

THE DANCE INDIA

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THE STORY OF Dr MAYA RAO

TORCH BEARERS

BHARATI SHIVAJI:
A NAME SYNONYMOUS
WITH MOHINIYATTAM





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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

Where is the cultural policy of India?

Some great minds initiated and developed a cultural policy at UNESCO in the 1960s to develop culture across the globe. Simultaneously, around 160 countries around the globe implemented their cultural policies. India being a land of culture and heritage has, however, not yet implemented any such policy.

One may ask, why does a country like India need a cultural policy? Every country has been showcasing their rich art, culture and heritage in a grand manner but India has refrained from doing so because of lack of funds, the lapse of administration or because of political corruption. The Cultural Policy in India has vanished. In England, for example, the cultural policy provides for a sum of 360 pounds to junior artistes and the amount goes up according to their seniority. Even theatres and corporate houses have been playing a vital role in establishing and supporting art and culture in a big way. Artistes receive basic wages to survive and continue performing their art. The Government of England collects 20 per cent from wages as tax but in return, the artiste receives medical and personal insurance.

However, in India, the artistes have no proper income. The little financial help that has been allocated goes to renowned gurus, corrupt individuals or people with influence. Corruption has marred even the government cultural bodies. Under these circumstances, the appeal from the art community to the new government which will be sworn in soon for the next five years is to develop a sound cultural policy that facilitates the welfare of artistes and helps in enriching our cultural heritage. The policy needs to be developed with a sense of urgency before the young artistes lose interest in pursuing arts at a professional level.

Jai Hind!

BR Vikram Kumar

TORCH BEARERS



BHARATI SHIVAJI: A NAME SYNONYMOUS WITH MOHINIYATTAM

Text: Paul Nicodemus



She is a unique combination of a performer, choreographer, researcher, author and guru -- someone who has widened the horizons of Mohiniyattam, the exquisite and graceful dance form of Kerala and put it on the world map. Today, Bharati Shivaji is a name synonymous with Mohiniyattam.

She was born in Kumbakonam, Thanjavur and her maternal family have been performers of the traditional Bhagavata Mela. Her mother, Shankari Krishnamurthy was a Carnatic musician and a disciple of Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer. Her family migrated to the north as her father, Krishnamurthy Iyer, got a job at Tata, Jamshedpur. Her mother was keen on making her learn Bharatanatyam but in Jamshedpur, there were no Bharatanatyam teachers. So she brought down a Bharatanatyam teacher from Madras to teach Bharati when she was 8 years old. Soon, several

Pic: Paul Nicodemus



Bharati Shivaji

Bharati Shivaji



other south Indian families sent their children to learn Bharatanatyam. Her first Bharatanatyam teacher was Guru Janakiraman, while her mother sang for her.

As Bharati grew up she started performing in the steel cities like Bokaro, Bhilai, Durgapur and others. However, her first stint in dance came to an end when she got married to D Shivaji, a chartered accountant, in 1965. Later, her husband got a job in one of the public sectors and the couple moved to Delhi. Life took a different turn once she arrived in Delhi. One day in the late '60s, she chanced upon the Sangeet Natak Akademi and met her guru Lalita Shastri from Kalakshetra. She resumed her dance training under her but the style was different from her earlier teacher. Her former guru taught her the Vazhuvoor style, and the latter taught her the Pandanallur style. Under guru Lalitha, she again started from the basics. In 1970, she went on her maiden trip abroad. "It was wonderful to get back to dance. I once again resumed my training. Opportunities flowed in a big city like Delhi and I accompanied my guru to Japan which was led by Sonal Mansingh," she says.

Bharati Shivaji's guru always projected her and she performed on various occasions. Soon, she received a national scholarship to pursue advanced training in



Mohiniyattam Collective, an exhibition held by Centre for Mohiniyattam featuring all the gurus and practitioners of Mohiniyattam



Bharati with Kavalam Narayana Panicker during a Mohiniyattam seminar at Kerala Sangeet Natak Akademi in Trichur

Bharatanatyam from the ministry of culture. Jamshedpur was a small town with limited exposure but in Delhi, many things happened around her and she had time to witness many dance forms. "During those days, I had a wider exposure to dance. It was a wonderful period," she says. That was the time Odissi was becoming popular in Delhi and she met some Odissi dancers. Those days it was mandatory for students of dance to learn music. As a child, she was always interested in learning Hindustani music despite her mother being a Carnatic musician. She loved the melody in Hindustani music and learnt it from Sangeet Samaj, an institute in Jamshedpur. "I never realised all the little things of life like learning Hindustani music would come in handy one day," she says. One day, she met Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and Trinath Maharana. By then, Guru Kelucharan was working on developing the repertoire of Odissi. It was a period when Indian classical dances were being structured and classified. "Guruji asked me to learn Odissi. That was also a time when Odissi had two great artistes, Sanjukta Panigrahi and Sonal Mansingh. So for a brief period, I had a unique opportunity to sing for Odissi dancers. The Odissi music at the time was a blend of both Carnatic and Hindustani music. I was witness to all the good



Bharati with Vijayalakshmi at Kochi with Parashurama statue in the background

work that was being done in Odissi. It was an enriching and learning experience for me to listen to Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Bhubaneswar Mishra and Raghunath Panigrahi," she shares. It was then that she learnt the basics of Odissi. The technique of Odissi differed from Bharatanatyam.

In the mid-'70s, Bharati happened to watch 'An Evening of Indian Classical Dance' in Delhi. On the evening, Indrani Rahman performed Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Kuchipudi and Mohiniyattam. "She had such a beautiful stage presence and for the first time in my life, I watched



Bharati Shivaji

a Mohiniyattam performance. She herself looked like an enchantress. The performance completely fascinated me and I went backstage to inquire about the guru who taught Indrani this dance form," she says. Indrani told her she learnt from Chinnamuamma in Kalamandalam. But she realised that she may not be able to go to Kerala. Bharati was so smitten by the dance form that she discussed it among her friends. A well-known dance critic of the time told her he found somebody in Delhi who might teach her Mohiniattam. That's how she came to know about Radha Marar from Kalamandalam, who

Receiving the title 'Kalarathnam' from Kerala Kalamandalam deemed university.



was at Natya Ballet Centre in Delhi. "It thrilled me to know that I need not go to Kerala and yet learn Mohiniyattam. I met her and requested her to teach me the dance form," she says. In the beginning, Radha expressed disbelief that somebody wanted to learn Mohiniyattam in Delhi. She taught Bharati the basics of Mohiniyattam and Bharati thoroughly enjoyed it.

After learning for a while, she felt the movements were repetitive and limited. She completed learning the basics in no time as she was from a Bharatanatyam discipline. She often wondered what would have potentially gone wrong with such a beautiful art form. At a time when she

knew that a lot was being done with Odissi, she questioned why it could not be done for Mohiniyattam. Being a witness to Odissi's structuring process and given her strong training in Bharatanatyam, she felt the vocabulary of Mohiniyattam could be developed as it had great potential.

However, she continued to perform whatever little Mohiniyattam she had learnt and one evening at the India International Centre in Delhi, she performed. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a great visionary, freedom fighter and someone who contributed immensely in the revival of many dying indigenous art forms of India post



Receiving the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award



Bharati receiving the Nritya Choodamani Award at Sri Krishna Gana Sabha from Maharani of Travancore

Bharati Shivaji



Bharati aged 9 years in a Bharatanatyam pose in Jamshedpur

Independence witnessed her performance. She was not only the president of India International Centre but by then she was also the chairperson of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. The next day, Bharati received a message from the Sangeet Natak Akademi stating the chairperson wanted to meet her. "I went into her room and she said that she has been wanting to do something for Mohiniyattam. She wanted an artiste to take up the project under the initiation of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. She asked if I was willing to take up the project. I went in expecting rebuttal and in turn, she offered me this opportunity. I simply answered 'Yes' without knowing what I was getting into. I was so excited," she reveals.

Bharati receiving Torchbearer Award from The Dance India



Bharati with the Edakka maestro Pallavur Appu Marar



After a few days, she again went back to Kamaladevi's office, and she was introduced to Kavalam Narayana Panicker, one of the most illustrious authorities in theatre in the country and was told that she would work with him. She had no idea about his background. At the behest of the late Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, she undertook research in Mohiniyattam under a fellowship scheme from the Sangeet Natak Akademi. For further research, she received yet another senior fellowship from the department of culture, ministry of HRD, Government of India.

Her family dissuaded her from taking up the project as she knew nobody in Kerala. But she went to Kerala and upon reaching, she came to know about Kavalam Panicker and what a great luminary he was. He was a poet, lyricist, theatre personality and the greatest authority on the folklore tradition of Kerala. "In the first few visits, Kavalam sir introduced and exposed me to the vibrant cultural scene of Kerala. I was from Tamil Nadu and it was amazing to see the neighbouring state with such a distinct and indigenous culture. He sent me to various places and sometimes accompanied me. It

was a fantastic experience to watch the several indigenous art traditions of Kerala," she says.

Her first-hand encounters with the traditions and culture of Kerala helped her deduce a connection with lasya of Mohiniyattam. With Kavalam Panicker as her guide, her interactions with the artistes of Kerala helped her to weave the inner threads of Mohiniyattam. "Kerala is a magical place where you get the rich tala traditions of India," she says. Over time, she met artistes, scholars and historians who guided her to understand the essence of regional culture in Kerala. "My entire approach to Mohiniyattam has been a holistic one," she explains. Her pursuit of Mohiniyattam also started her into other regional art forms of Kerala thus enabling her to imbibe the aesthetics of Mohiniyattam not in isolation but in the significant relation to the inter-disciplinary traditions of Kerala, be it theatre, music, sculpture, painting, architecture and literature. She embarked on a process of assimilating elements from various art forms in which she discerned an affinity with lasya, the feminine spirit which constitutes the quintessence of Mohiniyattam.

Bharati Shivaji



According to historical evidences Mohiniyattam originated from Trivandrum during the period of Swati Tirunal. Everything survived as an oral tradition and nothing was documented. So it only thrived in Travancore. Mohiniyattam in isolation had a limited repertoire. Swati Tirunal designed it with the help of the Thanjavur Quartet. Tirunal was a great scholar who patronised arts and with their help, by including local content, he tried to give Mohiniyattam a certain stature. Sugandavalli, a devadasi who accompanied the Thanjavur quartet, performed the repertoire.

Bharati's exposure to regional art forms of Kerala made her think about incorporating the regional aspects into the repertoire of Mohiniyattam and give it a regional identity. "Otherwise, it would be like Bharatanatyam in a white costume. I felt that every dance form has a certain regional influence. Other dance forms like Odissi and Bharatanatyam have their own identity, but why not in Mohiniyattam? Kavalam sir was of great help and it would not have happened but for him. Whatever I did, I did under his vision and guidance," she explains.

"Now that we collected everything why don't we create a new repertoire," he said to her. That was how she came up with a new format, a new repertoire where they



Bharati with Guru Kalyanikutty Amma and Prof. Kalamandalam Sathyabhama

created few items which reflected all the observations and experiences. It took a few years for her to do it as she believed it needed to be done with conviction.

It was a challenge for her to establish her work as opposition and criticism came her way because she did not belong to Kerala. "It is natural for people to criticise because I did not belong to Kerala. They felt someone from another state should not tell them about their traditions. That only made my conviction clearer. If Mohiniyattam needed to have its own identity, its own standing in the field of Indian Classical dance, then this is how it should be. My repertoire is different, and it reflected my research," she says.

She was someone who believed collecting information and speaking about it was not enough. As a performer, she tried to translate her research and observation into choreography, for people to see. "My work is performance oriented," she says. Her work has been documented by the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Her association with Mohiniyattam has been at various levels. "At an emotional level, I simply loved it like a mother would love her child - unconditionally. I felt that it needed to be nourished and enriched. All the time, I had a maternal concern for it. I wanted the world to appreciate it and widen the viewership. I could successfully do it with my performances being essentially a performer," she explains.

After successfully establishing the art form, much later, she tried to further widen the art form by writing books about it. Her research into the cultural legacy of Kerala culminated in the publication of her book, 'The Art of Mohiniyattam', making it one of the most illuminating works on the form and spirit of Mohiniyattam. She authored another book titled 'Mohiniyattam', and Abdul Kalam, the former President of India, released it at



With Kavalam and other members during a Mohiniyattam workshop in Calicut, Kerala.

Rashtrapati Bhavan in 2004. "There have been challenges but people who have always supported me were scholars and historians. Today, I am happy that the awareness of Mohiniyattam has caught on with the coming generation and they have been researching about it at a holistic level," she says. Currently, she is working on the aesthetics of Mohiniyattam.

In 1984, she established an institute for Mohiniyattam titled 'Kalambalam' in Delhi. In 1995, it was renamed the Centre For Mohiniyattam (CFM). "TN Seshan, a former Chief Election Commissioner of India agreed to be the first president of the institution," she says. CFM's activities involve research, training, documentation and propagation of Mohiniyattam. Her daughter Vijayalakshmi has taken to Mohiniyattam seriously and established an institution in the USA.

Bharati has done extensive work on the Geeta Govinda tradition which has been prevalent in the temples of Kerala. Bharati has added a new dimension to Mohiniyattam by successfully presenting innovative group choreographic productions, including Chandrotsavam, Soma-Stuthi, Deva-Githa, Athira and Swan Lake (a concept by Vijayalakshmi). Her wide



Bharati Shivaji



With Odissi guru Kelucharan Mohapatra in Konarak, Odisha.

experience researching into the interdisciplinary traditions led her to choreograph some classic plays in the theatre. She worked as a choreographer for Kavalam Narayana Panicker's 'Dhootavakyam', National School of Drama's 'Abhigyana Shakuntalam' directed by Kumara Verma, and 'Viddyottama' directed by Mohan Maharishi.

Apart from performing extensively both within the country and abroad, she has also produced documentary films on Mohiniyattam for Doordarshan and Films Division. Over the years, through innumerable presentations, Bharati has played a significant role in not only starting and kindling interest in audiences within the country and



Nataraj Samman Award to gurus in Bangalore Bharati Shivaji, Yamini Krishnamurthy, Vyjayanthimala, Pandit Birju Maharaj and Sonal Mansingh

abroad but adding a refreshing dimension to Mohiniyattam.

For her contributions she has received many awards and accolades including the title of Lasya Lakshmi by the Kunchan Nambiar Memorial Trust, Kerala; Sahitya Kala Parishad Samman by the Delhi Administration; the title of Nritya Choodamani by the Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai; felicitation at the Theatre de la Ville, France by the Mayor of Paris, for being a one-woman crusade in popularising Mohiniyattam; the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award; Padma Shri by the Government of India; the title of 'Kalaratana' by Kerala Kalamandalam, the Government of Kerala and Torchbearer Award from The Dance India magazine on the occasion of International Women's Day..

Bharati Shivaji has performed widely all over the world including the US, Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe and Mexico. In 2002, she was invited to perform at the prestigious International Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, UK, where it was for the first time in history that Mohiniyattam was presented. In 2005, she had the rare honour of being invited to present Swan Lake at the world-famous Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, and the Conservatory Theatre in St. Petersburg, organised by the department of culture, Government of India. Another unique honour for Bharati Shivaji was to be invited to choreograph Mohiniyattam, in the classical dance segment for the Opening Ceremony of the Commonwealth Games held in October 2011 at New Delhi.

"The younger generation have to remember and practice two important things -- humility and gratitude. They are essential. Today, youngsters learn two pieces from a guru and they become great gurus themselves. What

have they learnt? One's lifetime is not enough to learn an art form. The thought keeps you grounded," she concludes.

"Mohiniyattam is a powerful, graceful art form for, grace has its own power" - Bharati Shivaji



Bharati at Kochi Palace Museum

COVER
STORY



THE
STORY
OF
Dr MAYA RAO



THE STORY OF DR MAYA RAO



Text: **Chitra Venugopal**, Sister of Dr Maya Rao

"Sanjiva Villa" is the name of the place where the story begins. A sprawling bungalow opposite Malleswaram railway station, nestled amidst lush green orchards, this was the abode of Hattangady Sanjiva Rao and his wife Lalita Bai (Subhadra). To them was born Maya Rao preceded by Manohar and Ramesh followed by Shivaram, Uma and Chitra. They were amongst the early pioneers who settled in Bangalore and contributed to the welfare of the Saraswat community.

Maya, born after the two elder brothers, was more a tomboy in her youth but gifted with a melodious voice. She showed interest in music and was trained in both vocal and instrumental by Katta Rama Rao. She was nurtured in a family which patronised music and culture. The children were always a part of the many cultural events and programmes featured at the Town Hall.

Maya's passion for choreography started while she was a student at Kamalabai's Girls School, where she headed the dance club. Later at college she choreographed lots of one-act dance dramas along with her dancer classmates. Some of these were Art and Life (lyrics by TaRaSu the famous Kannada writer), Seetha Apaharan and Grow More Food. It was on one of the college day programmes, the musicians did not turn up and as providence had it, Nataraj, who had come to accompany some singers, helped her out with the music as he had top vidvans in his Saraswathi orchestra. They later collaborated and started the Natya Saraswathi, the school of dance.

The entry of Udaya Shankar and Ramgopal in Bangalore scenario was the starting point of Maya's journey in dance. Sohanlal, who performed in Ramgopal's troupe was an impressive Kathak dancer. My father was fascinated by him and he decided to engage Sohanlal as a tutor for his daughters.

Her ambition to pursue dance as a profession took her to Jaipur, where she wanted to specialise in Kathak. But she found that all the Kathak Gurus had moved out of Rajasthan to seek new avenues. Hence she went to Ceylon, where her brother Manohar introduced her to Chitra Sena, an exponent of Kandyani dance. In 1954, she was selected by the Government of India, New Delhi, for a scholarship to learn and research in Kathak. She



**Chitra Venugopal, Maya Rao and
Dr Suparna Venkatesh**

was under the tutelage of Gurus Shambhu Maharaj and Sunder Prasad. A research facility was available in Sangeet Natak Akademi. Incidentally, she was the first South Indian to receive this scholarship.

The turning point in her life commenced when she was selected to specialise in ballet and choreography in Moscow, Soviet Union. She came back to India in 1964 and established her dance school 'Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography' in New Delhi under the guidance and help of Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. The school was moved to Bangalore in 1987 as the Late Shri Ramakrishna Hegde was keen to have it here as Maya was from Karnataka.

Maya was given the charge to conduct the SAARC dance festival, organised by the Government of Karnataka, for the SAARC summit. Seeing her ability as an organiser, she was made the chairman of the Sangeetha Nritya Academy. She started for the first time the dance festivals at all the Heritage Tourist places in Karnataka. Though she was based out of New Delhi for 25 years, Maya was connected with Karnataka state. She choreographed ballets like Hoysala Vaibhava, Ramayana Darshan by Kuvempu, and Basaveshwara, to name a few before she shifted to Bangalore.

Maya rose to greater heights producing historic Sanskrit and contemporary ballets. The school also continued diploma and degree courses in dance and choreography and is now affiliated to Bangalore University.



Maya earned several laurels including gold medal at the dance festival in Helsinki, Sangeet Natak Academy award in 1987, Shantala award, Tagore award, Karnataka Rajyotsava award, Kala Shri award, HRDA emeritus and a doctorate from Bangalore University.

Maya has trained and produced talented artistes who are well established in India and abroad propagating Kathak and establishing their own schools. This had been her passion and ambition of handing over the baton to the younger generation to keep the flame burning. Her daughter, Madhu Nataraj, has now taken over responsibilities as director.

Her last ballet before she departed from this world, was "Kathak through the Ages", which was very dear to her heart. It was in 2014 during the 50th year of Natya Institute. Three weeks later, she left this world for a heavenly abode.

To Maya, teaching dance was a sadhana and as a guru, she spared no pains in passing on her knowledge to her devoted disciples in the true Gurukula tradition.

That is the story of Dr Maya Rao.

GURU MAYA RAO: A TEACHER, ADMINISTRATOR AND EDUCATOR



Text: Sai Venkatesh

I met Dr Maya Rao in 1984, during the first dance workshop conducted in Karnataka. Later, I went to Delhi for a 3-year diploma in dance choreography under Dr Maya Rao at Natya Institute of Choreography (NIC). The institute shifted to Bangalore in 1987 and I worked as a manager of Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography (NIKC) for more than 25 years with Maya didi.

Guru Dr Maya Rao started her life as an English teacher, but destiny had other plans. Blessed by Lord Nataraja, she became a world-renowned dance teacher, choreographer and a professional in presentation and preparation. Her dream to promote Kathak and choreography made her start an institution in New Delhi, to impart professional training to professional dancers. Natya Institute of Choreography (NIC) started in 1964 was filled by dancers from all over the globe. Her in-depth knowledge on Natya Shastra, world history on

dance, Indian dance forms, and folk forms attracted lots of dancers.

Dancers from Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi, Tamil Nadu and other parts of India also joined the institute including Chaotombi Singh from Manipur, Bansilal Dogra from Jammu Kashmir, Deepti Gupta from Canada, Dorothy from New York, Helen Acharya from Delhi, Nassif Anna from USA, Nayana More and Vijaya Marthanda from Karnataka, Raja Radha Reddy from Andhra Pradesh, Prakash Yeddegudde from UK, Satyanarayan Charkha from USA, and Sonar Chand from Manipur.

Natya Institute of Kathak and Choreography (NIKC) started in 1987, in Bangalore, Karnataka, and for the first time a kathak and choreography institute was established in southern India. Maya didi trained numerous dancers both in Kathak and choreography,



Maya Rao with Dr Suparna, Shwetha and Sai Venkatesh



Maya Rao with Chitra Viswesaran



On the occasion of Basant Panchami



Guru Maya Rao

at NIKC, a body affiliated with the Bangalore University. Dancers received bachelor degree in choreography. She had a vision that all graduates would get jobs and stand up as professionals to do more research work and establish themselves at national and international levels. Maya didi started the performing unit which travelled and presented both Kathak and choreographic works in the form of dance features or dance dramas or dance ballets all over the world, Maya didi's interest to present, promote our art and culture started in 1947 with the establishment of "Natya Saraswathi Dance and Music Centre" along with her scholarly husband MS Nataraj, a musicologist, who played both string and wind instruments. A big team of musicians and dancers joined together to present small dance themes, social, historical and mythological. The troupe travelled all over the country.

A visionary, with utmost professional calibre, Maya didi attracted many dancers from all over the world, and worked with reputed dance choreographers in India and abroad. Her home or institute created this atmosphere and a relationship that lasted long.



Maya Rao with her disciples



Maya Rao with Sai Venkatesh

DR MAYA RAO: GURU PAR EXCELLENCE



Text: **Vijaya Marthanda**

It was a day in June 1969 when I was awaiting my B.A. final results that Maya didi visited us. During our conversation, she casually asked me about my next career move after graduation. Like everyone else, I expressed my interest in Masters, of course with my dance practice on. She paused for a while and suggested that I take up a 3-year diploma in choreography training at Delhi on Mysore State Academy Scholarship. I jumped at the idea and saw my father's illuminated face of approval.

Instantly, Natumama, as we fondly called MS Natraj, invited me to join the Mysore state cultural troupe travelling to Jammu & Kashmir and Haryana to perform Bharatanatyam and later to join the Natya Institute of Choreography course at New Delhi. After a successful tour, my training period started in Delhi. As I watched my seniors dancing, composing and directing, I was shaken a bit. But Maya didi, who watched my expressions, convinced me that everybody goes through this phase. Soon with her guidance, I started my work at a slow pace. But I picked up the thread of creative work with the guidance of illustrious teachers like Maya didi teaching the Art of Choreography, Sri Anil Biswas for Mood & Dance music, Sri. Habib Tanvir and Smt. Monica Misra Tanvir on theatre, mime and movement, and Sri. Inder Razdan on stage settings, who instilled the knowledge of allied arts on choreography. Whatever the creative work or idea I think of, I owe it to my wonderful teachers.



Vijaya Marthanda, Maya Rao and Nayana Morey



Maya Rao and Chitra Rao in a dance class

Some of my unforgettable experiences at the Natya Institute were Maya didi's ballet productions like Ramayana Darshana for Kuvempu's Jnanpith Prashathi at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi. Anilda, who scored the music for the ballet, began singing which was so divine that it brought tears in our eyes before entering the stage. The music lingers in my ears even to this day. Next was our performance Hoysalavaibhava, inside the Belur temple, where the Hoysala queen Rani Shantala Devi used to dance. We were all in tears throughout the performance and felt like we were in heaven. Likewise, Maya didi's ballet productions went on with the Vision of Amir Khusro, Pulikeshi, Basaveshwara, Venkateswara Vaibhava and so on.

The institute's production of contemporary ballets like Miss Bottle, Jawan, Ateet Vartaman, had its own flavour. I must say I was very fortunate to be a part of all these ballets. Apart from this, we had a novel experience of mingling with artists from other states and getting to know about their regional dances. It was Maya didi's maiden effort to bring in all the elements of a traditional theatre through the Sanskrit ballet productions by the students. The Poorvarang and Asaarita interpretation were regional. We learnt a lot and it was an awesome experience which I cherish even today. It was Maya didi who introduced dance theory and stressed that dancers should study theory, to create and practice while composing and choreographing new ballets.

Having associated with her for three to four decades, I had the opportunity to share and learn a lot at the institute. She guided me at every stage - in theory, huge



Guru Maya Rao

productions on grants from the HRD ministry, research projects and dance school productions. She made me interact with many veteran artists, scholars and diplomats of the country and outside during my tenure at the institute. I had the privilege of being a member of her troupe which visited foreign countries on cultural exchange programs through ICCR.



Family

Indeed it was a sublime experience and profound learning in every way during my association with the legendary Maya Didi. I hope that her blessings continue in all my endeavours in future.

Maya Rao with her family members



BELOVED GURU DR MAYA RAO



Text: **Keremane Shivananda Hegde**,
Yakshagana Artiste, Guru, Director, and Choreographer.

I cherish the memory of attending the birthday celebration of gracious Guru Dr Maya Rao, our dear most 'Didi'. It was a Friday morning on May 2, 2014. Didi was stepping into her 86th year. Many of her students, followers, well-wishers and eminent personalities like Vimala Rangachar, R Ganesh, Veena Murti, Ashish Khokar and many more had gathered to celebrate the auspicious function.

Students had arranged a screening of a documentary on the glimpses of her art journey. As she entered the institute, as usual, she was welcomed with warm birthday greetings by all of us which was a surprise to her. A person who followed the mantra of simple living and high thinking, a person who breathed dance in every moment of her life, as she entered, she appeared to be 'Natya Saraswathi, personified.

The gathering had an opportunity to chat with her. Madhu Nataraj, didi's daughter, who is a well-known Kathak and contemporary dancer herself, asked her mother, "Which art form you like most apart from Kathak?" Didi answered immediately and said, "Yakshagana" with a smile on her face. We were thrilled by her reply. She, being an ardent student of Kathak maestro Shambhu Maharaj, being the first to venture out of India to learn choreography in USSR, being a guru and inspiration to world-renowned artistes (Keremane Shambhu Hegde, Raja, Radha Reddy, Sonarchand, Choutambi Singh, Satyanarayana Charaka and many more) and one who has studied extensively, dancers of the world and one who designed and implemented choreography course for the first time in India, expressing her utmost love to Yakshagana made all of us immensely happy and proud.



Maya Rao with Shivananda Hegde



Guru Maya Rao with Keremane Shivarama Hegde

Guru Dr Maya Rao's love for Yakshagana is not something recent. And it goes beyond just love. The depth at which she connected and understood the art form was amazing. Destiny brought together, Guru Maya Rao and MS Natarajan, an established renowned musician and composer, who managed a troupe Saraswathi Orchestra (later became Natya Saraswathi) and was touring all over the country since 1947. They used to take Yakshagana and other folk artistes along with them. Upon her return from Russia in 1964, with the help of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the then vice-chairperson of Sangeet Natak Akademi, she started the Natya Institute of Choreography in Delhi under the aegis of the 'Bharatiya Natya Sangh'. Keeping New Delhi as the centre of her activities, Maya Rao and Natarajan created a lot of opportunities to the artistes of Karnataka especially Yakshagana. Whenever they visited Karnataka, they interacted with eminent Yakshagana artists like Bannada Maalinga, Keremane Shivarama Hegde, Bannada Kuttiyappu, Guru Veerabhadra Naik, Kushtha Ganiga, Kokkarne Narasimha Kamti to name a few. Documentation of the art and exposure of the artistes to a wider audience (which included artistes from other art forms) was always an important part of her work. She called Bannada Kuttiyappu to Delhi and arranged a lecture demonstration on Yakshagana. She also arranged the first ever full-fledged performance of Yakshagana and invited our troupe to Idagunji Mela at Sapru House, New Delhi in 1968. It was the act (Prasanga) of 'Karna Parva' and Jarasandha Vadha for Doodarshan, encapsulating the various traditional



Maya Rao honoured by senior student Keremane Shambhu Hegde and his wife

aspects of the form such as song, dance and drama. People of Delhi for the first time relished every moment of this accomplishment. Thus, this became a historical event in the journey of Yakshagana. It is not an exaggeration to say Dr Maya Rao was the first woman from Karnataka who worked towards popularising Yakshagana outside of the state and beyond. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's blessings and help towards this end made Dr Maya Rao convert her vision to reality.

Yakshagana always had an important place in most of her choreographies and performances not only in India but also abroad. There always used to be a pupil from Yakshagana in her choreography institute and she always used to be proud of this fact. Keremane Shambhu Hegde, my beloved father, was the first student from

Karnataka to train under her guidance and he was also part of the first batch of the choreography course designed by her. Didi treated him like her own family member and for my father, she was a second mother throughout his life.

Maya Rao always respected Yakshagana in its traditional form. She opposed crafting, grafting and mixing of other dance forms. However, she encouraged creativity that added value to the tradition. She expected that all her students adhered to this basic principle while working and improvising with any art form. Didi never used to discriminate between the art forms. Nor did she have any hatred, jealousy or ignorance towards anyone. Rather she interestingly understood the potential and looked at the creative possibilities of art forms, appreciating and respecting the culture and tradition.



Padma Subrahmanyam and Maya Rao



Group dance choreography by Maya Rao

She had great care regarding the growth and development of Yakshagana. She did not like populist meaningless approach to attract the audience. And was a severe critic of unhealthy gimmicks used in Rangbhumi. Despite being at a distant city like Delhi she always kept in touch with the artistes of Yakshagana in Bangalore and was updated about the state of Yakshagana starting from the bayalatas (open field play) to the tent troupes in the villages and also other experimental performances of Yakshagana including those of Dr Shivaram Karant. There was always a reference to Yakshagana in whatever she did - Seminars, workshops, speeches, writings, cultural delegations, etc. She had the vision of both scholar and a performer simultaneously. We feel proud and happy to acknowledge that Guru Dr Maya Rao was a Queen of Kathak and choreography - a walking encyclopaedia of many art forms.

I was fortunate to have a close association with Maya didi since 1985. It was a time when I was in Delhi, my batch mates and myself, all of us were scared of her. But it was only in the classroom. She was like a mother to all of us outside the classroom. Her affection for the students was invaluable. This can be seen throughout her life in her utmost devotion towards the betterment of her pupils. Nevertheless, she did not compromise with the discipline and quality of learning in her lessons. Once when her best and favourite students, my father, and Satyanarayana Charaka, arrived late to the choreography exam by two minutes, she did not allow them to appear for the exam and they had to retake the choreography exam. Once I enacted Rama's role in the famous Ram Leela at Delhi Ramaleela ground till midnight and attended her classes the next morning. I dozed off in the class and didi sprinkled water on my face to wake me up.

Didi admired my role of Amir Khusro during the Kathak festival in Lucknow in 1986. She introduced me to a lot of performers, scholars and dignitaries as an upcoming



Maya Rao wearing Ghungroos

Yakshagana artiste and son of Shambhu Hegde. I am blessed with a thousand such proud moments. The saying "Vajradapi Kathoraani Mrudooni Kusumaadapi" (The heart of the holy and noble souls is harder than a diamond and softer than flower) takes meaning when we look at personalities like her.

It was the blessings of Maya Didi on my father and myself that made us develop Yakshagana. In fact, we learnt the art of bringing changes and innovation within the framework by adhering to its tradition from her. Her support and guidance enabled us to keep purity, loyalty, ethics in our profession and other paraphernalia of Yakshagana such as stage direction, stage techniques and choreography.

She opened our eyes to visualise the beauty of various art forms. She taught how to appreciate them sincerely. Her primary lesson was that art is greater than the individual (artiste) and she illustrated this at every step of her life. She wrote a new chapter in Indian art arena by bridging and bringing harmony among different art forms. I think this is one of her greatest contributions to the world of art. Her immense efforts in upholding the essence of the arts, her simplicity, stage discipline, no compromising with the quality of practice and productions, appreciating traditions, deep knowledge and experience working with art and artists, farsightedness makes her and her work comparable to the depth and width of an ocean.

Maya Didi gave us eyes to see the beauty in art and hearts to love them. She stands as an ever shining lamp in the hearts of millions of art lovers. She may not be with us today physically but her spirit lives in our hearts forever.



Sunder Prasad, Shambhu Maharaj, Chitra Venugopal, Birju Maharaj and Maya Rao

MY MEMORABLE JOURNEY IN LIFE WITH DR MAYA RAO



Text: **Nayana S Moray**, Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi and Odissi Artiste.

At the age of 15 years, the Karnataka government offered me a scholarship to further specialise in dance, at which point I had the privilege of being selected by Dr Maya Rao for an advanced course in Kathak and Choreography at her institute in New Delhi. With this, my journey in life with Dr Maya Rao began and lasted for about five decades. In this long journey of five decades, I gained knowledge and shared a memorable loving bond with Guru Maya Rao which left a great void in my life today.

I was the first scholarship candidate from Karnataka for this course and I completed it with distinction. I went to become the principal at the Natya College of Kathak and Choreography, Bangalore founded by Dr Maya Rao.



A Governor, his wife, Maya Rao and Padma Subrahmanyam

Throughout these five decades of association with Dr Maya Rao, I have earned a special place in her heart with dedicated hard work and perseverance. I performed in the lead roles in Maya ji's major ballets like Hoysala Vaibhava and Basaveshwara to name a few. I travelled and performed across India and even overseas with Dr Maya Rao and earned great applause.

Maya Rao with his family



Maya Rao was one of the first women from southern India to learn Kathak

MRUNMAYEE MESMERISES

Text: BR Vikram Kumar



Through the vocabulary of hand gestures, postures and facial expressions, execution of the stance with knees bent and turned outward, she performed like an expert dancer. All these movements flowed together gracefully. The Arangetram of Kumari MT Mrunmayee presented by Nrithyathi Kalakshetram was held at the SNGDS Auditorium, Sector 4 in Bhilai, Chhattisgarh, on April 6. It was the 26th Arangetram of Nrithyathi Kalakshetram. The artiste was a disciple and daughter of Guru Dr G Ratheesh Babu (a disciple of Kalaimamani Adyar K Lakshman of Chennai).



Mrunmayee



The arangetram began with a set of songs invoking the Gods in an item named Thodaya Mangalam in raga and tala Malika. The line started with 'Jaya Janaki Ramana, Jaya Vibheeshana Sarana, Jaya Saroruha Charana, Jaya Dheena Karuna Jaya, Jaya', meaning 'A Victory To The Sweetheart Of Sita, A Victory To Him Who Gave Refuge To Vibheeshana, Victory To The One With Lotus-Like Feet, Victory To One Merciful Towards One In Distress Victory, Victory.'

Following the piece, Mrunmayee spun onto the stage with an aura of splendour as she danced to the traditional Alarippu in Tishrajathi. Alarippu means 'a flowering bud'. It was an invocatory piece meaning it was performed before a dancer begins a whole performance. Mrunmayee drew every eye through her impassioned naatya.



Dr VP Dhananjayan and Shanta Dhananjayan

The 'Nateshwar Kauthuvam' was a dance in praise of Lord Shiva, the third god in the Trinity. He is the god of destruction as well as the god of dance in his 'Nataraja' form. Here, Mrunmayee performed the fast-paced piece with beautiful poses of Natesha (Shiva). She represented his abhinaya, the one who is worshipped by all the sages and demons; and who dances with a drum in one hand.

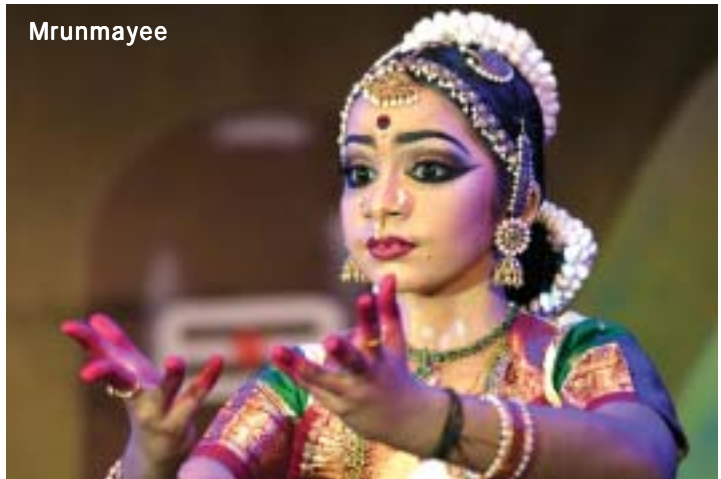
Another Nritya piece Jatiswaram, Tanjore quartets composition in Kalyani ragam and Rupaka talam, was performed with perfect precision in every stride, strength in the posture for

every leap, elegant mudras during every stretch in the performance. Mrunmayee showed her perfection in footwork through this dance.

Mrunmayee's makeup and costumes worked as add-ons to the performance. Teacher Ratheesh Babu's nattuvangam with rhythmic syllables that denoted Nritya movements and his striking cymbals on few beats enhance the performance.

The supporting orchestra included I Sweta Prasad from Hyderabad on vocals, IV Renuka Prasad from

Mrunmayee



Hyderabad on mridangam, Sanjay from Pune on flute, Naveen Anand from Kerala on percussions and AR Biju from Kerala on Veena.

The chief guests for the evening were the founders of Bharata Kalanjali, Chennai, and Padma Bhushan recipients Natyacharya VP Dhananjayan and Shanta Dhananjayan.

The other guests of honour included eminent personalities like Anupama Mohan, a renowned Kuchipudi exponent and founder-director of Sathyaanjali



Dr VP Dhananjayan and Shanta Dhananjayan receiving Lifetime Achievement Award from Dr Ratheesh Babu



Mrunmayee

Academy of Kuchipudi Dance, Ernakulam, Vikram Kumar BR, editor of The Dance India magazine, Visakhapatnam, Jagabandhu Jena, an eminent journalist and dance critic from Bhubaneswar, Karnataka Kalashree Poornima Ashok, senior Bharatanatyam exponent from Bengaluru and founder-director of Nrithyanjali, Gyanendra Bajpayee, assistant professor of Bharatanatyam, in the Bhatkhande Music Institute, Lucknow. Members of the All India Dancers' Association from across the country were also present during the programme.

Mrunmayee presented an entire Margam or the repertoire of Bharatanatyam and also included Shabdham in praise of the mischievous and ever playful Lord Krishna, set to Ragamalika, Mishra chhaputalam; Varnam - the popular composition 'Sri Krishna Kamalanatho' in ragam Reethigowla, talam Adi. This was in praise of Lord Krishna, depicting his notorious childhood, slaying of the demons Putana and Sakatasura, taking the Vishwaroopam in the battlefield of Kurukshetra to helping Arjuna fight the war; Keerthanam - describing the Ananda Tandava of Lord Shiva, set to raga Ranjani, Talam Adi; Thillana - The popular composition of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal in ragam Dhanashree, talam Adi; Kaavadichindu - A traditional folklore where the heroine sings in praise of her beloved Lord Muruga, in raga Chenchurutti, talam Adi.

The programme also included the honouring of the chief guests VP Dhananjayan and Shanta Dhananjayan with the title 'Nrithyopasana', the lifetime achievement award, presented by Nrithyathi Kalakshetram.



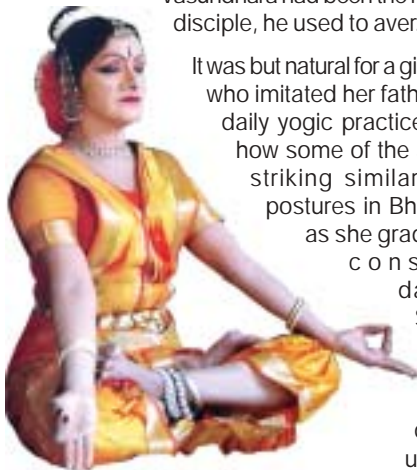
NATYA-YOGA DARSHANA BY DR VASUNDHARA DORASWAMY



Text: **George S Paul**, Cultural Critic

Anyone who has ever witnessed a Bharatanatyam performance by Dr Vasundhara Doraswamy is sure to comment, "She is a phenomenon in the dance scenario of the country". And I have personally heard the same from many on various occasions both in India and abroad. What is the secret of the stability of her aesthetically rich poses? What is the source of her inexhaustible energy that helps her perform for hours on end, that too without a break? Why sathwika abhinaya is predominantly delineated during her performance?

There are ever more questions for which the answer is simple - Her bewitching artistry as a dancer apart, Vasundhara is a practitioner and an acclaimed Guru of Yoga. Sure, there are many dancers who practice yoga and pontificate about its merits. But among the fraternity of dancers, she stands out for the incessant practice and teaching of this traditional Indian discipline, decades before it became the buzzword at the international level. And in this pursuit, she benefited from her Guru Pattabhi Jois of Mysore, a legend whose disciples included celebrities like Madonna. Admittedly for Jois, Vasundhara had been the most favourite disciple, he used to aver.



It was but natural for a girl in her teens, who imitated her father during his daily yogic practices, to realise how some of the asanas bore striking similarities to the postures in Bharatanatyam as she graduated into a consummate dancer later.

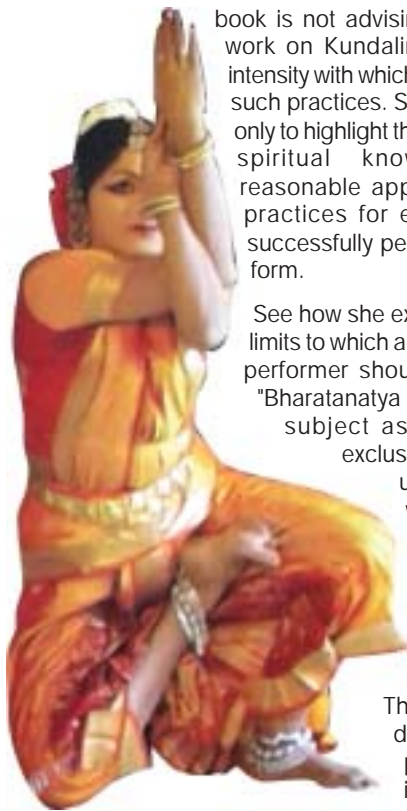
Small wonder that she opted for a systematic disciplining under Jois.

Digging deep into the tenets of Yoga and Bharatanatyam, she could eventually bridge the philosophy of the two. While this fetched her doctorate for the thesis "Bharatanatyam and Yoga", the book under review is the end-product of this passionate research.

Composed in 19 chapters, the book opens with the evolutionary trail of Natya from Brahma to the contemporary time. The very origin and evolution of Yoga Darshana are treated elaborately in the second chapter. She explains how yoga existed even during vedic times but it was Sage Pathanjali who was instrumental in imputing to it the status of a distinct philosophy. Sankhya and yoga are among the six main schools of philosophy pertaining to spiritual matters. Interestingly, it was Abhinavagupta, the commentator of Bharata's Natyasastra and author of Abhinavabharati, who successfully established a direct relationship between Natyasastra, sankhya and yoga. She underscores the inevitability of spiritual knowledge on the part of the performer that has a significant bearing on the magnitude of understanding the very concept of dancing.

The third chapter is entirely devoted to an exhaustive discussion of the philosophy of dancing. It is replete with quotes from Abhinavagupta, Bharata and Pathanjali which are really didactic. In this connection, Abhinavagupta's obeisance to Lord Shiva is worth mentioning: Viswabeeja orahorathram, mooladharathaya stitham/ Dharthri saktimayam vandhe dharaniprupam Eswaram - I bow to that Eswara who is the primordial cause for the creation of this world, and who abides in the mooladhara chakra like Earth which supports that creation.

Anyone practising yoga and tantra cannot fail to comprehend the importance of mooladhara chakra in pursuit of knowledge. It is said that he in whom Kundalini is aroused is an exceptional orator and scholar (Shat chakra nirupanam). But Vasundhara points out that the



book is not advising a dancer to work on Kundalini in the same intensity with which a yogi pursues such practices. She refers to this only to highlight the importance of spiritual knowledge with reasonable application of the practices for effectively and successfully performing the art form.

See how she expatiates on the limits to which a Bharatanatyam performer should carry yoga. "Bharatanatyam is not a spiritual subject as specific and exclusive as yoga, the ultimate aim of which is liberation from rebirths. Moksha is not essentially the aim of Bharatanatyam. The dance form is destined as a powerful media in carrying the spiritual theme to

the common man through easily comprehensible artistry that embodies all the contemporary subjects. Ultimately it makes a deep impact on the spectators inspiring them to follow the path of righteousness in the interest of the society. Also, it elevates him to higher intellectual and spiritual plane". Anchoring on the Natyasastra, she once again supports the argument of Abhinavagupta by establishing that yoga entails a comprehensive and aesthetic use of the ingredients Jnanam, Shilpam, Vidya and Kala.

Bhava is discussed against the backdrop of spiritual perspective and yogic practices in chapter 4. This is rather exhaustive. When the actor identifies himself with the character as if there is no difference between him and the character, the theme under interpretation is instantly transformed into bhava. This is possible by realising the essential difference between dhyana and dharana on his part. For the spectator, the actor is the object of meditation (dhyana) and is further the character personified in entirety. A commonality in experience between the actor and the spectator is then established which in turn, through abhinaya, evokes the desired Rasa in the spectator. The chapter concludes with the assertion that a dancer should imbibe the principles of yoga in its true spiritual sense to achieve divine success on the

basis of Abhinavagupta's interpretation of the spiritual aspects enshrined in Natyasastra. "Abundance of absorbing emotions supported by intense involvement while the spectator watches spell-bound untainted by any distortion, and above all a packed auditorium signify 'divine success'. Once again the author avers that this is impossible to achieve unless the dancer is proficient in the eight limbs of yoga viz. Ashtanga Yoga which is elaborately treated in chapter 8.

Abhinavagupta is the preceptor of shantha rasa, the ninth one which is not mentioned by Bharatha. According to the former, Shama is the corresponding sthaya bhava. The author confirms that Shama sthaya bhava is the primordial of all sthaya bhavas. Shama (calmness) is more a means to an end and that is shanta rasa. While Shama is demonstrable on the stage, shantha rasa can only be made to experience. Just as it is possible to enact rasas like sringara through bhavas like rati, it is equally possible to demonstrate Shama sthaya bhava and elicit shanta rasa. In this connection, a vivid description through charts is given in chapter 5 to drive home the parallels between the principles enunciated by Pathanjali and Abhinavagupta. This is really singular.

Chapter 6 is noteworthy for the discussion of Rasa from a spiritual perspective. The charts depicting a schematic representation of rasa sutra with reference to Sringara rasa and Shanta rasa are laudable. Interestingly, a whole chapter (7) has been devoted to elaborate on Shanta rasa, an indication of the prime importance of this rasa in the portrayal of characters.

The remaining 11 chapters are singular as they delve deep into the Natya and yoga directly. Illustrated with alluring colourful pictures, they spell out the objectives, methods, mental states and applications of almost all asanas that are beneficial to a dancer. The finesse of each asana speaks for the dexterity of Vasundhara, hard-earned through assiduous disciplining over years. No student of dance can afford to miss this part, even if she/he fails to comprehend in full the philosophical treatment of Natya and Yoga explained in the previous chapters.

The sub-title of the book 'Impact of Spiritual Practices on Bharatanatyam' is proof enough of Vasundhara's perception about dance - "Dance is a spiritual exercise for me". The cover photo of the dancer in Padmasana epitomises her approach to the terpsichorean art.

Natya-Yoga Darshana is the first-of-its-kind, correlating Natya and Yoga and really an invaluable treasure for Indian classical dance.

SAMVATSAR: A RECONSTRUCTION OF UPA-RUPAKA RAMAKRIDA

Text: **Tapati Chowdhurie**, Cultural Critic



Chidakash Kalalaya - Centre of Art and Divinity presented Samvatsar, a reconstruction of Upa-rupaka Ramakrida, recently at Uttam Mancha, Kolkata organised by SNB foundation. Samvatsar has emerged from the training received by Piyal Bhattacharya's disciples on Marga Natya, based on the research and reconstruction of Upa-rupaka, a minor dramatic form developed post Bharata's era that is concerned with the seasons. During an informal chat at Uttam Mancha, Kalamandalam Piyal Bhattacharya shared few thoughts with me about his journey in the field.

"This long journey," he said, "Started since I joined Kalamandalam in 1998 to learn Kathakali theatre. But the seed of Natyashastra was sowed in me when I saw the creative work of Padma Subramaniam. And so began my quest. To fulfil my dream I had to learn Sanskrit, Koodiyattam and Kalaripayattu and musicology. I trained in playing Saraswati Veena, Rudra Veena, vocal music and did research on reconstructing Mattakokila Veena from Myanmar under the Intangible Cultural Heritage grant by Sangeet Natak Akademi. U Win Maung of Gitameit Music Centre, Yangon, Myanmar, taught me 'Saung Gauk', the Burmese version of the Indian Harp. Reconstruction of Alapini veena and Kinnori veena had also to be on my agenda, to bring in the Shrutis of that era. These and the Rabab also fall within

the purview of Natyashastra and needs to be understood, researched and reconstructed. I am constantly at it and it is a never-ending journey tradition."

Piyal Bhattacharya's work was a theatre. Ramakrida finds its mention in Acharya Abhinavagupta's work. He has also recounted description of the seasonal manifestation of Ramakrida, from his earlier master Chirantan.

The mention of the two Upa-rupakas before and after this Ramakrida, seemed kind of complementary to the conceptualisation of this particular Upa-rupaka. It was both enigmatic and humorous, strung with riddles, called Prerana. The dance presentation mentioned was performed in a circular formation known as Halleesaka. In coherence to his vision of Ramakrida, he did the anukeertana of all the three instructions pertaining to Prerana, Ramakrida and Halleesaka in order to reconstruct his envisioned manifestation of Samvatsar Katha. His reconstruction of Ramakrida was an exploration of the poetic liberations granted by the Sastrakartas, regarding the Upa-rupakas. This he represented through the formation of the seasons and nature. Just like the union between a man and woman, Bhriгу - Universal Male and Angira - Universal Female coexist in one form. The advent of external sensual proximity brought in the dualism and dichotomised the male and female as separate entities. Bhriгу or the

Disciple of Piyal



cosmic male epitomises Agni - formless energy and Angira or the cosmic female epitomises Soma - formless matter. These exist everywhere, within the living and the non-living, in their dual forms. Their characteristic subtleties are expressed through the myriad forms of beings and phenomena. So Mangalacharan was the invocation of Samvatsar Chakra, where Bhrigu, enacted by Sayak Mitra, came wearing a veil to deliver the truth and Angira enacted by Rinki Mondal, was also not revealed fully, thus, suggesting that truth always remains shrouded.

Practical reconstruction of this particular Upa-rupaka, Ramakrida, drew its influence from Ragamala paintings of the late 16th to early 18th century from different regions like Rajasthan, Deccan and Nepal.

The attires and ornaments of our presentation were influenced by paintings, which specifically transports us to the dramatised reconstruction to the medieval Indian era. The main textual impetus arrived from Kalidasa's Ritusamhara, Magh's Sisupalavadha Sixth Canto, Jaydev's Geet Govinda, Sudraka's Padmapabhreetakamand Jaiminiya Upanisad. These works of literature were mainly limited to scholarly

practices but this reconstruction of Upa-rupaka Ramakrida demanded lucidity and a core-worldview to form the content of this presentation.

The music is also an integral part of this reconstruction as musical preferences gradually changed with time. Dhrupad songs were structured under specific ragas, which were devised to provide the imagery of the seasons. Before the Turkish invasion, the music system of India was based on Jatis Gana, later to be determined by ragas, which became the thread of this dramatic presentation. The 'Padas' or the literature of those songs provided the pictorial description of the seasonal changes that nature paints.

The subtlety of the first sensational disposition is elucidated through the arrival of each season as the masculine entity wrapped in royal grandeur and nature's (female entity) delightful desire to succumb to its enigma.

Summer has vigorous energy to absorb and leave nature bare and parched. The perfect symphony of summer heat in the morning and its breezy evenings were suggested by the use of Vrindavani Sarang to illustrate summer. Twenty-one stringed Mattakokila veena was used to strum straight notes for the representation

of the sharp, burning heat waves. The nine stringed Vipanchi veena played by the young minstrel, serenading beautiful women represents the intoxicating heat. The stoles are dyed in Manjishtha to bring the colour of the burning sun, a resemblance of the colour of 'terracotta', an apt portraiture of the burnt colour of the soil.

Meghraj or Varsa arrived with his Kinnari Vina with the strains of raga Megha representing monsoon. This was from Kalidasa's Ritusamhara - "Ashani shabda mardala". The spread of indigo symbolised the rumbling monsoon clouds. Here, the Kinnari veena is used to add to the colour of the medieval structure of music. Bharata's mridangam, pakhawaj, shree khol and mizhavu set the tone and forms the character of Varsa.

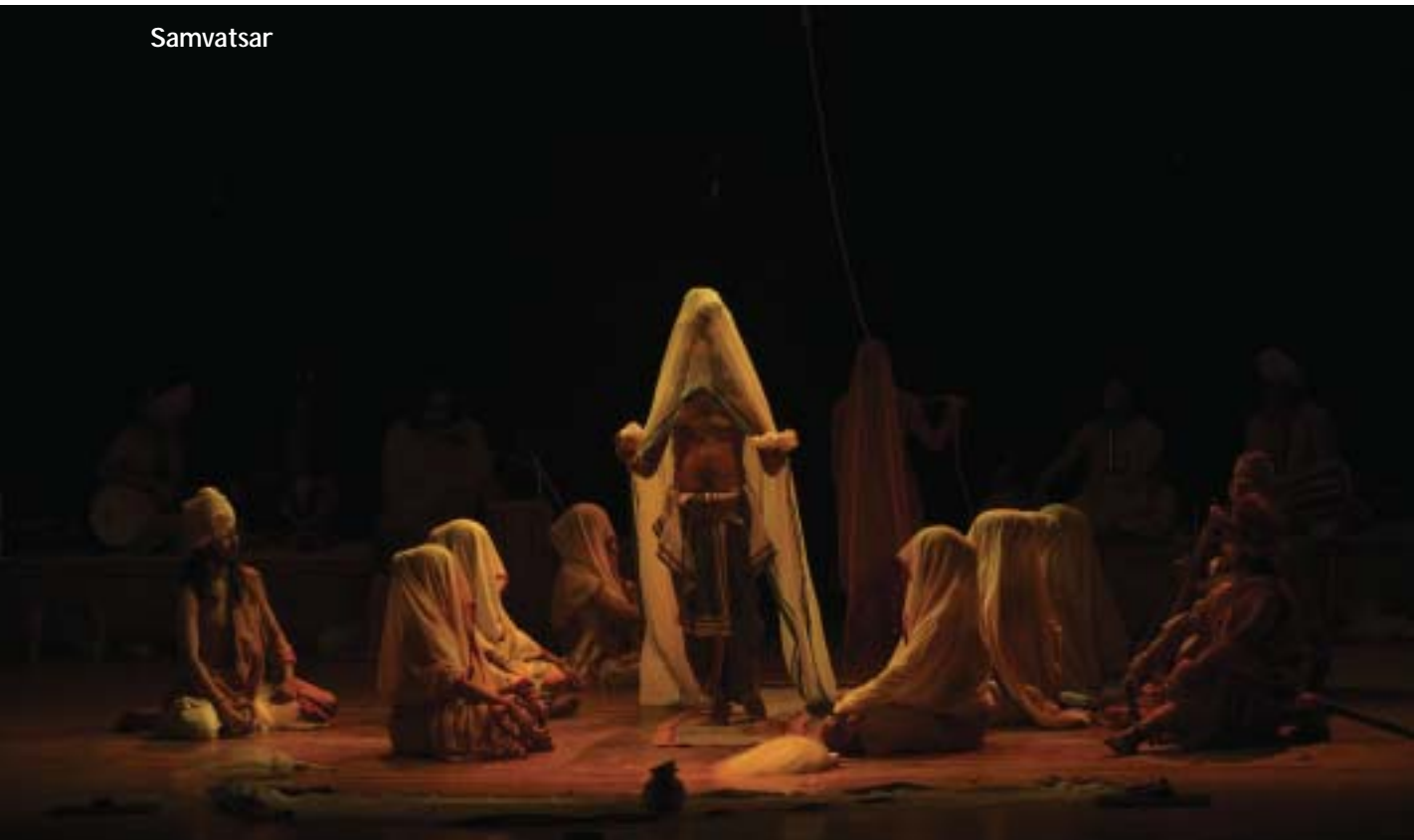
Autumn arrived with the chanting of slokas from Ritusamhara in raga Revathi/Vairagi, which was enacted with several girls together representing nature. White lotuses and the white stoles symbolised purity and Hamsa was the essence of autumn. This season showed the glorification of Mother Cult and hence, the only season which is portrayed by feminine beauty. Devi arrived with the utterance of Devisukta along with the playing of Kutti Mizhavu, bells of kumbakonam, cymbals, kurangkural, mizhavu, mridangam, and shree

khol. All the Mangal Vadya is used to create an auspicious ambience, worshipping Mother Nature. Hemanta (Subhendu Ghosh) is the transitional Ritu, the harbinger of winter, which is depicted by raga Bihag, suggestive of the depressive feeling for the estranged lover. Raga Bihag is mentioned in Sangeeta Parijat as raga Bihangam.

The season before winter, Hemanta wraps nature with a bleak cover, the white stoles symbolised the onset of winter. Slokas from Ritusamhara painted the picture of the harvesting season when the wind turns cold and is shrouded by snow.

During ancient times, winters witnessed merchants flocking faraway lands and a bustling marketplace was the seat of all dramatic antics. This was enacted with Kamdev arriving with his Ekatantri veena, Adi veena symbolising the Adi rasa, Shringara rasa. Raga Vasanta heralds spring that enchants nature and intoxicates it with lust and merriment. Vasant was enacted on the verses from Kalidasa's Ritusamhara worshipping Kamdev, King of Vasanta, seated under the canopy. Swayamvar Sabha of Radha, depicting the merriment and ecstasy of spring through an ashtapadi of Jayadeva was included. The dramatic version ended when the

Samvatsar



Samvatsar



Universal Male and Universal Female coming together and nature ceasing to exist only to reveal the universal oneness.

The instruments used here were a combination of ancient and medieval instruments, which set the tone of this reconstruction: Mizhavu, Kutti Mizhavu, Kinnari Veena, Dhruvadi Rabab, Kachapi Veena, Mridangam, Pakhawaj, Bengal Shree Khol, Kumbakonam bells, Cymbals, Kurangkural, Conch Shell, Seenga (Buffalo's Horn), Mattakokila Veena and Chitra Veena. Ragas formed the fabric of this reconstruction as it inspired the visual imageries of this production. There was no recorded music.

To train and execute this reconstruction, it took Piyal 8 years. This is because the research required many lost instruments, which took a long time to reconstruct. Also, a presentation of this kind requires training in body toning, language and singing and instrument playing lessons.

When asked, how he trained his students, Piyal said, "My students are cooperative. The place where we practice is in a secluded area with a mud floor and clay-tablet roof, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Hence, it ensures a wholesome training in a peaceful environment."



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SALUTATIONS TO GURUS BY YOUNGSTERS OF NATYA TARANGINI, ON WORLD DANCE DAY

Text: **Mandira Ghosh**, Cultural Critic



Dr(s) Radha, Raja and Kaushalya Reddy are synonymous with Kuchipudi dance, one of the eleven major Indian classical dances. Kuchipudi is a dance-drama performance with its roots in the ancient Hindu Sanskrit text of Natya Shastra. It developed as a religious art linked to travelling bards, temples and spiritual beliefs, like all major classical dances of India.

On the occasion of World Dance Day, youngsters of Natya Tarangini paid tribute to the three famous gurus of Kuchipudi.

The performances began with an invocation. Each costumed actor introduced themselves like in the classical form stating their respective roles before performing a short preliminary dance (dharavu).



A scene from *Namo Mathrubhumi*

A scene from Namo Mathrubhumi



Performers or the students presented pure dance (nritya). This was followed by the expressive part of the performance (nritya), where tiny tot's rhythmic hand gestures helped the audience to understand the story even if language became a barrier.

Melodious vocal and instrumental Carnatic music in Telugu accompanied the performance. The musical instruments in Kuchipudi are mridangam, cymbals, veena, flute and the tambura and Kaushalya and others set the celebrations with their melodious voices.

Radha and Raja Reddy made Kuchipudi popular not only in India but in the world. 43 years back, they founded Natya Tarangini to teach students this mesmerising dance in subtle and pure form.

It was heartening to watch the children of Natya Tarangini, the dance school founded by Radha, Raja and Kaushalya Reddy, perform the programme on April 29 to mark the World Dance Day and the 43rd anniversary of Natya Tarangini. It was double celebrations for Kuchipudi lovers.

It was also heartening to watch young budding artists who keenly practised the nuances of the pure Kuchipudi dance form.

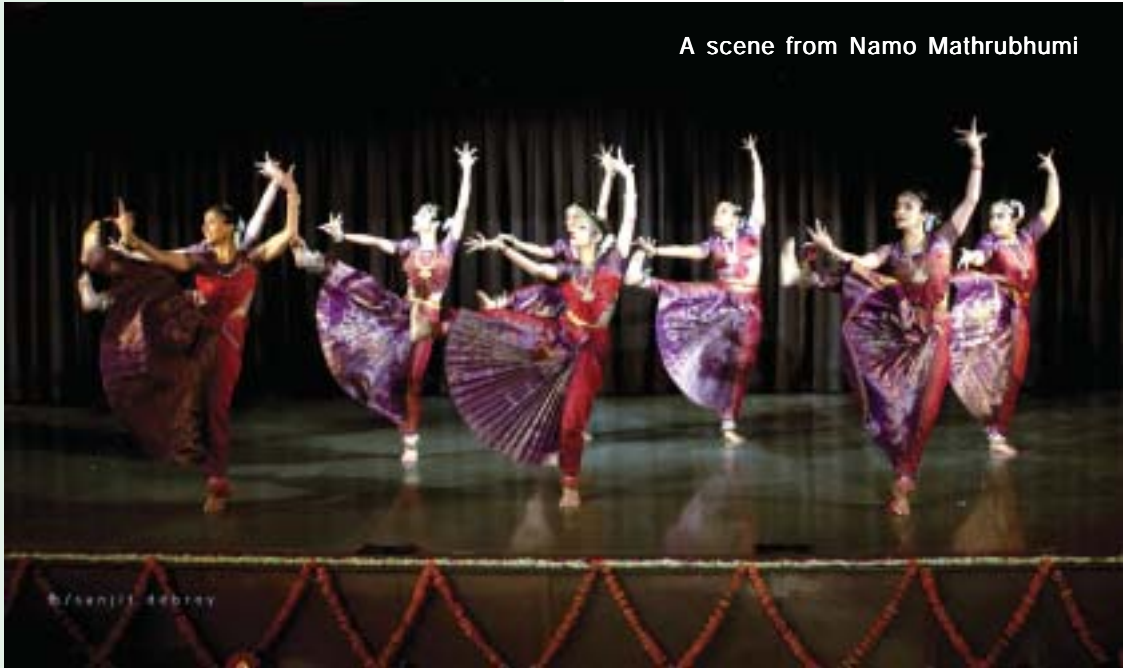
Several students presented different dance items with the melodious voice of Kaushalya Reddy and other musicians at their Amphitheatre Raja Radha Reddy Rang Manch, at Pushp Vihar, Saket, New Delhi. An overcrowded Manch, with enthusiastic parents of the young artistes, applauded every performance of the tiny tots who performed each item with precision and graciously.

According to Shubhra and Ruchika, young enthusiastic mothers of the 10-11 years old participant Adiva, who performed Rajshri Shabdham or King's honour, and Deeya and Nittyta, who performed Tillana, "Children want to make their gurus proud of them." Indeed it was wonderful to watch tiny tots in adult-like dazzling attires perform to perfection. Their perfection of feet work, costumes, jewellery, facial expressions, rhythmic movements of hands and body made the evening a memorable one.

Kaushalya welcomed the august audience and spoke about the hard work that went into making the programme a success.

According to Raja Reddy, Kuchipudi was mentioned by Kalidas. Kalidas said Kuchipudi dance form leads to

A scene from Namu Mathrubhumi



universal brotherhood and unity of mankind that was evident from the selection of dance items.

The programme commenced with a Ganapati Vandana performed by small girls. The Ganapati Vandana concluded with the shloka,

Vakra-Tunndda Maha-Kaaya Suurya-Kotti Samaprabha |
Nirvighnam Kuru Me Deva Sarva-Kaaryessu Sarvadaa | |

This was followed by Guru Vandana which concluded with the shloka,

Gururbrahma gururvishnuh
Gururdevo maheshwarah |
Guruhsakshat parabrahma
Tasmai shrigurave namah | |

(Realize that the Guru is Brahma Himself. He is Vishnu and He is also Shiva (Maheshwar). Guru is Parabrahma (Supreme God or the Absolute Truth). With this knowledge, I (salute) offer my obeisance to the Guru. |

Guru or teachers speak till eternity. This programme on World Dance day is representative of that.

"My heart is a temple Happy happy dance" was choreographed by Raja Reddy and through this dance, children learnt the right values. They learnt about mother earth, wind, water, plants, animals and other creatures.

They learnt about the paradoxes and contradictions of life as they danced singing,

Something is good

Something is bad

Something is right

Something is wrong

They learnt to attain peace and value of patience. They also learnt to forgive and that in the heart as a temple Allah, Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, or Nanak are one and same. The performance was quite distinct.

Bhavna Reddy performed brilliantly to the melodious music of Jayadeva's Ashtapadi. She as Radha, Nayika or heroine said to her beloved Krishna to smash kohl from her eyelash with his kisses. With superb expressions and wonderful footwork, the perfect performance was a treat to the audience's eyes and sensibility. The curls of her hair are the laughter of a poem and the entire performance can be compared to poetry.

Children were also taught how to dance on the stories or fables. The story of Vishnu saving the elephant from the crocodile was performed by youngsters perfectly. That is how they were educated of the world of animals and myths.

A sequence from Jathi Swaram



The item Namo Matribhumi, a salutation to Goddess earth, was fantastic. Girls in terracotta or maybe rust-red appearance performed splendidly.

Jathiswaram or the performance of pure dance was equally good. In some dance items, including this one, the youngsters introduced themselves on the stage. Jati they said are human beings and swaram means sound. Two groups talked about talam or tal or beats. One tal had seven beats whereas Adi or the ancient tal had 8 beats.

The concluding items Rajshri Sabdam, Tillana, Tarangam were equally good. They taught the children of love for mankind, patriotism and above all India's distinct character of diverse nature and unity in diversity.

The entire event made the audience understand the aim and objective of Gurus Raja, Radha and Kaushalya Reddy were not just to teach the children Kuchipudi dance, but in the process educated them on right values, patriotism, Indian history and humanism. The Reddys were successful in achieving their aim and we thank them for that.

A sequence from Jathi Swaram



A GRAND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Nataraj Music and Dance Academy Celebrated its 19th Anniversary

Text and Pics: Paul Nicodemus

Classical Dance has once again triumphed in showcasing its grandeur. The dance ballet presented by the students of Nataraj Music and Dance Academy captivated the audience of all age groups. Kalabharathi Auditorium in the city was packed to the rafters with dance aficionados during the 19th-anniversary celebrations of Nataraj Music and Dance



Narayana

Geeta Narayan



Tejasri



Sujana and Bhagyasri

Academy, a cultural organisation based in Visakhapatnam, recently. As part of the celebrations, students of the academy presented Kuchipudi solo performances and a dance ballet titled 'Chenchu Lakshmi Nrisimha Kalyanam'. Based on popular folklore, Rambhatla Nrisimha Sarma, a Nandi award recipient well wrote the one-and-half-hour ballet and Dr Dwaram V Tyagaraj provided the music. The music flowed hand in hand with the storyline. Twenty-eight students under the guidance and choreography of KV Lakshmi played their characters to perfection and enthralled the gathered audience with their impeccable performances.

Looking into the plot, the ballet as per Kuchipudi tradition began with the Sutradhar narrating the story. The ballet proceeded with a 'Pravesa Dharuv' praising Lord Ganesha. Starting with the episode

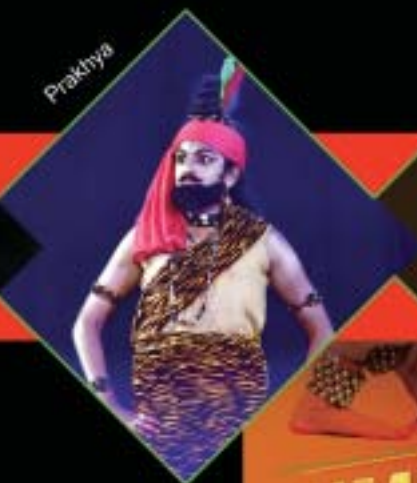
Ravi Shankar Narayan, IRS



A scene from the ballet



Sachita

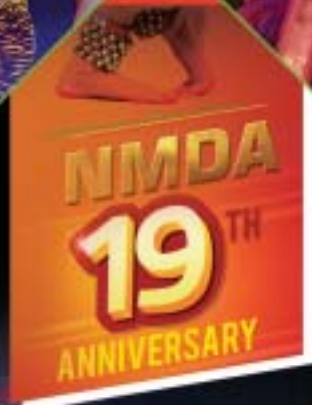


Prakhyia



Tejgavi

NMDA



Closing scene of the Ballet



Rambabu, secretary of Kalabharathi receiving a portrait of Guru Vempati Chinna Satyam from the organisers



A scene from the ballet



A scene from the ballet



A scene from the ballet



Naatyasri KV Lakshmi being felicitated by her students





Bhagyasri

of Narasimha's emergence followed by Hridayakasipu vadha, the ballet depicted in detail how Mahavishnu in the guise of Narasimhaswamy was followed by Mahalakshmi in the guise of Chenchetha and got married to him. Narayana as Narasimha, Tejaswi as Hridayakasipu, Bhagyasri as Chenchu Lakshmi, Sujana as Chenchu Vishnu, Tejasri as Adilakshmi, Amruta as Prahlada, Sanchita as Narada, Prakya as Sikhayanayak played their parts brilliantly. After the ballet, students of NMDA along with their parents felicitated and honoured KV Lakshmi, founder secretary and principal of NMDA.



Sujana.



Sravani



Sudha Varma

Earlier in the evening, after the lamp lighting ceremony, the organisers presented a portrait of Master Vempati Chinna Satyam to GRK Prasad (Rambabu), Secretary of Kalabharathi. Kuchipudi artistes Sudagani Geeta Narayan and Sudha Varma kick-started the evening with scintillating Kuchipudi solo performances. S Ravi Shankar Narayan, IRS, Additional Commissioner of Income Tax, Visakhapatnam; B Satyanarayana Raju, IRS, Additional Commissioner of Income Tax, Mumbai; G Viswanadh, Governor of Rotary District 3020 and GRK Prasad (Rambabu), Secretary of Kalabharathi graced the occasion as guests. BR Vikram Kumar, founder president of Nataraj Music and Dance Academy supervised the celebrations.



SOLO DANCERS STORM THE STAGE IN THE FIRST FESTIVAL OF SATTRIYA DANCE IN KOLKATA



Text: **Nita Vidyarthi, Cultural Critic**
Pics: **Pics: Manas Das**

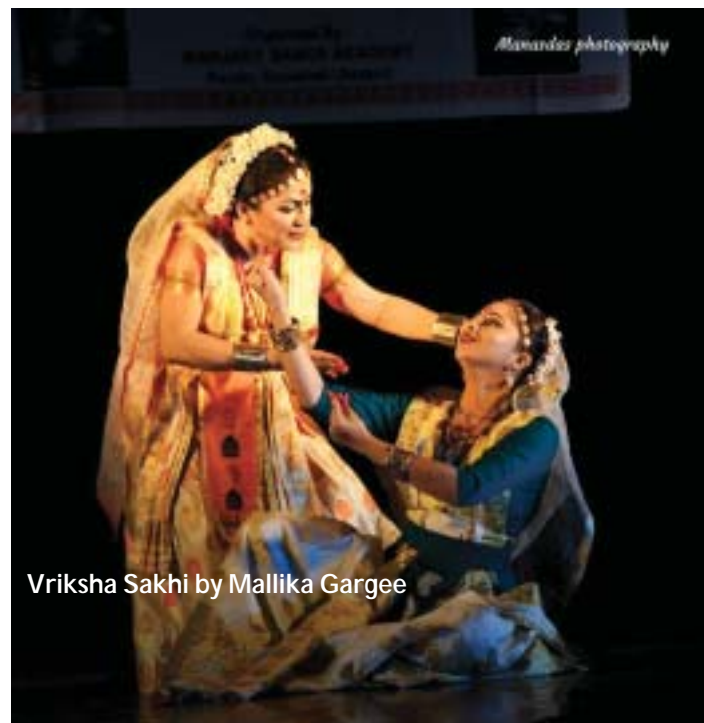
Three seasoned Sattriya dancers of the present generation who have acquired acclaim by their brilliance and talent, stormed the stage in "Brahmaputra Festival", the first Sattriya Dance Festival organised in Kolkata in fact in West Bengal by Manjary Dance Academy, Pandu, Guwahati at the Triguna Sen Auditorium, under the leadership of senior Sattriya and Bharatanatyam dancer Tatini Das, who was also the festival director and head of the academy.

Sattriya culture is a living tradition and is an outcome of the Vaishnavite Movement in Assam under the leadership of Saint Sankardeva, a preacher and visionary who gave birth to this vibrant ritualistic tradition associated with the monastic life, during the last decade of 15th century A.D.

After a simple inauguration by local dignitaries, including actor-dancer Jaya Seal Ghosh, the festival opened with a Ramdani part of the 'Jhumura Nach' in taal Thukani and Suta by the students of the academy, all from Guwahati. Masculine in character, the young female dancers managed it well.

The first solo dancer Jolymoni Saikia, a seasoned dancer began her riveting recital with a Guru Vandana in

taal Thukani and then Suta, followed by the famous 'Krishna Vandana' and 'Yet Pada Pankaja' in taal Sutkala. It was a glorious number composed of glimpses of tandava style of dancing blended with pure dance. The Gopi nach set to the Borgeet 'Phagu Kheley



Vriksha Sakhi by Mallika Gargee



Esho Hey Barsha by Manjary group



Mallika Kandali

'Brindaboney', was an elaborate piece of pure dance woven in a lasya style and Jolymoni wove magic with her execution, quivering lovely hand movements and nimble-footed jumps.

The next solo was by the erudite dancer-scholar, Dr Mallika Kandali whose lyricism and grace have charmed audiences on many occasions. The perfection of movements and refined abhinaya was the hallmark of her two interpretative items bringing forth the emotional tussle and insecurity of Yashoda and Devaki for losing Krishna, if and when they meet, and thereby projecting the underlying meaning of motherhood. Spreading the message of adoption and parental love for orphaned children, she began with the appealing piece 'Suchhanda Boyano'. In this number, she underlined the agony of the loss of a mother and placed a universal appeal that no child should be left without a 'Mother', with refined poignant abhinaya and delicate hand movements and cries 'Mooro Putra'. Based on Sri Sri Madhavdeva's Borgeet 'Uthore Jadu Gopal', on the glory of maternal love replete with Vatsalya rasa, Mallika's felicity of expressions and directness of appeal in her own choreography, blended with immaculate dancing supported by Bhupen Nath's music, stupefied the audience. The next piece was 'Vrikhya Sakhi', a duet based on Srimanta Sankaradeva's lyrical verses on the relationship between women and trees. The duet by Mallika and her well-trained disciple Gargee Bordoloi



Seujpriya Goswami

portrayed the search for Krishna by the Gopis who ask the trees, the birds, the butterflies and the animals like deer in the forest if they had seen him. Delicately choreographed, 'Koitey Paibu Prangopal Aami, Hari Hari Bula Samasta Joney' (Where Will I Find My Dear Gopal), the piece was noteworthy for the exquisite harmonious coalescence of musical and lyrical. Both the pieces were conceived and choreographed by Mallika.



Jolymoni Saikia

The last solo 'Ratnakar' saw Ustad Bismillah Khan Puraskar awardee Seujpriya Goswami in an exalted form. Her 'Ekaharya' abhinaya from the 'Adi Kanda' (last chapter) of the Ramayana saw her in six different characters - the bandit, his parents, traveller, Brahma and the beggar (Brahma in disguise). She shifted moods and expressions in an elaborate treatment showing the transformation of Ratnakar to Valmiki by uttering 'Maramar' to 'Ramram'. Seujpriya has reached the level of mastery in a style that spontaneously delivers the internalised emotions of multiple characters with

involvement and ease. Gunakar Goswami's soulful music composition and incorporation of 'Ojapali' traditions enhanced the appeal of the presentation. Seujpriya's powerful aesthetic expressions stood out for its kinetic phraseology.

The students of the academy presented a well-rehearsed 'Chali' dance 'Hey Krishna Daivakinandana' and a lovely garland of Sattriya dance set to four songs of Tagore as a tribute to the bard, in the item 'Esho hey Barsha'.

Tatini should be lauded for the endeavour.

Manjary group Jhumar Ramdani



NRITANRITHYATHI 2019 BRINGING DANCE CLOSER TO PEOPLE

Nritanrithyathi 2019, a festival of Indian Classical Dances organised by Nrithyathi Kalakshetram in association with SAIL and Ramkrishna Care Hospital (Raipur) was held at the Ayyappa Temple, Sector 2, Bhilai (Chattisgarh) from 7-9 April. The festival is being organised for the last 8 years, since its inception in 2012.

On all the three days, during the daytime, Bharatanatyam Margam Competition, a one of its kind in the country was conducted where the competitors are required to prepare and perform all the items from the Bharatanatyam repertoire as requested by a panel of judges, along with a Question & Answer session during the performance. The panel of judges asked them to perform any item from the ones that the contestants have prepared and asked them relevant questions about it. In the senior category, there was also a Choreography round wherein, the performers were given a subject/ story/character on the spot and the performer was asked to choreograph the same on a given, specific talam. This competition tested dancers not just on their



performing abilities, but also on their command over the basics like talam, adavus, mudras, stamina, strength, theoretical knowledge of dance, creativity and most importantly, presence of mind. Each contestant performed for an hour accompanied by a live orchestra.



AIDA Family



The Nritanrithyathi Festival in the evening became a platform for many talented, young dancers from across the country. There were also guest performers including eminent dancers from different styles like Sandhya Manoj (Odissi) from Malaysia, Poornashree Raut (Odissi) from Raipur, Aparajita Sharma (Bharatanatyam) from New Delhi, Richa Gupta (Kathak) from New Delhi, Sujatha Nair (Mohiniattam) from Mumbai.



This edition of the festival saw 20 participants for the Bharatanatyam Margam Competition in the morning and more than 100 artistes performing at Nritanrithyathi festival in the evening.

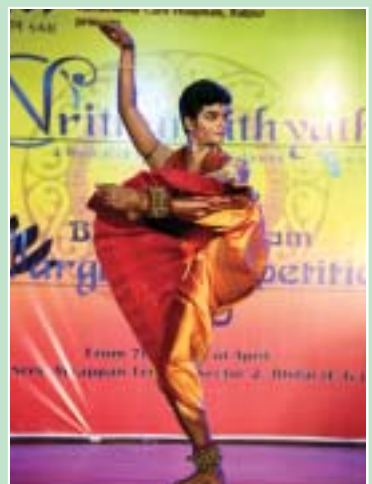
This festival was conceptualised by Guru Dr G Ratheesh Babu, Founder-Director of Nrithyathi Kalakshetram, Bhilai. The main aim of this festival was to promote and preserve the Indian Classical Dance forms and provide





a platform for the younger generation of performing artists to showcase their talent. This festival, in turn, has also provided this city of Bhilai and its people an insight

into the world of Indian Classical Dances and has brought this art form closer to their lives.



ATHARVOTSAV 2019 A CELEBRATION OF INDIAN DANCE

Celebrating the importance of Dance and Music, preserving Indian Culture and tradition, Atharva School of Fine Arts (ASOFA) organised 'Atharvostav 2019' on the occasion of International Dance Day Celebrations at 'The Mysore Association', Matunga, Mumbai on April 28 and 29. Curated by Shamal Pawar, the 2-day festival spread across 4 sessions had some legends of dance in attendance. It was unique in its own way.

Atharva School of Fine Arts (ASOFA) founded in the year 2003 as a Charitable trust was registered under the Maharashtra Public Trust Act 1950 and caters the needs of Classical and Indian Folk Dance and Music. The vision is to bring up the talent in young children through systematic and technical teaching of dance. In a long journey of 16 years since its formation, a part of the mission was achieved with great performances of their students nationally and internationally.

Day one of the festival saw performances of well-known gurus in the field of Classical dances. Kashmiri Trivedi (Bharatanatyam), Guru V Gurunathan in Bharatanatyam from Chennai, Guru Debi Basu - Odissi (Odissi), Guru Darshanaben Jhaveri (Manipuri), Guru Lata Surendra (Bharatanatyam), Guru Smt Vyjayanthi Kashi (Kuchipudi), Guru Geetha Vijayshanker (Mohiniattam) and Guru Mukta Joshi (Kathak),





Day two of the festival witnessed participation in large numbers by various Dance institutions. It appeared as one family of Dance. It was a well-organised festival with 200 junior and senior artistes sharing the stage with various Dance institutes from all over Mumbai and India.

Gurus were felicitated with 'Nriya Samvardhak/Nriya Samvardhini' award by Padma Shri recipient Guru Darshana Jhaveri. Senior gurus and artistes were

felicitated with 'Nriya Nipun' award and the upcoming artistes with 'Nriya Sadhaks' during this celebrations by Doordarshan Sahyadri (Marathi producer), Malakraj Panchbhai and Sadanand Rane (leading Folk dance guru and researcher)

- **Kashmira Trivedi**





Sheetal Makwana

@AHMEDABAD



Vedika, the monthly programme of The Dance India in collaboration with Nrutyasangini Dance Institute was held in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The performances included Bharatanatyam recital, Vocal, Tabla and Gujarati Sugam Sangeet concert.

Riya Gohel and Yuti Patel performed a wonderful Bharatanatyam recital. Dinesh Tharu accompanied by Vikalp Shakya on harmonium presented a Vocal Folk and Sufi concert. Dhananjay Vekariya gave a splendid Tabla concert, and Vikalp Shakya accompanied him on a harmonium. Falguni Sanjay Shah gave the gathered audience a taste of Gujarati Sugam Sangeet with his recital. It was a blissful programme of dance and music.

- Sheetal Makwana





Samidha Shinde

@ANDHERI

Vedika, The Dance India Magazine's monthly programme of music and dance in association SRSS Academy supported by Samidha Shinde was held at SRSS Academy in Bagarka College, Andheri on April 30. The programme began with lamp illumination by famous Kathak Guru Pranita Sawant, founder member of Swarangi Sangeet Vidyalaya group.

The evening started with 'Ganesh Vandana', Kathak performance by students of Swarangi Sangeet Vidyalaya. It was followed by an Alarippu presentation by the students of Samidha's Institute of Performing Arts. Trivat, a disciple of Guru Pranita Sawant presented a beautiful presentation. Guru Pranita was the winner of Gopikrishna Puraskar and Pandit Paluskar award, and her style was seen in her students when they performed on famous Abhang 'Kaanada Raja Pandhrich'. As the audience was getting charged Guru Samidha Shinde presented famous Bharatanatyam Shabdam 'Gokulambudi' and her students presented it expressively. The audience wanting to enjoy more of the performances, their request was obliged by



Samidha Shinde's students Khyati Patra, Anushree Kumbhar, Aastha Pai, Rhea Nair, Madhavi Ghante, Vedangi Gade by presenting popular Bhajan 'Maa Saraswati Sharde'.

Towards the end, a graceful performance by Madhura Gokhale, Riteeka Kalode, Aditi Sawant, Pratiksha Hare, Tanaya Prabhu and Manali Sawant of Teen Taal of traditional Kathak which was beautifully choreographed by Guru Pranita Sawant in a clear and crisp presentation proved to be perfect. Guru Pranita has dance school branches at Dahisar and Asalfa Ghatkopar in Mumbai.

It was indeed a satisfying evening for art lovers and artistes, having a beautiful combination of dances on Carnatic and Hindustani music of God Ganesh, Krishna, Vittal and goddess Saraswati. Both gurus were thankful to The Dance India for giving such a beautiful opportunity for their students to perform in the monthly programme.

- Samidha Shinde





Shamal Pawar

@KURLA

Vedika, the monthly programme organised by The Dance India in collaboration with Atharva School of Fine Arts was held on April 21 at the Kurla (East) Centre in Mumbai.

The first performer of the day was a promising artiste Rhea Nair, a disciple of Guru Madhuri Pratap who performed Bharatanatyam and showcased her talent of learning the art form for the past 13 years. She presented Pushpanjali, Alarippu and Padam. The second artiste was Yesashweeni Baskar, a disciple of Guru Subhalaxmi Iyer. She performed 'Khanda Chapu Keerthanam', a song on the Meenakshi Kalyanam and Tillana. The jugalbandi between her singing and violin was enjoyed by the gathered audience. Both the performances were excellently executed by these upcoming artists.

The artistes thanked The Dance India team, its editor, BR Vikram Kumar, coordinator, Kashmiri Trivedi for providing them with a free platform to showcase their talent. They also thanked Atharva School of Fine Arts, Mumbai for making the place available to promote art and culture.



- Shamal Pawar





Vrunda Upadhyay

@DOMBIVLI

Vedika, the monthly programme of The Dance India in collaboration with Mudra Dance Academy, supported by Vrunda Upadhyay was held at Dombivli in Mumbai on April 13. It was indeed a great occasion as it was graced by the editor of the magazine BR Vikram Kumar and Kashmira Trivedi, coordinator of Gujarat and Maharashtra.



The programme has an awesome audience. It concluded with the felicitation of the artistes with a certificate as the token of appreciation. The Dance India team headed by BR Vikram Kumar felicitated Vrunda Upadhyay for conducting the monthly programme in Dombivli.

- Vrunda Upadhyay

The programme started with a Kathak dance presentation by Gayatri Bhat and her disciples from Padnyas Kathak Institute. They started their recital with Saraswati Vandana and followed it with traditional Kathak dance and Devi Stuti. The next performers were disciples of Pavitra Bhat of PAVI Institute. They beautifully presented Bharatnatyam dance which comprised of a Hanuman Varnam and a Devi Kirtanam. Last but not the least was a performance by disciples of Sheetal Kapole from Lehja Art Foundation who presented Kathak. Sheetal Kapole was more into concept-based kathak dance and it was seen in her disciples.





Rajan

@NAVI MUMBAI



The Dance India Magazine held another illustrious programme in collaboration with Meenakshi Nritya Vidyalay, under the able guidance of KV Rajan at Shri Manikanda Seva Sangham in Nerul, Navi Mumbai on the 23 April. The monthly programme patronises classical music and dance, spreading the message of Indian classical arts far and wide. It brings forth to the audience some typical styles and simple explanation of

the classical dance forms so it is easier for the people who love dance and music to appreciate and enjoy the particular characteristics and nuances of the classical dance styles.

The programme started with Mridula Pradosh and her friend, Neethu Menon, a film artiste, performing a poem in the Mohiniyattam style. Mridula, founder of Nrithya



Vatika Academy of Dance is a multi-talented, a graceful dancer who hails from Thrissur, the cultural city of God's own Country. Nriya Vatika, under her guidance, performed a piece choreographed on a poem by Malayalam poet Changampuzha. It described the

beauty of a dancer and compares the beauty of nature with the beauty and grace of a dancer. The vivid expressions and the movements of the two performers brought the evening alive and the grace and charm of the dancers mesmerised all the lovers of dance.





The next session was a performance based on Bharatnatyam by Ramya Prasad. Ramya is a disciple of Guru Ambika Vishwanath. She is conducting her own classes, Natanam - Centre for Performing Arts at Panvel and also works as a dance faculty at some institutions. Her students Sivaganga Dinesh Karippara and Saanvi Dhanraj Tambuskar presented the Mahavishnu Kriti composed by Jagadguru Bharathi Theertha Swamiji, in raga Yamuna Kalyani and tala Chatusrajati Ekatalam. Following that, Ramya herself presented a composition on Dhyaana shloka and Guru shloka based on the Bharatnatyam style. It is a tradition to start a dance practice with a Dhyaana shloka. She ended her performance with the Guru sloka. All the compositions showed remarkable practice and sincerity that goes into the teaching and learning of classical dance and music. The country requires such teachers, students and mentors for the perpetuation of the classical dance form.

- Julia Ghosh



GIRIJA DEVI: A SHARP-WITTED QUEEN OF THUMRI

Text: Tejasri Bathina



Girija Devi one of India's greatest vocalists and one of the last masters of the Purab Ang Gayaki tradition of the Banaras Gharana. Devi has been equally effective singing in the traditional 18th-century classical style of Khyal and semi-classical styles such as Thumri, Tappa, Kajri, Dadra and Chaiti. She was born on May 8, 1929, at Varanasi (which was called Banaras), where she used to live with her parents and two elder sisters. She started training in music in Banaras at her guru's house itself at the age of 4 years. Her first guru was Pandit Sarju Prasad Misra. After Sarju Prasad passed away, she became a disciple of Shrichand Mishra. She was a multi-faceted artiste who also knew how to fence and ride horses.

Girija Devi's mother, who later became one of her biggest fans, could not understand why she was wasting time on something as inconsequential as classical music. At the age of 15 years, she was married to Madhusudan Jain, a businessman and a great lover of music and poetry. She decided to go to Sarnath for a year. There she started rigorous work and continued her classes. Her mother used to take care of her daughter. She honed her skills in a span of one year.



Girija Devi A Sharp witted Queen of Thumri



Her major break came when she turned 20. Her first concert was aired from Allahabad radio station in 1949. Her performance at the AIR music conference in 1952 brought her to the limelight. She had found success. In the year 1975, she endured one of the most painful moments of her personal life when she lost her husband. Until that point, she had never managed life on her own. Even simple things, like paying bills, had not been her responsibility. She stopped performing. After a year, her fans and co-artists persuaded her to perform again. She realised her responsibilities and started to perform again.

For her contribution, she received Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, Sangeet Natak Akademi award, Sangeet Natak fellowship and became an unchallenged queen of thumri.

She breathed her last on October 24, 2017 (aged 88) at Kolkata.

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TRIBUTES



Rakhal Chandra Mohanty was an Odia singer and music director. He also worked as a music director at the All India Radio(AIR). He was born at Chatana village in Kendrapara district on June 26, 1932. He had learnt music under legendary singers like Balakrushna Das and Pandit Bhubaneswar Mishra and started his career as a music teacher. He completed his post graduation in vocal music from the Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. He had directed music at Cuttack Kala Vikash Kendra, AIR and Doordarshan. He was also a part of the Odia film industry.

Mohanty had joined the All India Radio in 1974 as a music composer and created many popular and acclaimed musical programmes. He has given music for several Odia films including 'Ghara Sansar', 'Amar Prem', 'Manika Jodi', 'Trinath Mela' and 'Akhaya Truriya'. He was a recipient of the several prestigious awards like Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, Nitali Palit Award among many others.

Rakhal Chandra Mohanty breathed his last at his residence in Badambadi, Cuttack, on April 14. He was 88 years of age.

Inadvertently, a couple of photo captions got mixed up in the last month's cover story on Guru MK Saroja. Errors are regretted.



Guru MK Saroja on sets with contemporary Guru Kalanidhi Narayanan in DD serial Taal Mel made by Sharmistha Pranab Mukherjee and Ashish Khokar



President of India, Shankar Dayal Sharma giving her the SNA award

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