani signs off.