

Tip-top-tap of a lonely heart

KOCHI

In New York they call her the Lady with the rapid-fire feet. And that's an understatement as far as tap dancer Jane Goldberg is concerned. The dexterity with which her feet tap to the equally rhythmic rapid-fire movements of her verbal message is a sight worth watching.

Relaxing at Malabar Hotel in Willingdon Island, Goldberg spoke to *Indian Express* about her pet passion — her "tip-top-tap".

Jane Goldberg has been tapping for the last 20 years. And along with the tap-tap of her feet have come issues she has been espousing all her life. Of feminism, freedom and family.

"Topical tap" — that's what Goldberg is perfecting today. She loves to talk and she loves to tap. She mixes words and steps to astonishing effect. Topical tap has autobiographical overtones. It gives Goldberg an opportunity to talk about her political affiliations, her romance, and even her loneliness.

"I've been tapping for the last 20 years. Yet I am depressed," she sings as she taps, thus opening up a vulnerable spot in the life of an artiste — a whole life of emptiness where there's no room for family or close relationships.

Like comedians and clowns who make others laugh even while living through moments of agony,



Jane Goldberg displays her special tap dancer's shoe

dancers too delight audiences willfully putting away their pain. Goldberg emphasises this point when she says that tap dancers need not always be the stereotyped "happy people with happy feet."

"Tap dancing is going through a renaissance and America is avidly seizing this medium of rhythm as a means of self expression," says Goldberg. And she herself is a pioneer of the current renaissance.

Very much like rap, though it originated from the shanties and ghettos of America to convey the repression of the Black American free spirit, tap too is eloquent in its efforts to convey the yearnings of the human heart.

Goldberg is a fusion of the old "hoofers" as tappers are sometimes derisively called and the sophisticated artiste who performs to a deft and inimitable fusion of verbal and pedal rhythms.

The tap dancer's special equipment are the special shoes she wears. Fitted with a metal coating over the heels and the portion covering the toes, these shoes help the dancer to manoeuvre her feet over the smoothest of surfaces. However smooth the floor is, she never

misses a beat. So perfectly has she mastered her style.

Ever since Goldberg perfected her own brand of tap dancing, she has gone all out to ferret out potential talent. She has organised shows and seminars and conducted workshops all over New York. She hopes to exploit the interest Europe is showing in tap dancing.

A Jewess, Goldberg takes pride in tracing the origins of tap to the Jews. Jewish women, while waiting for their men to come down from Mount Sinai with Moses, might have developed an insistent tap which later on metamorphosed into its more sophisticated form.

"Right now I am a cultural Jew and not a religious Jew", says Goldberg dressing up for a visit to the Jewish synagogue.

Jane Goldberg is in India on an Indo-American research fellowship offered by the American Institute for Indian Studies.

Goldberg sees in kathak an uncanny likeness of the tap rhythm. Though unfamiliar with mohiniyattam, she hopes to learn a lot from India's dance forms which may someday offer themes for future tap shows.

— Rebecca Thomas