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# THE DANCE INDIA

A Treasure Trove of Culture & Tourism

TORCH BEARERS

**C RAJENDIRAN:**

A SAVANT OF THIRUKKURAL

RAYS OF HOPE

**LEENA MOHANTY:**

TRANSCENDING BEYOND BARRIERS



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# CONTENTS

Volume 3 | Issue 12 | June 2019

**04 EDITORIAL TEAM**

---

**05 EDITOR'S DESK**

---

**06 CULTURAL BULLETIN**

---

**10 TORCH BEARERS**

C Rajendiran:

A Savant of Thirukkural

---

**22 COVER STORY**

Guru Gopinath:

A Legacy Revisited

---

**32 RAYS OF HOPE**

Leena Mohanty:

Transcending beyond barriers

---

**40 SCHOLARLY CORNER**

---

**44 REVIEWS**

---

**54 ARANGETRAM**

---

**58 VEDIKA**

---

**65 TRIBUTES**

---

**66 CLASSIFIEDS**



# EDITORIAL

'The Dance India' - a monthly cultural magazine in English is our humble attempt to capture the spirit and culture of art in all its diversity.

**"IF THE ART IS POOR,  
THE NATION IS SICK."**

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# EDITOR'S DESK

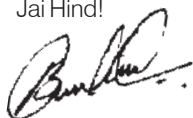
Now is the time for a new beginning. On behalf of The Dance India magazine, I congratulate the newly formed NDA government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The NDA has won most of the seats in the recently concluded general elections and the newly formed government is in a seat of absolute power. As the popular saying goes, with power comes responsibility.

Prahlad Singh Patel, who has taken charge as the minister of state (independent charge) of the ministry of culture; and minister of state (independent charge) of the ministry of tourism, has a Herculean task in front of him. Protecting and propagating Indian arts and culture has been a challenge for the former ministers and the art fraternity though let down in the past is hopeful of the new minister-designate to deliver on mandatory tasks in the interest of Indian arts. The welfare of the artiste and propagation of the art forms should take the front seat.

Critics from the art fraternity have been accusing autonomous bodies under the ministry of culture on various accounts of corruption such as misuse of funds, misuse of power and extensive lobbying. Only time would tell, how effective the governance under the new leadership would pan out. The country looks forward to a rich cultural development laced in Indian roots, principles and values.

Jai Hind!



BR Vikram Kumar

# CULTURAL BULLETIN

Source: PIB

## Prahlad Singh Patel takes charge as the minister of state (independent charge) of the ministry of culture

**P**rahlad Singh Patel assumed charge as the minister of state (independent charge) of the ministry of culture, Government of India, in New Delhi on May 31. The five-time MP, Prahlad Singh Patel represents Damoh Lok Sabha Constituency in Madhya Pradesh. He has previously been a member of many Parliamentary Committees in the 16th Lok Sabha. The 59-year-old minister takes interest in a wide range of social and cultural activities including preservation of Indian culture, development of rural areas, farmers' welfare and promotion of sports.

Addressing media persons, soon after taking charge, the minister said, "Under the visionary leadership and guidance of our Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, I



am sure my ministry will work to build a 'New India' by actively investing in strengthening our cultural roots and preserving civilisational continuity."

## A high-level team of ASI officials visits Puri and Konark

**A** high-level team of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) officials led by DG ASI, Usha Sharma visited Odisha to assess the nature and quantum of damage caused by cyclone Fani to Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri and Sun Temple, Konark.

The team visited Konark in the forenoon on May 10. The team observed that by and large there is no structural damage to the monument. The team has informed that there is some dislocation in the scaffolding provided for chemical cleaning at upper level which is being set right. More than 200 trees have been damaged which are being cleared. The electric and illumination system including internet access has gone out of order, restoration of which will take some time.

The chemical cleaning and consolidation of the eastern face will be completed on priority. The monument will be restored back to normal within about a fortnight.

The team also visited Sri Jagannath Puri Temple to assess the damage. The state government had sought help from the ASI to assess the damage caused to these world heritage monuments. The team will also suggest restoration exercise needed for the monuments and the surrounding areas.

Earlier, the superintending archaeologist, Bhubaneswar Circle ASI, had inspected the monuments including Shree Jagannath Temple at Puri. He found certain damages on the surface but no major damage to the structure of the temple.

## PRESS COMMUNIQUE

The President of India, as advised by the Prime Minister, has directed the allocation of portfolios among the following members of the Union Council of Ministers:

**Shri Narendra Modi**, Prime Minister and also in-charge of: Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions; Department of Atomic Energy; Department of Space; and All important policy issues; and All other portfolios not allocated to any minister.

### Cabinet Ministers

- 1 **Shri Rajnath Singh**, Minister of Defence.
- 2 **Shri Amit Shah**, Minister of Home Affairs.
- 3 **Shri Nitin Jairam Gadkari**, Minister of Road Transport and Highways; and Minister of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.
- 4 **Shri D.V. Sadananda Gowda**, Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers.
- 5 **Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman**, Minister of Finance; and Minister of Corporate Affairs.
- 6 **Shri Ramvilas Paswan**, Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.
- 7 **Shri Narendra Singh Tomar**, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; Minister of Rural Development; and Minister of Panchayati Raj.
- 8 **Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad**, Minister of Law and Justice; Minister of Communications; and Minister of Electronics and Information Technology.
- 9 **Smt. Harsimrat Kaur Badal**, Minister of Food Processing Industries.
- 10 **Shri Thaawar Chand Gehlot**, Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- 11 **Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar**, Minister of External Affairs.
- 12 **Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'**, Minister of Human Resource Development.
- 13 **Shri Arjun Munda**, Minister of Tribal Affairs.
- 14 **Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani**, Minister of Women and Child Development; and Minister of Textiles.
- 15 **Dr. Harsh Vardhan**, Minister of Health and Family Welfare; Minister of Science and Technology; and Minister of Earth Sciences.
- 16 **Shri Prakash Javadekar**, Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; and Minister of Information and Broadcasting.
- 17 **Shri Piyush Goyal**, Minister of Railways; and Minister of Commerce and Industry.
- 18 **Shri Dharmendra Pradhan**, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas; and Minister of Steel.
- 19 **Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi**, Minister of Minority Affairs.



- 20 **Shri Pralhad Joshi**, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs; Minister of Coal; and Minister of Mines.
- 21 **Dr. Mahendra Nath Pandey**, Minister of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- 22 **Shri Arvind Ganpat Sawant**, Minister of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprise.
- 23 **Shri Giriraj Singh**, Minister of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries.
- 24 **Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Minister of Jal Shakti.

### Ministers of State (Independent Charge)

- 1 **Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- 2 **Rao Inderjit Singh**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; and Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Planning.
- 3 **Shri Shripad Yesso Naik**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH); and Minister of State in the Ministry of Defence.
- 4 **Dr. Jitendra Singh**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region; Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office; Minister of State in the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions; Minister of State in the Department of Atomic Energy; and Minister of State in the Department of Space.
- 5 **Shri Kiren Rijju**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports; and Minister of State in the Ministry of Minority Affairs.
- 6 **Shri Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Culture; and Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Tourism.

- 7 **Shri Raj Kumar Singh**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Power; Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy; and Minister of State in the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- 8 **Shri Hardeep Singh Puri**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs; Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Civil Aviation; and Minister of State in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- 9 **Shri Mansukh L. Mandaviya**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Shipping; and Minister of State in the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

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- 1 **Shri Faggansingh Kulaste**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Steel.
- 2 **Shri Ashwini Kumar Choubey**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- 3 **Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs; and Minister of State in the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.
- 4 **General (Retd.) V. K. Singh**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- 5 **Shri Krishan Pal**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- 6 **Shri Danve Raosaheb Dadarao**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.
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- 21 **Shri Rameswar Teli**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Processing Industries.
- 22 **Shri Pratap Chandra Sarangi**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises; and Minister of State in the Ministry of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries.
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- 24 **Sushri Debasree Chaudhuri**, Minister of State in the Ministry of Women and Child Development.





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# TORCH BEARERS



## C RAJENDIRAN: A SAVANT OF THIRUKKURAL

Text: **Paul Nicodemus**



**D**ressed in formals, C Rajendiran may be one of the highly revered officers from the 1985 Batch of Indian Revenue Service (Customs & Central Excise), but is also a man of principles, values and dedication who believes in the land's wisdom. If his illustrious career in the Indian Revenue Service is one side of the coin, his contribution to Tamil literature as an author, especially on Thiruvalluvar's 'Thirukkural', is the other side. He dedicated his life to the application of the concepts from 'Thirukkural, a 2000-year-old text comprising 1330 couplets, to modern society.



Rajendiran

**Rajendiran with an elder on the occasion of Addressing students at Kakinada**



C Rajendiran was born to V Chinnasamy and Kuppayee Ammal in a small village named Govindampalayam in Tamil Nadu on December 12, 1957. His grandfather, Vayyapuri, was a freedom fighter who took part in Mahatma Gandhi's movement of picketing liquor shops near Kadalur near Pondicherry in 1931-32. Rajendiran's father, Chinnaswamy was part of the 'Sarvodaya Movement' and 'Khadi Movement'.

His father's profession took Rajendiran to various places in Tamil Nadu. He studied at various places till his 5th standard. The family returned to the native village when he was 8 years old and he continued his education in a one teacher school. He continued studying in the same government school until his 8th standard and pursued his higher education in a nearby town. Those days, there were hardly any private schools, and the government

would provide quality and value-based education. Teachers of the time lived selflessly for society. "They may not have taught us advanced physics or science but they taught us values of the system," he says.

When Rajendiran was in his 8th standard, there was this teacher in the school, Jagarajan who taught all the subjects. The teacher gave him a taste of Tamil literature by introducing two stanzas of Ramayana. The teacher's nephew lived in the USA and by showing a postcard from Washington DC, he inspired his pupils and told them they can also travel places if they study well. Though it was a school in a village, the teacher encouraged his students to take part in all activities. The school even had a shadow Parliament with ministers and Rajendiran acted as an education minister for some time. All these



Addressing about 500 school children  
at Karur in Tamil Nadu

little things had a big impact on him. It taught him responsibility and leadership qualities.

Rajendiran's parents lived an exemplary life. He imbibed righteousness from his father and fearlessness from his mother. Back in time, even relatives, both near and distant ones, helped each other expecting nothing in return, "Nowadays, pure love has become a rarity in society," he laments. Rajendiran experienced true community living in his village.

He moved to Trichy in Kerala to pursue his college education in arts. He lived there for a year and moved to the Government Arts College in Selam. He lived there for five years and met people from the cross-section of society. Unable to pursue engineering in a government college, Rajendiran opted for BSc Mathematics.

In 1975, while pursuing his bachelor's degree, he participated in a recitation competition on Thirukkural and stood second. Thirukkural became an important part of life since then.

He started his career with a job in telecommunications while still pursuing MSc Mathematics in Trivandrum. He got selected as a technician at the junior level cadre and joined the telecom department in February 1979. "I was the leader of the 30 member group because I was a highly educated person and all the others were diploma holders," he says.

In the training period, Chandra Shekhar Warriar, an assistant engineer, told Rajendiran, "You are over-qualified for this post. Improve your English, read the Hindu

## Addressing students at Kakinada



newspaper, equip yourself with better knowledge and move out of the department.” He took the advice and over the course of the next 3 years, he improved his communication skills. “I equipped myself with a BEd degree hoping that I would become a teacher because most of my friends from MSc Mathematics joined as teachers. In addition, many members of the family were also teachers,” he reveals.

Meanwhile, he wrote bank exams and did not qualify for some but he qualified in a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) exam for a clerical post. While his salary in the telecom department was Rs 800, they offered him Rs 1,800 at the RBI. Around the same time, he also cleared a special recruitment exam

for Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and others to be an inspector in the excise department. He had two jobs in his hand and needed to decide. “I joined Reserve Bank in December 1981. It was a big jump,” he says.

After joining the Reserve Bank of India, he had another turning point in life. He observed employees ranked below him appeared for civil service examinations. “I felt if these guys can appear for civil service interviews and clear them why shouldn't I try it?” he explains. Rajendiran tried it and reached the interview stage in the first attempt with mathematics and political science as his subjects. But he did not clear the mains.



Addressing HSL officers

## Rajendiran



Meanwhile, he appeared for a State Bank of India exam and cleared it. "Earlier I couldn't clear an exam for the post of a clerk and now I cleared an exam for the post of an officer. All the preparation for the other exams helped me get through the exam with no preparation," he smiles.

In December 1983, he joined as an officer at State Bank of India in Ahmedabad with a salary of Rs 3,500. After working for a year, he realised that the job was not meant for him. He again prepared for the civil services but by then he lost his touch with mathematics. One colleague from the RBI suggested him to take Tamil as his second option and political science as his first. He prepared for the exam on his own with no coaching and cleared it with a rank of 323. He joined Indian Revenue Service in Customs and Central Excise in December 1985.

In the process, Tamil literature resurfaced in his life. The link from his school days made its way back and preparation for services helped it. After the training, they posted him in the customs department in Calcutta. After a two-year stint, they posted him to Madras in the Revenue Intelligence. As a young and dynamic officer,

he worked in the department for 6 years and arrested 200 people. Then he moved to Delhi on promotion in Inspection Directorate. Later, he got back to the headquarters as a joint director in the Revenue Intelligence. Here, he had a satisfying stint for 3 years. He then spent some time with Delhi Customs Department. He was then picked up for a position in Singapore in the Customs for Overseas Intelligence Network. He worked in Singapore for four years on deputation to the foreign ministry. He oversaw proceeding in the South Asian region which included Australia and New Zealand apart from Asian countries, for customs cooperation.

While working as the head of the commercial side of the mission, his interest in Tamil got revived. Tamil was one of the official languages of Singapore apart from English and Mandarin. The country's population comprised 8 per cent Indians and out of which 90 per cent were Tamils. His frequent interactions with people made him have a re-look into Tamil literature. Confucius, who was considered the architect of modern civil services in China was widely quoted. Confucius took the ancient



knowledge of China from the Golden period - the three emperors period and reinterpreted it for modern society. "Majority of the Chinese in Singapore drew inspiration from Confucius and then I thought why not Thiruvalluvar?" he says. Rajendiran looked into Thiruvalluvar teachings and his ancient wisdom of life. His time in Singapore gave him an opportunity to delve into the teachings of Thiruvalluvar and he developed a holistic view and a whole new dimension.

He found couplets written by Thiruvalluvar in Thirukkural to be pregnant with meaning. "Each couplet was like an atom with seven seas hidden inside it. A normal approach may not reveal its inner meaning," he says. These couplets survived for over two millennia. When something survives 2000 years there ought to be truth in it. "I wanted to know the real meaning of these couplets. Truth alone triumphs," he adds.

He took one of the best commentaries on Thiruvalluvar, written by Parimelazhagar, a poet from Kanchipuram around 1250 AD. In the 13th Century, there were three universities in the region - Takshila, Kanchipuram and Nalanda. Out of the three Kanchipuram was believed to be the oldest and a seat of learning for all languages. Rajendiran wanted to look into the teaching of Thirukkural with the help of Parimelazhagar commentaries. "Confucius on one side and our ancient Indian wisdom on the other side. I wanted to do a comparative study. But before that, I first wanted to understand Thirukkural and delved deep into it," he says.

In 2005, he went to Chennai on leave. He straight away visited Pondy Bazaar and picked up the old commentary and few other books to understand the commentary. He then did a comparative study. His innate passion to study and understand Thirukkural resulted in writing his first book titled திருக்குறள் உவமை நயம் (Thirukkural – Uvamai Nayam). In this book, he attempted to share his thoughts and reflections on the



metaphors and similes used in Thirukkural in today's context. He released the book written in Tamil in September 2007. "Thiruvalluvar used several techniques to convey the message. Within two lines and a few words, I had to convey real meaning," he says.

In 2009, something more profound came into his mind. He felt whatever he did so far was the tip of an iceberg - 238 couplets out of 1330. He thought only metaphors and similes would not help in understanding the complete meaning of Tirukkural. He had decided to study the entire work from the 700-year-old commentary. He segmented and wanted to come up with 10 different books on 10 aspects of Thirukkural.

After joining civil services, Rajendiran got married to Malarkodi in 1986. She is from his mother's hometown. She was a student of Sarada College in



**Rajendiran, IRS being felicitated**

Selam, a college which taught great values besides academics. After marriage, in the case of a coincidence, she came home with a book on Thirukkural.

Thirukkural contains 133 chapters - 38 chapters on Righteousness, 70 chapters on how to deal with society and last 25 chapters are about love. In 2009, he told his wife they would leave the last set of chapters and write short stories of this land, short stories of today and short stories from real life based on the first 108 chapters. "The idea was to weave stories



**Handing over the book he wrote to the members of Tamil Kalai Mandram in Visakhapatnam**

based on couplets from each chapter. When the reader reads the story, it should convey the message of the chapter. The story itself could be enacted or told to children. The tradition would go from one generation to the other,” he explains. His wife Malarkodi Rajendiran has written the book titled நழல்சாட்டும்திணங்கள் (Nizhal Kaattum Nijangal) containing 124 stories conveying the essence of first 108 chapters of Thirukkural. The title translated to ‘Truth Through the Shadows’. She wrote it in 9 months. Their children, Karthik and Kiruthika then came up with an idea to add illustrations to these stories. They found an artist in Coimbatore and he read the stories and drew illustrations for all the 108 chapters. On the whole, the book had 124 stories. The publisher was happy to publish a 500-page book.

Around the same time, a friend of Rajendiran had come from Chennai to Coimbatore and advised him to write a book on the entire Thirukkural instead of several small books. “He told me, it was ageless wisdom and asked me to write a book on the entire thing. At that point of time, APJ Abdul Kalam’s classmate from St. Joseph’s College, Sampath Kumar, suggested me to begin with friendship,” he says. He worked on the project and he took 7 years to complete it. He read books, got in touch with few scholars and worked on it whenever he found the time.

Simultaneously, he excelled in his profession as an Indian Revenue Service officer.

“The government had a lot of confidence in me and my work. I was always designated as an executive commissioner. Had it been any other job, I would have had more time to work on the book. I worked on the book on Saturdays and Sundays,” he says. He completed writing the book in November 2016.



He believes in destiny but he is not a prisoner of it. “I can craft my destiny,” he says. Destiny had taken him to Chennai where he finally had a work-life balance. It allowed him to continue his work on the book. Though, he finished writing the book, post processing work like proofreading and checking for cohesion and coherence needed his attention.

Parallely, he had an encounter with a guru named Bala Subramanya Swamy and it had a positive effect on him. He received good guidance from the guru. Guru Balu initially worked as a driver for a company for 35 years and remained a bachelor. Even the next-door neighbour would not know about the greatness of this man as he

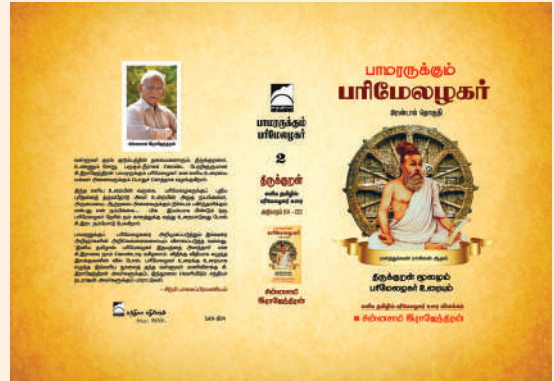
never had a huge following. “As a divine intervention, the right people were brought into my life at the right time. I was apprehensive of reading the first chapter as it was the most important part and I was looking for a scholar. At that point of time, Srinivasamurthy, who retired from our department as an assistant commissioner, came to me looking for an opportunity to work on the project and voluntarily offered to help - like a squirrel to Rama. But instead of being a squirrel,



VoV Family Voice of Valluvar Family logo



Thirukural Part 1



Thirukural Part 2

he became a pivotal member in my yangna,” he says. He took one more year to fine tune the book. In the period, new ideas emerged, and he also incorporated them. After he considered the book to be ready, he gave it to Balasubramanian, Sahitya Akademi Award coordinating committee member for Tamil Nadu, and he wrote a 10-page foreword within two months. When everybody involved thought the book was ready, it took another two years to refine and add the third volume.

Finally, the book, “Pamararukum Parimelazhagar” was launched in December 2018. Three volumes of the book put together comprised 1088 pages. The book brought Parimelazhagar’s work close to 21st Century society. Earlier, his work was exclusive for the scholars and this book opened a door for the common man to understand the wisdom of Thirukkural. “All the authors whoever worked on Thirukkural so far did it not to be at the forefront but to pass on the wisdom of the past to the next generation,” he says.



With members of VoV Family



**Launch of Thirukkural linked savings scheme in our Village Government School for over 300 students. Makara Bhushanam, IAS the then District Collector of Salem can also be seen alongside Rajendiran.**

Rajendiran has a Master's degree in Mathematics (1979) from Government Arts College, Salem, The University of Madras, and gained two Bachelor Degrees one in Law (1993) with specialisation in Criminology and the other in Education (1981). Later, he did a PG Diploma Programme in International Business Operation (2002) from IGNOU, New Delhi and Patent Laws (2003) from NALSAR, Hyderabad. Immediately before assuming charge as vice chairman, he joined the commission as a member, Settlement Commission, Chennai in November 2016. Immediately before that, he held the charge of chief commissioner of customs, Central excise and service tax, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. He worked in various capacities in major custom houses such as Kolkata, Chennai, New Delhi, Tuticorin and Visakhapatnam. As commissioner, central excise & service tax, Coimbatore, he successfully implemented a pilot project on ACES (Automation of Central Excise and Service Tax). He worked for about 9 years in the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence at various levels both in the zonal unit (Chennai) and in the headquarters (New Delhi) and handled several cases relating to cross border smuggling, drug trafficking, commercial frauds relating to imports and exports. He was honoured with the Presidential Award of Appreciation

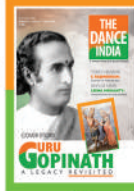
Certificate for rendering 'Specially Distinguished Record of Service' on the occasion of Indian Republic Day 2003. From July 2003 he worked for four years as first secretary (commerce) in the High Commission of India, Singapore. During his tenure in Singapore, as head of the commercial wing, he handled many government, business and student delegations from India visiting Singapore and vice versa. He played a very important role as a coordinator and a member of the negotiating team in the negotiation and conclusion of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) between India and Singapore, which was signed on 29 June 2005. He is working as the vice chairman, Settlement Commission, Customs, Central Excise and Service Additional Bench, Chennai, since June 2017. He is a Savant.

Rajendiran has been keen on sharing his experience with the young generation and has addressed over 2 lakh school/college students, academicians and representatives of trade and industry since 2007. He considers Thirukkural as an operating manual for meaningful, effective and joyful living. He firmly believes that the principles in Thirukkural lay a strong foundation to our lives if only we understand the true meaning and practice it in our day-to-day life.



Rajendiran

**C**OVER  
**STORY**



**GURU**  
**GOPINATH**  
**A LEGACY**  
**REVISITED**



Guru Gopinath and Thankamani

# GURU GOPINATH

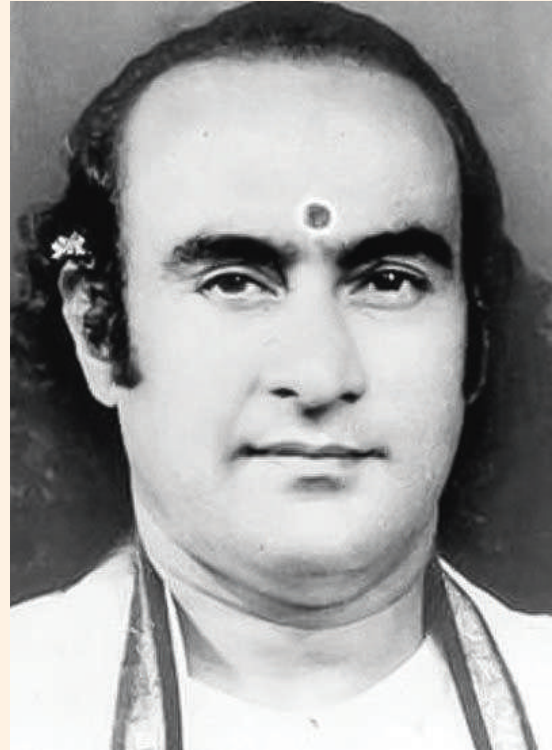
## A LEGACY REVISITED



Text: **V Kaladharan**, Cultural Critic

Pics: **Mohan Khokar Dance Collection and Collection of Sukanya Rahman/Ram Rahman**

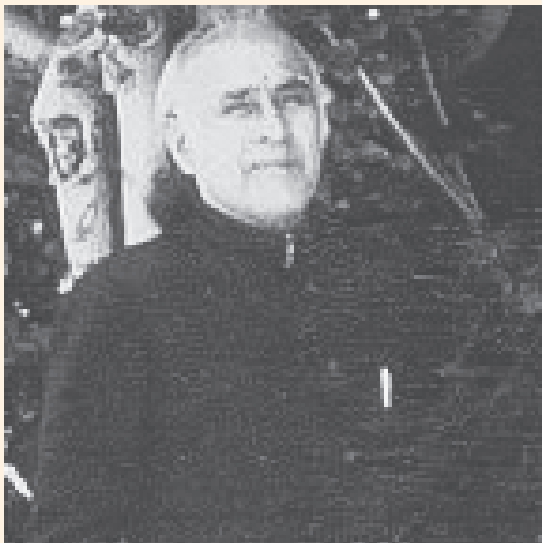
The early decades of the last century witnessed a cultural renaissance wedded to nationalism and the struggle for Indian independence. Tagore, Vallathol Narayana Menon and Rukmini Devi Arundale spearheaded the cultural renaissance movement. Of the three, Vallathol, besides being a poet, was a die-hard fan of Kathakali, the classical dance-drama of Kerala, which was on the brink of extinction owing to a host of socio-economic and cultural factors. Kerala Kalamandalam founded in 1930 by the poet and his close associate, Manakkulam Mukunda Raja, in the Cheruthuruthy village of Thrissur District was a bold attempt to revive Kathakali and similar traditional performing arts. Vallathol resorted to the institutionalisation of Kathakali as he could find no other way to revive this glorious artistic heritage. The resurrection of Kathakali paved the way for 'new formations' in the field of arts which were quite eclectic in nature. Several talented artists who had their basic training in Kathakali got themselves involved in less rigorous dance-drama productions which had a tremendous outreach among the public. Perumanoor Gopinatha Pillai alias Guru Gopinath was one of those



who built up a highly successful career in the teaching and performance of dance-dramas drawing inspiration from various sources especially Kathakali.

### Illustrious heritage

Gopinath was born and brought up in Kuttanad, well known in the cultural history of Kerala both for paddy cultivation and traditional arts. He was born on June 24, 1908, to Kaippilly Sankara Pillai and Perumanoor Madhavi Amma. The family he belonged to was inextricably linked to the southern school of Kathakali. His elder brother, Chambakkulam Pachu Pillai, was acclaimed in his lifetime for the presentation of all the major demoniac characters in Kathakali. Gopinath had his initial training in Kathakali under Chambakkulam Paramu Pillai. He later came under the tutelage of the all-



Guru Gopinath



Guru Gopinath



Parents of Guru Gopinath

time great actor, Mathoor Kunju Pillai Panickar, and Thakazhi Kesava Panickar. Gopinath's quest for Kathakali later brought him to Kerala Kalamandalam where he received training in the Kalluvazhi School under the veteran Kavalappara Narayanan Nair. Vallathol had an inexplicable affection towards this agile actor from south Kerala. He did his Arangettam at Amachikara Pattupurakkal Temple.

**Breadth of Vision**

Most of the well-trained actors groomed in the south school of Kathakali had and still have a definite penchant towards emotive acting which is amply reflected in the facial expressions. Satwikabhinaya (expressions that arise from deep within) is their forte. Gopinath was no exception. His upangas (eyes, eyebrows, cheeks, chin and lips) were capable of expressing the navarasas (nine different facial expressions beginning with Sringara) fluently. Ragini Devi, formerly Esther Luella Sherman, an American dancer, in the first half of the 20th century, was naturally drawn to the histrionic adroitness of Gopinath resulting in their onstage friendship. The dance of the duo soon attracted huge crowds wherever they performed. Their maiden performance was in Mumbai in December 1932.



Guru Gopinath and Thankamani

Enacting Manav Jeevitham



Enacting the role of King Dasaratha



Guru Gopinath as Sreekrishna

Esther Sherman (right), known as Ragini Devi, and Guru Gopinath performing the Lakshmi Narayan Dance at Bombay, Maharashtra in 1933



Although rooted in Kathakali, Gopinath did not want to confine himself to the clearly demarcated boundaries of the art form concerned. He carried with him a

contemporary sensibility which persuaded him to go into topics dealing with social, political and cultural issues confronting the society. He had always stood for the



**Students of Narthakaalayam at Trivandrum**

reinvention of our tradition so that traditional arts tend to be dynamic well in tune with the changes in society. Gopinath consciously tried to do away with the complexity of the art form he is well conversant with and make it simple and highly communicative to a common audience. His wife, Thankamani, a trained Mohiniyattam dancer from Kerala Kalamandalam, had been an enduring inspiration in all his subsequent creative ventures. Gopinath's approach towards the traditional arts won the appreciation of Rabindranath Tagore who showered lavish praise on the artistic endeavours of this avant-garde artiste. His choreographies encompassed themes from the Bible and socially relevant poems like Kumaran Asan's Chandalabhikshuki. Sister Nivedita's life was yet another of his compositions that won critical acclaim. Keralappiravi (origin of Kerala), appealed to the masses as a soulful tribute to his homeland.



**Guru Gopinath as Hanuman**



**Lecture demonstration in Trivandrum**

### **Turbulent journey**

Though Gopinath was able to establish his name as an acclaimed dancer in the company of Ragini Devi, their heydays did not last long. Financial crunch made it impossible for both to continue for long. Their partnership on stage fell apart. Gopinath returned to Trivandrum and he established a dance-school there to make both



**Guru Gopinath and Thankamani as Radha Krishna**

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Guru Gopinath



ends meet. Initially, he had received patronage from the Travancore Court to foster his career as a dancer and teacher. But it did not last long. He resigned from the dance-school and with family shifted to Madras (now

Chennai) where he could prosper for a while with teaching, dancing and even acting in a few films. Recognitions and rewards came to him from far and near. Guru Gopinath attained celebrity-status wherever

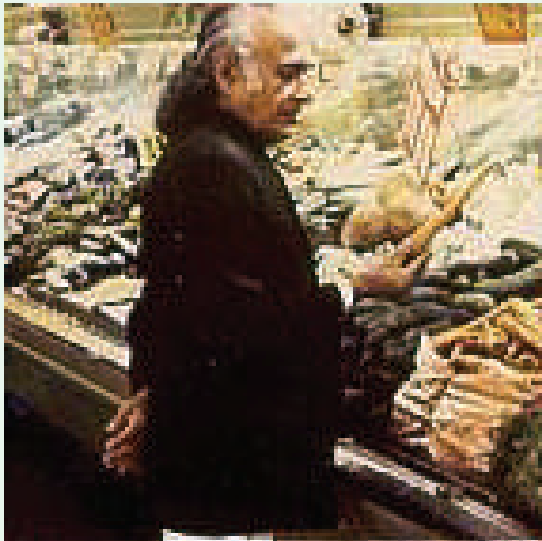


**Guru Gopinath with Nehru**

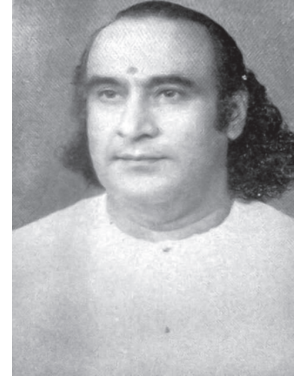
he went. He spent short stints in different institutions in the different parts of India and toured various countries with his troupe and danced in prestigious venues. The underlying objective of his artistic journeys was to introduce the language and aesthetics of Kathakali to the uninitiated through a medium which most viewers would find easy to identify with. This undoubtedly had the desired effect.

### **Keralanatanam**

To enable more and more people to appreciate the art of Kathakali, Gopinath came up with "Keralanatanam", which enthralled the audiences cutting across the barriers of caste, community, religion and geography. Kathakali has traditionally been a male bastion. Gopinath could not digest the logic of gender-discrimination in traditional



arts. And he was probably the first Acharya to defy it by teaching Kathakali and Keralanatanam to women of different age groups. Author of five books on dance, its doctrines and aesthetics, Gopinath's life was devoted to resisting elitism in the field of classical arts especially Kathakali which for centuries remained the treasure of the select few. Through his art, he waged a relentless battle against the degenerated tastes of aristocracy and feudalism.



For someone whose self-expression was embedded in his art and whose mission was to entertain and educate through art, there is nothing more blissful than paying his debt to nature while performing on stage. Guru Gopinath passed away on October 9, 1987, while enacting the role of King Dasaratha in the eminently acknowledged Ramayana ballet presented at the Kerala Fine Arts Society Hall, Ernakulam.

Like the indomitable dancer and India's cultural ambassador Udaya Sankar, Guru Gopinath too has left behind a void in the cultural and artistic history of the country. His contributions to the cultural enrichment of India in general and Kerala, in particular, are still to be duly assessed. His soul rests in peace in an expansive plot in the Vattiyoorkavu village close to Thiruvananthapuram. Guru Gopinath Natana Gramam functioning there under the Cultural Affairs department, Government of Kerala, is a befitting monument to an artiste whose legacy to posterity is beyond question.

His major awards and titles include Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi; Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy; Fellow of Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy 1973 and D-Litt from Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, 1972.

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Guru Gopalakrishnan with Guru Gopinath

# RAYS HOPE



## LEENA MOHANTY: TRANSCENDING BEYOND BARRIERS

Text: **Paul Nicodemus**



**B**orn in a Vaishnav family, one of the primary reasons for Leena Mohanty to choose Odissi was to propagate Vaishnavism through a dance medium. After years of dedication, Leena Mohanty is not just one of the leading exponents of Odissi dance, but also an acclaimed dancer with wide national and international repute.

With a strong and impeccable command of technique, Leena is a critically acclaimed and celebrated dancer with clarity, graceful intricacies, eloquent expressions, and precision in evoking the rasa. She is born to dance

but has established her credentials through sheer hard work and dedication.

Leena Mohanty hails from Bhubaneswar in Odisha. Her father, Ravi Narayana Prasad Mohanty was an industrialist and her mother, Swarna Mohanty was a homemaker, writer and singer. Her mother wrote under a pseudo-name Krishna Priya. Her father was a devout Vaishnava, and it immensely influenced the values of Leena and became the primary reason for her to become a dancer.



Leena Mohanty

"We are four sisters and from our childhood, we are linked with the arts. Popular artistes of the time visited our house because my father patronised arts," she says. From her childhood, she has seen and been with eminent artistes. She grew up in an artistic environment.

Leena started to dance at the tender age of four under the tutelage of Guru Deba Prasad Das, one of the pioneers of Odissi. He was also regarded as someone who took Odissi abroad for the first time. "Guru Deba Prasad tied a red thread around my wrist and said 'I accept you as my student'," she says. Those days, Guru Deba travelled frequently and whenever he had to travel, he sent one of his



Leena Mohanty



Leena Mohanty

senior students to teach her. "They were young, and they were not as patient as guru ji, so I used to wait for him. He had a nice way of teaching kids and I developed fondness towards him," she adds. Guru Deba Prasad shared a good rapport with his students and often told them stories from his travel.

She was in the fourth standard when students of the Guru performed Krishna Rasa Leela in a group. Watching their performance, Guru Deba said, "I could feel divinity in these kids". In 1984, he made the Odissi dance drama into a feature film with 81 songs. It was a pure Odissi production. The film won some awards. After the film, they toured across India with the production. Her father wanted Krishna Leela and Odissi to reach interiors of India.

At 8, her father took the production to Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh. "We visited Vrindavan during Dusshera and we danced in the temples. Vaishnavas came down in large numbers to watch the performance," she says.

Her father wanted to show the movie to the Vaishnavas and it was the first time when many of them came down to a cinema hall. "They would come as if they were going to a temple and kept their footwear outside. People in Vrindavan saw



Leena Mohanty

## Leena Mohanty



Radha and Krishna in the character and so after the show, they would come in a line and perform aarti. We were taken aback by their devotion. We as performers used to transcend beyond ourselves, lose ourselves and became those characters," she shares.

"The first realisation I am doing something divine came in Vrindavan while performing for the Vaishnavas. It was one of the best moments of my life," she says.

After the demise of Guru Deba Prasad Das in 1986, she continued her training under the guidance of his senior disciple Guru Durga Charan Ranbir.

The dance journey continued. Programmes came her way, and she performed across India. Gradually she garnered a name for herself. Critics praised her work and she had to leave Bhubaneswar to grow further.

She got married to Debashish Mohanty, a software engineer in 1999 and moved to California in the USA. Her in-laws supported her endeavour. Her mother-in-law was an Odissi singer. However, she had to start afresh after moving to a new country. To her luck, she found a Bharatanatyam dance teacher, Vishal Ramani, who had a dance school Sri Krupa Dance Foundation. "She watched my dance and asked me to come down



Leena Mohanty



Leena Mohanty

and perform for her TV show. I danced. After the performance, she asked me if I would like to teach Odissi in her school. I agreed and started teaching in California," she says.

However, when she was growing as a teacher, she had to move once again and this time they shifted to Malaysia. Though it was hard to leave the students, she felt happy to move to a country closer to her home. Another good thing that happened in Malaysia was Ramil Ibrahim, a disciple of Guru Deba Prasad Das. He had an academy called Sutra. Leena joined him and they performed frequently.

After 3-4 years, she met a Bharatanatyam dancer, Sangeeta Namasywaya from Kalakshetra who had a Bharatanatyam Institute in Malaysia. Leena wanted to do something of her own and Sangeeta asked her to join in. She became a part of the Kalpana Dance Theatre.

In 2005, Leena gave birth to a baby girl and continued to stay in Malaysia for 5 years after which they again moved back to the US. "Again, I had to leave things midway and move to Columbus and then to Texas. While in the USA, I met students of Guru Durga Charan Ranbir and choreographed for them," she says. She became the artistic director of Trinayan Dance Theater, New York City, USA and is the director of the professional training programme.

In 2014, she came back to India and has been living in Bengaluru for the last 5 years. She has been performing, teaching dance and spending time with her daughter. "It is easy for me to handle my institute Bansi Bilas in Bhubaneswar. Though I am not





in Malaysia, I still have students there and we have a production every year," she says.

The most challenging moment of her life was her first visit to the USA. She had to start everything from the beginning. "All my life I have been used to people who knew me and suddenly I found myself in a new place where nobody knew me. It was a challenge," she says.

Most of the time she draws her inspiration to choreography from literature and sometimes it comes to her randomly from watching a performance or reading texts with her parents. It also depends on the theme of the production.

Leena is a graduate in Physics and did her Masters in Business Administration. She writes for children and has authored the book 'Priya and Pritam Meet their Friend', which has received rave reviews from critics and established authors. She believes that stories are a good way to make kids understand the nuances of facing life's challenges head-on.

She is the recipient of the first Ustad Bismillah Khan Youth Award in 2006 from Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, and has been awarded the coveted and prestigious Mahari award and Shingarmani. Through her commitment to Odissi, Leena has proven to be a

versatile dancer with a vision. She is the artistic director of Bansi Bilas, an institution devoted to training young and upcoming dancers of Guru Deba Prasad Das' School of Odissi and provides a creative outlet for dancers, musicians and art lovers in Bhubaneswar. She is the artistic director of Trinayan Dance Theater, New York City, USA, and is the director of the professional training programme. She also heads the Odissi Department of Kalpana Dance Theatre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

She acted as a choreographer and artistic director of several Odissi dance productions including Parikrama - Life's Journey; Pratibimba - A Reflection; Anugamana - The Ongoing Journey; Saa Shakti - Her Struggle is her power; Mahamaya - Transcending Illusions; Sharanagati - Absolute Surrender; A Pallavi in raga Madhyamadi

and tala Ekatali; Leela Purushottama - The Supreme Absolute; Bhramara Geet from Srimad Bhagavatam; Anjali- An homage to Guru Deba Prasad Das; Surya Upasana for the Konark Festival; Maharaas in Odissi style; A feature Milan Madhuri for Doordarshan Kendra, Bhubaneswar. She also choreographed many group dance productions like Madhur Milan, Swapna Vilas, Basanta Raasa, Hori Leela and Sri Krishna Balyaleela.

Currently, she teaches and conducts workshops in various places in India, Malaysia and the USA. Trinayan Dance Theater, New York; Bansi Bilas, Bangalore; Dallas and Texas in the USA; Bansi Bilas, Bhubaneswar, India and Kalpana Dance Theatre, Malaysia are some places. She imparted training at Sutra Dance Theatre, Malaysia, Sri Krupa Dance Foundation, California, USA and Mukti (a contemporary theatre group), Bhubaneswar, India.

## Leena Mohanty





# NRITYA SANGEETHAM - THE INSEPARABLES

(The twin arts of music and dance)

Text: Sweta Prasad



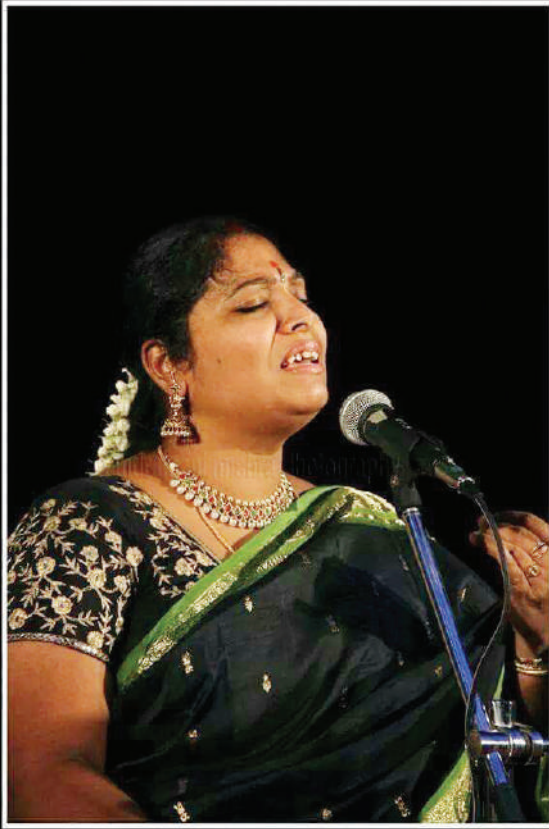
**'Geetham Vadyam Tatha Nrithyam Trayam Sangeetha Muchyathe'**

The noted verse from the 'Sangitaratnakara' by Sarngadeva indicates that music has a threefold path, namely Geetham (vocal music), Vadyam (instrumental music), and Nrithyam (dance). To a large extent, the above verse summarizes the strong inter-relationship between vocal music, instrumental music and dance which has existed from the times immemorial. At this juncture, a new commencement of word or system called 'Dance music' or the 'Nrithyasangeetham' started. This music forms the ensemble and support system for the classical dances of India.

Music or the sound creates a particular and distinctive effect on physical and emotional feelings among the listeners and so does Dance. Both activate mirror reflexes in the viewers as expressed in the study of Kinesthetic. The movement expressed within the dance enhances and enlarges the emotions when it accompanies the music. The combination of music and movement creates a comprehensive



Sweta Prasad in Concert



aesthetic experience. Dance is better understood as deepening of the emotions inspired by music. The aesthetic experience that is perceived by a combination of both these forms presented as one unit is vastly different from the experience that is created by each of them individually.

Music and Dance have the power to influence the functions of our body and soul. Therefore it is evident, why music and dance appear together in most of the ritualistic aspects of





worship. The phenomenon of dancing in response to music is an age-old practice, almost as ancient as emotion itself. From Vedic times, dancing to the accompanying music is ubiquitous. Many of the Indian Dance choreographers and Dancers often reiterate that their dance is an inspiration of the Music. George Balanchine, father of the American Ballet states, "I cannot move, I don't even want to move unless I hear the music first. I couldn't move without a reason, and the reason is music".

Just as a mirror reflects our image, music is a medium that reflects dance. Therefore, a dancer further articulates and adds to the ideas already prevalent in the music they are dancing to. Dancers receive the music, internalize it through the movement to convey the story or emotion embedded within both.

From references to Apsaras or celestial dancers in ancient legends to historical records of Devadasis or Temple dancers, we find the combination of both the arts. Kalavanthulu, [hereditary temple dancers of the Telugu land] or women who excel in arts, were singers and dancers, who were equally skilled in conducting the performances and executing them. This core group of artists was together called 'Chinnamealam' or the 'Nattuvamelam'. In today's times, these skills have emerged as independent crafts, like, singing, dancing, conducting the Nattuvangam and choreography etc, whereas it was a synthesis of all these faculties in the singer/dancers of yesteryears.

Musicality in dance has many dimensions. It begins with the dancer training in music and being musicians themselves.

Dancing to the tempo

Dancing to the intricacies offered by the rhythm

Responding to multiple instruments used at the same time

Responding to the meaning and essence of the literary content.

A deeper understanding of all these aspects helps to enhance the dance.

In today's scenario, the possibilities provided by the technology have taken over the live ensemble of musicians. To an extent, this situation is comprehensible when the dancer has to present a theme in a fusion of styles. When it comes to traditional pieces, the aesthetics of the whole performance is minimized with the usage of pre-recorded music. The dancer becomes extremely planned. The spontaneity that is possible with the interaction of live ensemble is lost.

Modern technology and the usage of studio recorded music influences the way music is rendered or created today. The natural frequency and tone of each individual instrument or voice tamper with the digitalization of



recording technique. From the early '60s to '90s, music recorded for dance had a 2 track method. In this context, the music was still performed live by the musicians, in the studios. Today's multi-tracking technology has led to fragmentation in music. There is a separation between musicians during a recording, as each musician can record as per his/her time and convenience. This creates separation in the quality of the music itself since the interaction between the artists is missing. The day-long rehearsals to perfect a piece or a whole production, which was the trademark of the yesteryears is absent in today's scenario. The reduction in the size of studio spaces, is also responsible for this separation or lack of interaction between the dancer and the musicians, therefore resulting in a fragmented musical experience.

Often, the correction software and plugins lead to music being dehumanized. Rhythm and percussion instruments are often auto placed to a metronome, take away the natural irregularities that come from spontaneous human interaction. This, in turn, makes the dancer extremely mechanical and soulless.

The soul of Indian classical arts is improvisation or wildly known as 'Manodharma'. The dance musician should be well versed in this manodharma aspects. The dancer at times mimics a story or an idea, spontaneously on stage. In such a context, the dance musician plays a vital role in enhancing this process. An accomplished singer would sing 'neraval' or variations sung to the same line to enhance the bhava or mood, and in turn, keeps the audiences engaged. This interaction between the dancer and the ensemble produces an aesthetic experience.

Dance music is a distinct area of musical experience. This genre is not dependent on technical constructs of musical typologies, but on the process of storytelling, movement, instrumentation, melody and rhythm. It is very essential to recognize the importance and understand the 'Nrithyasangitam' or Dance-music as an independent system of traditional musical knowledge and study it as a complete independent genre.



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# ODISSI ON HIGH: BOUNDLESS VERVE AND AUDACITY

Text: **Nita Vidyarthi**, Cultural Critic

Pics: **South Gurukul Society**, Kolkata



Malaysian Odissi dancer and choreographer Datuk Ramli Ibrahim had recently brought his new riveting production "Odissi on High", a presentation with "Boundless Verve and energy" to India with the graphics and innovative lighting design as his arsenal to enhance the appeal of the spectacular presentation. In Kolkata, it was presented by Guru

Sutapa Talukdar of the South Gurukul Society at the GD Birla Sabhagar.

Conceptualised and directed by Ramli Ibrahim of the Deba Prasad gharana and Guru Bichitrananda Swain of the Kelucharan Mohapatra gharana "Odissi on High" saw the coming together of two styles in a harmonious





whole. The choreography had been worked upon by two distinguished Gurus, Bichitrananda Swain and Guru Durgacharan Ranbir, of the Debaprasad gharana. Ramli's Sutra Foundation, Malaysia, and Bichitrananda's male dancers of Rudrakshya Foundation, Odisha, merged their individual styles while expanding and exploring the possibilities in six Pallavis, a pure dance item which showcases the wizardry and grip of the dancers on rhythm with intricate elaboration.

There were no solos and only group presentations with 13 male and female dancers documenting their training and abilities to work in synchronisation and understanding to reveal the essence of a particular piece. The items were definitely a test of the dynamics between dancers, musicians and light designer to contribute to the success of a choreographic piece. A commendable feature of the production was that none of the dancers tried to establish their commanding presence and performed with excellent uniform training.

The evening opened with visually brilliant imagery of Krishna entering the subtle light- washed stage. Distributed in two halves, the first half began with Kolabati Pallavi set to Raga Kalavati, a sabhinaya Pallavi composed by Guru





Debaprasad Das and concluded with the lovely composition "Sangini re chahi" by poet Banamali Das originally composed as a solo but adapted for group composition by Sutra. This was followed by Mukhari Pallavi in raga Mukhari which explored the various

possibilities of the tribhangi (triple body inflexions) and the Chauka (square position). The elegant display of torso bends, utterly unique and endlessly dynamic, the sheer undiluted quality of the grammar of Nritya of the Pallavi would remain as a benchmark for any others





who aspire to understand and convey the blossoming (Pallavi or elaboration) of traditional Odissi.

The performance gained momentum with the rhythmic composition "Taal Taranga" in which the dancers swayed and matched to the permutations and combinations of intricate rhythms and variation in patterns of laya from percussion instruments mardal, mridanga and khanjani - a delightful experience where at times music overpowered the dancing.

Contemporising the solo pieces with high-intensity acrobatic feats, with a sprinkling of yogic, postures and jumps was a celebration and an exciting challenge both for the dancers as well as for the audience to quicken the vision and treat the dance from the standpoint of pure optical beauty. The intertwining of the dancers in the geometric patterns documented a rare presence and passion of Sutra.

One not familiar with the resources of art and intricacies of Pallavi though he is conscious that the dance before his eyes is progressing, like music, in conformity with an artistic argument, is confused by the speed and seeming intricacy of steps. As a result, he loses the greater part of the beauty of the succession of pictures unfolded before him. Instead of being harassed by the sensation of scrambling to keep up with an argument, the spectator finds himself with abundant time to luxuriate

in every movement, every posture. And like a connoisseur of any art, he sees a thousand beauties unnoticed by the untrained. And this was true for the second half which presented the famous Shankarabharanam Pallavi originally choreographed by Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra but choreographed for the group by the Sutra Collective carrying with it the Sutra Foundation stamp. This was followed by an equally gratifying Chakravaka Pallavi. The programme concluded with Ananda Bhairavi Pallavi.

The achievement in creating a fantasy world with a classical dance that too with Nritya or Pure Dance in Odissi by artistic directors Ramli Ibrahim and Guru Bichitrananda Swain, lighting designer Sivarajah Natarajan and graphic designer Jyoti Swain is all the more remarkable when one considers working with dancers of two different cultures from two different countries. The credit of the successful production lies also on the dancers. From Sutra came the powerful artists Harenthiran, Jeya Sri Kullayya, Mathuri, Hareen Loganathan, Tan Mei Mei, and Geethika Sree.

Rudrakshya Foundation is known for its strong, brilliant male dancers who execute with a masculine slant and those who performed were Sanjeev Kumar Jena, Samir K. Panigrahi, Jagyandatta Pradhan, Santosh Ram and Bichitra Behera.

# SALUTATIONS TO RABINDRANATH TAGORE BY PALLAVI

Text: **Mandira Ghosh**, Cultural Critic

Pics: **Indrani Datta**



It was indeed a magical evening, when Pallavi, Odissi Nritya Sangeet Vidyalaya founded by Padmashri Kiran Sehgal, daughter of legendary Zohra Sehgal, presented Divya Namaskar or Salutation to Rabindranath Tagore at India International Centre, New Delhi on May 5 to celebrate the 158th birth anniversary of the world famous Nobel laureate.

Kiran Sehgal choreographed the amazing dance items based on four songs selected from Gitanjali or Song Offerings on Tagore as a Patriot, as a nature lover and as a philosopher. She also experimented with a combination of elegant Odissi, Rabindranritya, Dhunuchi nritya, traditional music combined with jazz but keeping intact Tagore's unparalleled melodious songs. Five senior





participants of Pallavi -- Madhayama Sehgal. Dea Dey, Ayushi Madan, Mrinalini Ghosh and Shashrika performed and created enchantment and made the august audience spellbound.

The scintillating performance began with Ekti Namashkare Prabhu, Ekti Namashkar, followed by Ekla



Chalo Re (Walk alone, when no one listens to you) when the dancers put Seraikela masks (Used in Chau dance) and indeed this was another successful experiment done by the well-known choreographer. Tagore as a nature lover penned beautiful songs on monsoon and the song where the dancers in beautiful attires danced to the tune of Shrabanero Gagaganer gay, describing monsoon in Bengal and its beauty. As a philosopher, the poet wrote "You have made me endless", or "Amare tumi ashesh korecho". The dancers performing with alarming gait and elegance made the audience spellbound once again.

The event previously travelled from Singapore to Mumbai. The programme concluded with an amazing Dhunuchi Dance associated with Durga Worship in West Bengal. Indeed the beautiful participants set the stage on fire. The ideal disciples of the noted dancer seemed to have lived to the expectations of their Guru, Kiran Sehgal as they performed brilliantly.



# A SUCCESSFUL KATHAK WORKSHOP

- A first of its kind in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

Text and Pics: **Paul Nicodemus**



The valedictory ceremony of the 5-day workshop conducted by Kathak exponent, Anurekha Ghosh and organised by Nataraj Music and Dance Academy, Visakhapatnam under the supervision of BR

Vikram Kumar, its founder-director, from May 2-6 gave the gathered audience a taste of Kathak art form at Visakhapatnam Public Library in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh on May 6.



KV Lakshmi, BR Vikram Kumar and Anurekha Ghosh

## Christelle Estival from France during the workshop



Internationally acclaimed Kathak danseuse Anurekha Ghosh trained nearly 20 students from various walks of life, from morning till evening at the Nataraj Music and Dance Academy. Many of the students were introduced to Kathak for the first time. Another highlight of the workshop was the presence of Christelle Estival, an aspiring Kathak enthusiast from France.

In the valedictory, Anurekha Ghosh presented 'Kathak ki Kahani' - the journey of Kathak dance. The first presentation was Talashi Mei, a wounded woman, searching through the remnants of what had once been a gorgeous palace. She relives the brilliance, the sensuality, the ecstasy. The piece was manifested through a 'Chaturang', a composition in four parts. This Chaturang was set to Raag Bageshree and Teen Taal (16 beats time cycle). The second presentation is Taslim (The Gift of Tradition). The gift of tradition, manifesting the various traditional rhythmic compositions of pure classical Kathak dance - Thaata, Uthana, Aamad, Paran, and a garland of footwork improvisation set to a rhythmic time cycle of 14 beats Taal Dhamar and Raag Bageshree. Anurekha's final solo presentation was an abhinaya piece set to a ghazal, 'Lai Hai Musda Fasl Bahar Tere Liye'. The piece was composed by Pandit Birju Maharaj, a legend of Kathak and choreographed by Anurekha Ghosh.



Anurekha Ghosh correcting a posture



Anurekha Ghosh



**Anurekha Ghosh training students during the workshop**

She also presented 'Unplugged', an impromptu rhythmic conversation where the dancer interacted with the audience creating an on-spot rhythmic improvisation set to the claps of the audience to create the final crescendo. Anurekha Ghosh is one of the finest internationally acclaimed award-winning Indian Classical Kathak dancers. Her technique and style is a combination of 'tradition and modernity'. She has shown her excellence in choreography be it in the classical or contemporary genre.

Later, participants of the Kathak workshop presented a Kathak piece, 'Chal Chalan' that they learnt during the workshop. The Kathak piece showcased the Tandav and Lasya aspect of Kathak dance. Their presentation included Ganesh Paran, invoking Lord Ganesh,



**Participants of the Kathak Workshop with Guru Anurekha Ghosh**

followed by Guru Vandana, rhythmic intricacies of Kathak displayed through fast footwork and multiple pirouettes, Kavits depicting Lord Krishna, Lord Shiva and finally ended with a Tarana in raag Bihag. This was taught to the participants in a period of 5 days. None of these dancers had any Kathak training. However, they had an intense passion for learning the new classical dance form.

The organisers presented a participation certificate to all those who completed the first of its kind workshop in the city which was held from May 2 to 6.



Participants of the Kathak Workshop with Guru Anurekha Ghosh during the valedictory



Kathak exponent Anurekha Ghosh being felicitated by the guests from Rotary and PRSI

# Varangal

KUCHIPUDI RANGAPRAVESAM

## VARSHITA PRASULOVA CAPTIVATES IN HER DEBUT



Varshita

Text: **BR Vikram Kumar**



**P**adma Bhushan recipient Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam's Kuchipudi Art Academy, Visakhapatnam presented 'Kuchipudi Natya Sahrudaya Vidwath Jana Sabha Pravesam' of Varshita Prasulova at Kalabharathi Auditorium, Pitapuram Colony, Visakhapatnam, on May 13.

Varshita, a final year MBBS student of the prestigious Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam, started her dance career at a tender age of 8 years. She received Kuchipudi training under the tutelage of guru Yelamanchili Hanumanth Rao at Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam's Kuchipudi Art Academy. Guru Hanumanth Rao was a disciple of Master Vempati Satyam. Varshita has gained a diploma in the dance form and she was selected as a graded artiste in Doordarshan. She has given many performances all around India and the USA. She is also a CCRT (Central Cultural Research

Training) scholarship holder at both junior and senior level. She even bagged first prize in the Jnanabheri competitions and received an award from the then chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, Chandrababu Naidu.

Live orchestra on the occasion of her rangapravesam headed by Guru Y Hanumanth Rao on nattuvangam had Mukunda Praveen on vocals, CV Sudhakar on flute, CN Praneeth on veena; Kolanka Sai Kumar on violin; V Sridharachari on Mridangam and N Srinivas on Ghatam. Dr Perala Bala Murali Krishna, MD acted as compere for the occasion. The whole team did a fabulous job.

She began her recital with 'Bhamakalapam: Pravesa daruvu'. Kalapams are unique poetic compositions architected by Siddhendra Yogi. They can be called his gift to the art of Kuchipudi. Bhamakalapam revolved around the pranayakadha between Satyabhama and Krishna, the ensuing viraha of hers, shedding off her pride and ending in their coming together. The kalapam was embellished with patra pravesam (daruvu) and the character introduced herself with a song revealing the identity. Varshita as Satyabhama exuded grace as she presented the daruvu. They set the composition in raga Bhairavi and tala Misra chapu. It was written by Siddhendra Yogi.

She then presented 'Sri Vigna Rajam Bhaje'. This kriti was one of the unique compositions of Oothukadu Venkata Subbaiyer in the name of Lord Vinayaka. He beseeches the son of Lord Shankara and Devi Shankari. Varshita did a commendable job in portraying the story with her dance. The piece was set in raga Gambheera Nata and tala Khanda Chapu.



Varshita dancing on the brass plate



Varshita

She presented a tharangam, 'Govardhana Giridhara', one of the important pieces in a Kuchipudi recital. Tharangam means a wave and Varshita showcased it in her performance. The lyrics described Krishna who lifted the Govardhan mountain to shield his devotees from the wrath of Lord Indra, the King of Devas, in the form of rain and thunder. Episodes of Krishna as a baby stealing butter, as a youth teasing the gopikas and as the ever protecting Lord lifting the Govardhan mountain were depicted beautifully. The item concluded with a piece where the dancer matched the rhythmic patterns of the percussionist with her feet settled on the rim of a brass plate - a hallmark of Kuchipudi. The piece written by Narayana Theertha was set in raga Ragamalika and tala Adi.

'Ksheera Sagara Sayana', a composition of Tyagaraja, one from the musical trinity was presented brilliantly. This prolific composition imparted a definite direction and vibrant impulse to South Indian music. Tyagaraja as a composer is unrivalled, be it in his poetic ability or his mastery over music or his consummate skill as a musician. In 'Ksheera Sagara Sayana' he pours out of his heart and soul. Thyagaraja pleads with Rama to rescue him from this mundane existence. They set this popular composition in raga Devagandhari and tala Adi.

In 'Talaposi', the artiste portrayed as Sweeya, with her current mood as Vipralabda, finding her Lord indifferent to her. Nayika was separated from her nadha and ponders over her fascinating



Varshita

memories with him. She recollects the joyous moments spent in the company of her Lord. She describes the attributes of the nayaka, his lineage, his love and affection and asks her friends whether he will come to meet her and stay forever. Varshita's abhinaya must be appreciated. This Annamacharya composition was set in raga Nadanamakriya and tala Rupakam.

She then presented 'Viswamella', another piece written by Annamacharya. Hailed as Pada Kavitha Pitamaha, Annamacharya composed the piece about his ishta daivam Venkateswara in Gowla ragam Sankeerthana, thus Viswamella. The composition was set in raga Gowla and tala Adi.

She concluded her presentation with 'Thillana', a pure nritha piece. The brisk and attractive item was embellished with movements of torso, hands and feet. Her sculptural poses harmoniously balanced the intricate footwork. Sung in madhyama kala, the five Jathis are woven in such a manner to give scope to execute various permutations and combinations of the basic tala. The sahitya towards the end praised of Goddess Rajarajeshwari Devi. They set it

in raga Paras and tala Adi. Muthu Ramalinga Rajendra wrote it.

Prof. G. Nageswara Rao, vice-chancellor, Andhra University; Dr Alekhya Punjala registrar, Potti Sriramulu University; Mavuri Venkata Ramana, chairman, CMR Groups; Dr PV Sudhakar, principal/dean, Andhra Medical College; Sri Musunuru Apparao (Dolphin



Varshita

Apparao) and YV Naidu, ACP Dwarka subdivision, Visakha City, graced the occasion as guests of honour and blessed the young artiste. Pasumarthi Kesava Prasad, president of the academy, and co-ordinator, department of Kuchipudi Natyam, Krishna University, and Vempati Venkat, secretary of Kuchipudi Art Academy, Chennai, were also present.



Rajan

## @NAVI MUMBAI

The Dance India Magazine's monthly programme, Vedika in collaboration with Meenakshi Nritya Vidyalaya was held on May 31 at Nerul in Navi Mumbai.

The first half of the programme showcased Bharatnatyam. The performers were Nidhi Shetty and Anushri Pillai from the Minakshi Nritya Vidyalaya, Navi Mumbai. Under the able guidance of KV Rajan, they performed Pushpanjali, Chathushra Alarippu, Nateshkavitwam and Tillana. The dancers enthralled the audience with their postures, footwork and energy, which showcased the excellent training and blessings of their guru.





In the second half, Dr Purva Pandit and her students from 'Lasya Rang Foundation' presented Kathak. She is a Kathak exponent from Raigarh Gharana and received training in Kathak under guru Dr Suchitra Harmalkar. Dr Purva Pandit began her performance by worshipping Lord Shiva. 'Angikam Bhuvanam...' a shloka describing all the Abhinaya angas of dance was skilfully portrayed by her. Further, she presented taal - teen taal which included compositions of Raja Chakradhar Singh from Raigard Gharana. A Kavitta on Abhisarika Nayika and Kaali Paran, written by Dr Puru Dadheech, were highly appreciated by the audience.

The dance recital ended with a Shiva Stuti composed in Chautala, which was choreographed by Dr Purva Pandit. It was performed by her students Saayali Vispute, Himi Thapa and Jhalak Sakpal. The dancers received loud applause from the audience. The piece displayed unique choreography and creativity. Each and every dancer performed with great energy and skill. It was an excellent evening to remember.

- Julia Ghosh





**Kashmira Trivedi**

**@THANE**

The Dance India magazine was launched in July 2016 and it is nearing the completion of three successful years. The concept of organising monthly programmes for the upcoming artistes was



**Geeta Nritya Nidyalaya**



**Preeti Ghanekar**

initiated in its second year on the suggestion of Kashmiria Trivedi, chief coordinator for the magazine in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Since then, the concept was well received in Navi Mumbai, Dombivli, Kurla, Andheri, Ahmadabad and Vadodara. For the first time, The Dance India's monthly programme, VEDIKA in collaboration with Takshashila Nriryakala Mandir supported by Sanskruti Arts Festival was held at Upvan Amphitheater, Upvan Lake, Thane (West) on May 26. The programme received special support from Kathak exponent Mukta Joshi.



**Takshashila Nriryakala Mandir**

Vedika at Thane was inaugurated by Kashmiria Trivedi, the founder of



**Kathak Studio**



**Natraj Nritya Niketan**



**Sanskriti Academy of Fine Arts**

Takshashila Nrityakala Mandir along with Mukta Joshi and gurus and their disciple. The programme began with a Bharatnatyam performance by the students of Takshashila Nrityakala Mandir, disciples of Kashmira Trivedi - Vaishnavi Sawant, Arya More, Prathama Rahate, Isha Shendge and Sanika Devalekar.

The next presentation was given by disciples of Guru Girija Nair from Geeta Nritya Vidyalaya. Swarda Narkhede, Anupa Hariharan, Aakanksha Menon, Sarika Joshi, Kinjal Solanki performed beautiful Bharatnatyam. Next participants were disciples of Guru Priti Ghanekar from Natraj Nritya Niketan. She performed brilliant Kathak along with her students Gitanjali Sankpal, Shreya Survey, Ananya Ashar.

Aishwarya Shridhar, Nidhi Gaonkar, Sumita Menon and Netra Narayan, disciples of Guru Asha Sunil Kumar from Sanskriti Academic of Fine Arts, performed Bharatnatyam and mesmerised the audience with their presentation. Last but not the least Sayali Vispute, Hindi Thapa and Jhalak Sakpal, disciples of Guru Dr Purva Pandit from Lasya Rang Foundation's Kathak

Studio performed graceful Kathak. Guru Purva Pandit performed along with her students.

The programme concluded with the presentation of certificates of appreciation to the participants. Mukta Joshi honoured the participants with the certificates. Manoj Pillai, secretary of the Sanskruti Arts Festival was also present on the occasion.

- Kashmira Trivedi



Takshashila Nrityakala Mandir



Discussions



After Felicitation



**Samidha Shinde**

**@ANDHERI**

**V**edika, The Dance India magazine's monthly programme, has been an innovative concept of demonstrating and spreading the art of dance through lectures and demonstrations. The May edition of the programme organised in collaboration with SRSS Academy supported by Samidha Shinde was held at SRSS Academy in Bagarka College, Andheri, on May 20.



The programme began with the topic 'Taal' Carnatic music by Guru Manori Kadam. 'Taal' is an important aspect in a dancer's life and this was clearly demonstrated by the attendance of a number of students for this lecture. Manori Kadam is a renowned Bharatnatyam guru and dancer who has completed M.F.A from Bharata College of Fine Arts, Mumbai. She has multiple institutes running at Goregaon East and Malad. She started her lecture by explaining the meaning of 'Taal' and then explained Talangas with symbols and matras.

Manori interacted with students and tried to evaluate their knowledge with relevant examples. She added our natural daily life rhythm in Panch Jatis. Learning and playing panch jati was fun for the students. Her experience of teaching and many performances all over India with international experience proved to the audience her



mastery of Taal. She explained Sapta taal in detail to each student with practicals. Students wanted more when they played games on sharirik and mansik ganan kal. Manori exhibited good techniques for Laya and taught how to play three speeds on hand with patience.

Students enjoyed the calculation of Matras of sapta taal in a game format. The lecture ended with a question and answer round. A student requested for another lecture demonstration for further details in Taal.

**- Samidha Shinde**



# TRIBUTES



For his contributions, he received many prestigious awards including Shantala Award, Karnataka Music Dancing Academy Award, Karnataka Kala Tilak Puraskar, Raman Award to Indira Gandhi's Birthday Award and Karnataka Rajyotsava Award. He was a member of Karnataka Music Dance Academy during 1998-2001.

He was a personality par excellence who inculcated the traditional art form in a rigorous Guru-Shishya training system. The art fraternity will remember him for his contribution to the field of dance.

**KM Raman** was the founder of Rajarajeswari Dance Art Gallery and Rajarajeshwari Dancing Art Mandir Trust. He was originally from Nileswaram of Kasargod district. Born in 1930, he came to Tumkur in 1962 and founded the Rajarajeswari Dance Art Gallery.

The legendary Guru of Tumkur sowed the big banyan tree of knowledge of classical dance in Tumkur and has contributed extensively for the field of Bharatanatyam in various ways for the last several decades.

He breathed his last on May 29. His wife, Devaki Raman, died recently. He is survived by two daughters and three sons.



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'The Dance India' — a national English Monthly magazine is our humble attempt to capture the spirit and culture of art in all its diversity.

The magazine is an umbrella for various art forms in the fields of dance, music, literature and theatre that have existed for thousands of years. It also highlights the struggles and success of artistes across the globe. Like the 'mudras' in all dance forms, we have through our articles tried to express the importance and significance of art as well as to entertain.

It is our honour to document lives and times of dancers, musicians, authors, various artistes and critics who have made art popular. We salute their efforts and endeavour to pass it on to the next generation.

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