

Doctors help ballet dancer make miraculous comeback to life

They had almost given up on him after he suffered a massive electric shock

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CHENNAI: Ballet, dancers say, is all about technique and body control, grace riding on power. Ballet, they swear, is about art, but it is also about life.

It took technique, body control, grace, and power to bring ballet dancer Balaji back to life from the dead.

On February 15, Balaji, a dancer who was setting up his own dance school, literally from scratch got the shock of his life. Literally. While attempting to hoist a flex board for the school, he suffered a massive electric shock from a high tension pole and collapsed. The shock went right through his heart.

After a little confusion about what had happened and about whether it was safe to touch Balaji, co-workers and friends put him in an autorickshaw that took him straight down the narrow road to MIOT Hospital. Doctors at the critical care unit figured that the shock had gone right through his heart, and that it had been still for at least 15 minutes. Things might have been very different had some cardiopulmon-



SECOND LIFE: Balaji, who had a remarkable recovery, with Mallika Mohandas (left), chairman of MIOT Hospitals, and T.P. Nisheeth, Director, Critical Care MIOT, at the press meet at the hospital in Chennai. — PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

ary resuscitation been done right there. But then, there would be no grand story to tell the grand kids.

"We kept up the chest compression for about 20 minutes," says John Peter, the doctor who received Balaji in Emergency. "It was his luck that there were three well-built orthopaedicians on duty then. Had it been just me, we would have found it tough to keep up the pressure. Chest compression is exacting, physically." This was in addition to multiple electric shocks being administered to

the patient who, for all purposes, was not responding.

After about 15 minutes, Balaji's heart kicked back, though a little feebly. James, Balaji's close friend, who stuck with him right through the hospitalisation and after, says, "The same doctor who told us he was not responding came back in a bit to tell us that the heart was beating again. Then, I knew that the hospital will bring the Balaji we know back to us."

It's a good thing James had no clue how the doctors actually felt at that point. "It

was not good. We had cooled his body temperature down to 92 degrees F for about 36 hours. This was to restrict brain damage, by allowing the brain to rest. But despite everything we were doing, he was racked by seizures continuous, there was no response to pain after five days, and the only positive was he was capable of breathing spontaneously," Nitheesh TP, director, Critical Care, MIOT, explains.

Everything pointed to Balaji slipping into an impending vegetative state. On the

sixth day, the doctors discussed withdrawal of life support with the family. The family, though, as confident as James was about the abilities of the doctors, refused to pull the plug. The decision was left for Monday.

"Perhaps, Balaji overheard this conversation," Dr. Nitheesh jokes now.

On the seventh day, he opened his eye to pain stimulation. No other motor activity was present, but this small improvement was enough to bring a smile to the doctor's face, for the first time ever since Balaji was wheeled into the hospital.

Subsequently, he was weaned off the ventilator, and the doctors came up with an innovative drug delivery mechanism to control his seizures.

Fifteen days later, the night duty doctor called excitedly to say that Balaji was responding to calls. There was still no power in his limbs, but a dramatic recovery ensued over the next few days. He gained control of hands, though he suffers tremors still, and was able to use his legs, even if minimally.