

# THE DANCE INDIA

A Treasure Trove of Culture & Tourism

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90 ₹

TORCH BEARERS

**SOBHA NAIDU**

THE SATHYABHAMA  
OF KUCHIPUDI

.....  
RAYS OF HOPE

**PALLAVI SHAIKH**

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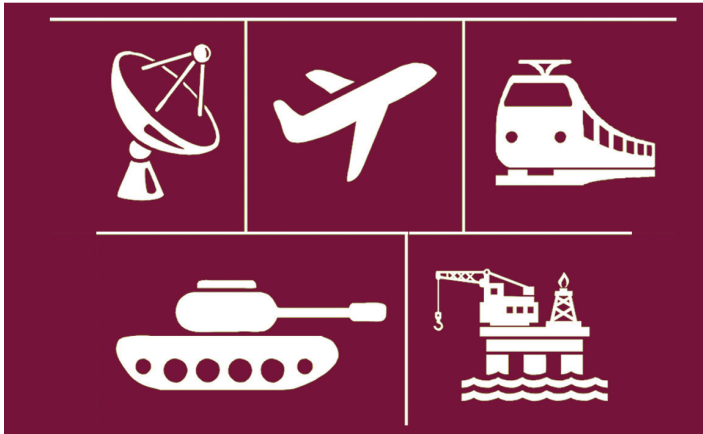
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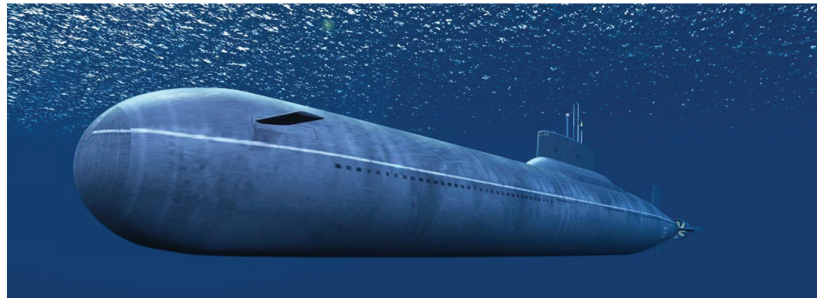
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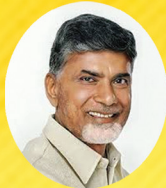
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**గౌ. నారా చంద్రబాబు నాయుడు గారు**  
రాష్ట్ర ముఖ్యమంత్రి వర్కులు,  
ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ ప్రభుత్వం



ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ ప్రభుత్వం



**శ్రీనితి భూమా అఫిల ప్రియ గారు**  
వర్యాటకం, తెలుగు భాషాభివృద్ధి, సంస్కృతి మంత్రివర్కులు  
ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ ప్రభుత్వం

ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్ రాష్ట్ర సృజనాత్మకత మరియు సంస్కృతి సమితి

## తెలుగు భాషా సంస్కృతి - జెన్నత్వం

ప్రభుత్వము వారు జి.ఓ.ఎమ్.ఎస్.నెం. 27, తేది. 06-12-2016 నందు  
రాష్ట్ర సృజనాత్మకత మరియు సంస్కృతి సమితి ఏర్పాటు చేశారు.  
తెలుగు భాష, సంస్కృతి పరిరక్షణకు రాష్ట్ర ప్రభుత్వం ఎంతో కృషి చేస్తున్నది.

### పథకాలు / కార్యక్రమాలు

ప్రభుత్వ సంగీత నృత్య పాఠశాలలు / కళాశాలల నిర్వహణ	సాంస్కృతిక కార్యక్రమాల నిర్వహణ, సంక్రాంతి సంబరాలు, ఉగాది వేడుకలు
సర్వారాయ హరికథ పాఠశాల గ్రాంటు	ఆడిటోరియంల నిర్మాణం
అమరజీవి పాట్టి శ్రీరాములు మెమోరియల్ సొసైటీ, చెన్నై గ్రాంటు	ఘంటసాల ఆడిటోరియం నిర్మాణం
జిల్లా సాంస్కృతిక మండళ్ళకు గ్రాంటు	కూచిపూడి నాట్యరామం
ప్రముఖ జాతీయ నాయకుల విగ్రహాల ఏర్పాటు	కళాకారులకు గుర్తింపు కార్డులు జారీ
సాంస్కృతిక అకాడమీలు	సాంస్కృతిక సంస్థలకు ఆర్థిక సహాయం
6,746 వృద్ధ కళాకారులకు నెలకు రూ. 1,500/- లు చొప్పున ఫించన్లు	ప్రముఖ వ్యక్తుల జయంతి ఉత్సవాలు
కళాకారులకు రైల్వే కన్వేషన్ మంజూరు చేయుట	షెడ్యూల కులాల ఉపప్రణాళిక కార్యక్రమాలు
ఆనంద లహరి	షెడ్యూలు తెగల ఉపప్రణాళిక కార్యక్రమాలు
యువ సంస్కృతి	జిల్లా సాంస్కృతిక మండళ్ళకు గ్రాంటు
చిత్రలేఖనం	ఎ.పి.భవన్ లోను, ఇతర రాష్ట్రాలలోను సాంస్కృతిక కార్యక్రమాలు ఏర్పాటు
సాహిత్యం భవిష్యనిధి	బాల ప్రతిభ

### ముఖ్య కార్యనిర్వహణాధికారి

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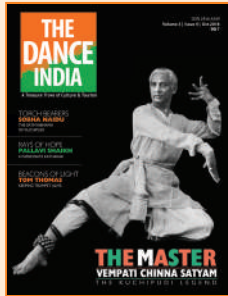
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# EDITORIAL

'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."**



Editor  
**BR Vikram Kumar**

Executive Editor  
**Paul Spurgeon Nicodemus**

Feature Writers  
**Rajahamsa  
RMK Sharma**

Contributors  
**Dr Sunil Kothari**  
New Delhi

**Avinash Pasricha**  
New Delhi

**Nita Vidyarthi**  
Kolkata

Administration Manager  
**KV Lakshmi**

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Goa and Kolhapur

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**Basu Sinam** Manipur

**Dr Smruti Vaghela** Vadodara

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# EDITOR'S DESK

*True art takes note not merely of form but also of what lies behind*  
-Mahatma Gandhi

In the name of Mahatma Gandhi, the Government of India has been propagating Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or Swachh Bharat Mission, a nation-wide campaign in India for the period 2014 to 2019 that aims to clean up the streets, roads and infrastructure of India's cities, towns, and rural areas. On the occasion of Mahatma's 150th birth anniversary, most of the government bodies and civilian communities have observed and conducted Swachhata weeks and programmes across the country. If you consider this mission as one side of the coin, the need of the hour is Swachh Samskruti. Even earlier, we discussed it but the problem is that none of the cultural bodies or the concerned ministry has been concentrating on this important aspect. Instead of spending a lot of money in organising a one-hour clean-up drive, if the Government concentrates on propagating swachh samskruti then naturally, every citizen will know how to behave in the society, how to respect others and mother nature.

Swachh Samskruti Abhiyan or Swachh Samskruti Mission is the need of the hour and it is our appeal to the Government of India. It would benefit every Indian citizen and artiste and it would be a boon to Indian art and culture.

Jai Hind!

BR Vikram Kumar



# CULTURAL BULLETIN

## National Museum Research Bulletin published after a gap of 16 years

The Minister of State for Culture (Independent Charge) and Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Dr Mahesh Sharma released two important publications of the National Museum (M/o Culture), Sindhu Ghati Sabhyata: Ek Parichay (Hindi)

and the National Museum Research Bulletin Number 10: special issue (In-House Publication), in New Delhi on September 17.

The National Museum Research Bulletin No.10: the special issue has several research papers that



The Minister of State for Culture (I/C) and Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Dr. Mahesh Sharma releasing the National Museum Bulletin, at a function, in New Delhi on September 17, 2018.

highlight the collection, display and education aspects that the National Museum engages with. The research bulletin is also illustrated by coloured photographs, some of which belong to the reserve collection of the National Museum, hence making the bulletin appealing to a wider audience. This research bulletin has been revived this time after a long gap of 16 years under the guidance of the Director General, Dr BR Mani, who is also the Editor-in-Chief of the Bulletin.

Sindhu Ghati Sabhyata: Ek Parichay is a Hindi version of 'An Introduction to Indus Valley Civilization' which among the bestsellers at the National Museum. Co-authored by Dr Sanjib Kumar Singh (Head

Publication Department, National Museum) and Dr Gunjan Srivastava (Deputy Superintending Archeologist, ASI) and Rajesh Kumar (Hindi Translator, National Museum), this book throws light on the splendour of the Indus Valley Civilization. The book is an important contribution to the field as most works on the subject are restricted to the English Language and this version will help the vernacular readers.

Both the publications will be available for sale at the National Museum Reception Counter and will benefit students, scholars, artists, historians, museum professionals and art lovers among other readers

## Logo and Web Portal Commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of MAHATMA

The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind launched the logo and the web portal (<http://gandhi.gov.in/>) for the commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi at Rashtrapati Bhawan on September 18. The president released the logo in the presence of Dr Mahesh Sharma, Minister of State for Culture (Independent Charge) and Environment, Forest & Climate Change and Arun Goel, Secretary Culture.

The logo has been obtained through crowdsourcing. Logo branding will be done in trains, metro rail, Air India Aircrafts, State roadways buses, government websites, emails, government stationery, calendar and diary, government advertisements & publicity material, digital signature etc. Public sector undertakings, subordinate/attached offices, autonomous bodies etc. under the Ministries/ Departments in the Government of India will also use the logo.

The two-year-long celebrations from 2 October 2018 to 2 October 2020 will be held across the country and all over the globe to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. A meeting of National Committee headed by the President of India was held in May 2018 to draw out a plan of action for

the mega celebration where 92 suggestions were received. Further, 33 suggestions were approved by the Executive Committee headed by the Prime Minister to organise nationwide and worldwide commemoration. Accordingly, all Ministries/ Departments in the Government of India and all State/UT Governments have initiated actions pertaining to their Ministries/Departments. These action plans are being uploaded to the web portal.



: Logo for commemoration of 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary :  
: of Mahatma Gandhi :

## ASI discovers **254 Copper coins** belonging to the **Medieval Period**

The Archaeological Survey of India (Delhi Circle) under the Ministry of Culture has discovered a hoard of 254 Copper Coins in the premises of Khirki Mosque during conservation of the monument. This mosque lies on the southern periphery of the village Khirki. The mosque was built by Khan-i-Jahan Junan Shah, the Prime Minister of Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1351-88), and is believed to be one of the seven mosques built by him.

Archaeological Survey of India had taken up cleaning the area to start conservation of Khirki Mosque and during the cleaning, a hoard of 254 coins of the medieval period was found near the entrance of the monument. Immediately, a team of an archaeologist, conservation assistant and photographers rushed to the site and took the hoard of coins under their possession. Few coins got cleaned by the experts of Science from Archaeological Survey of India and based on preliminary observation, it can be said that some coins belong to the reign of Shershah Suri and his successors.

It is pertinent to mention that in the year 2003 a hoard of 63 Coins was found from the same premises during cleaning and conservation. Delhi Circle has started scientific clearance of the area under the technical supervision of archaeologists. After cleaning of the coins process to decipher the same will be initiated with the help of experts.



*Copper Coins discovered by ASI*

Source: PIB

## Revolutionary Changes in **Tourism Sector:** Minister **KJ Alphans**



Minister Bhuma Akhila Priya

The 34th IATO Annual Convention 2018 was organised by The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) and Andhra Pradesh Tourism collaboratively in Visakhapatnam from September 6 to 9. It was attended by KJ Alphans, Minister of State (Independent

Charge) and Bhuma Akhila Priya, Tourism Minister of Andhra Pradesh. Speaking on the occasion KJ Alphans said that the Central Government has been implementing several strategic measures to bring revolutionary changes in the tourism sector.

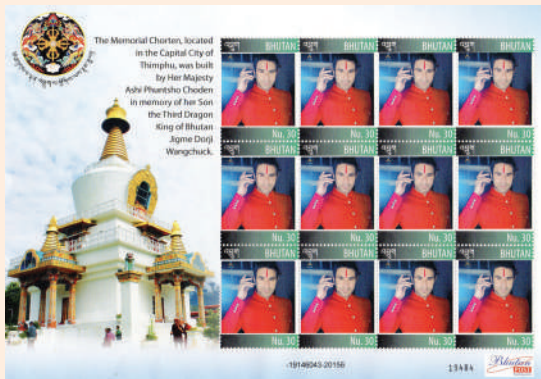


Minister KJ Alphans with Tappeta Gullu Troupe

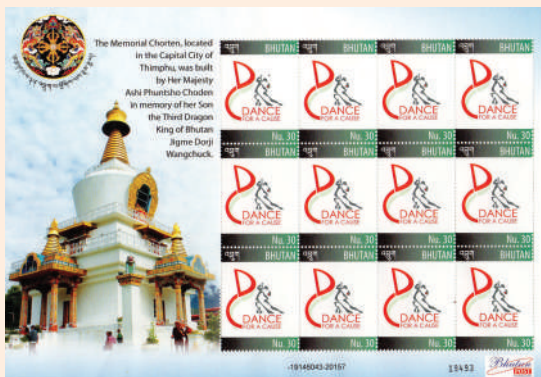
# Bhutan Issues Special Stamp Featuring Sandip Soparrkar

The Government of Bhutan an official postage stamp featuring internationally acclaimed choreographer Sandip Soparrkar and 'Dance for a Cause' logo.

In 2008 Sandip Soparrkar had launched his initiative 'Dance for a Cause' at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland with the help of late Parmeshwar Godrej. This initiative was a way through which Sandip used the dance and drama as a medium to raise awareness about various social issues prevalent in society.



Karma Wangdi, Chief Executive Officer, Bhutan Postal Corporation Ltd said, "Dance for a Cause is a heartwarming initiative by Sandip Soparrkar that has received international appreciation, be it United Nations or the Government of India, all have praised the worldwide social awareness work that Dance for a Cause has been doing. This stamp costing 30



Bhutanese Ngultrum issued by the Bhutan Postal Corporation Ltd celebrates and recognises 10 years of Dance for a Cause."

In the past decade, Sandip Soparrkar and the team have raised awareness on issues such as animal rights, cancer awareness, aids, care for mentally challenged individuals, drugs awareness and more. Last year the Government of India honoured the initiative with the National Excellence Award.



Sandip Soparrkar says that there are so many big and small social issues in the world that we live in. As a dancer, he believes that it is his responsibility to bring to light the problems that surround us because to him dance is not just a form of entertainment but also a form of education and it is the best way to make an impact and bring change. Dance for a Cause has been working towards it.

This is the first time that an official postage stamp has been issued in the name of any international style dancer by the Government of Bhutan making India and the entire dance community proud of the special achievement.

# ArangeTram



A GRAND

RANGAPRAVESAM



Text and Pics: **Paul Nicodemus**

"Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle," stated Napoleon Hill, a popular American writer. These words are apt for Sudagani Geeta Narayan who recently made her Rangapravesam at Kalabharathi Auditorium on September 28. In an unbelievable feat, she reached a professional standard in Kuchipudi in a short span of two and a half years. That too in her late 30s; making her achievement even more special. She is indeed an inspiration for many women of today. She reached the stage with rigorous practice. She sweated it out day in and day out.

Geeta Narayan was born in Jangareddygudem of West Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh. She has been training in Kuchipudi under the tutelage of KV Lakshmi, principal and secretary of Nataraj Music and Dance Academy, Visakhapatnam for the last two



and a half years. Her spouse, Ravishankar Narayan, IRS has been a pillar of strength in her terpsichorean pursuit.





*Sudagani Geeta Narayan, Sudagani Ravi Shankar Narayan, IRS, Dr. J. Purnachandra Rao, DGP, Ramajogayya Sastry and BR Vikram Kumar*



*Sudagani Geeta Narayan receiving 'Naaty Shaatak' from Anupama Mohan, KV Lakshmi, Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan and Dr. Darshana Jhaveri*



*Parents-in-law of Sudagani Geeta Narayan*



*Parents of Sudagani Geeta Narayan*





*Padma Bhushan Awardee, Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan*



*Padma Shri Awardee, Dr. Darshana Jhaveri*



*Kerala Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee Anupama Mohan*

She made her Kuchipudi Rangapravesam in a grand setting attended by cr me de la cr me of the city. Gurus from other parts of the country, Bharatanatyam exponent Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan from New Delhi, Manipuri exponent Dr Darshana Jhaveri from Mumbai and Kuchipudi exponent Anupama Mohan from Kerala watched her perform. Dr J Purnachandra Rao, DGP, ACB, Telangana graced the occasion as the chief guest. Popular film lyricist Ramajogayya Sastry attended the programme as a guest.

She began her rangapravesam with a prayer shloka 'Amba Paraku' and drew the attention of the gathered audience. She then performed 'Sabasadulu' composed by Rambatla Narasimha Sarma in Nata raga and Adi tala. Her soulful rendition of the art form was a treat to watch. She progressed with the numbers 'Oka Pari Koka Par' in Kharaharapriya raga and Adi tala; 'Bhamakalapam' in Bhairavi raga and Misrachapu tala; Jayadeva's Ashtapadi 'Sanchara Dadhara' in Ragamalika and Adi tala; Annamacharya keerthana 'Choodaramma Satulala' in Ragamalika and Narayana Teertha's 'Neela Megha Sareera Tarangham' in Ragamalika. Her beautiful and large eyes emoted the right expression as she effortlessly got into the role of the characters. Her footwork was fabulous and Tarangam was a treat to watch. She concluded her rangapravesam with a beautiful 'Thillana' and 'Mangalam'. Rangapravesam is a full-length solo dance performance which marks the transition of an artiste from a student to an accomplished dancer. With her performance, she proved herself as an accomplished Kuchipudi artiste.

KV Lakshmi, her teacher and principal of Nataraj Music and Dance Academy provided the live music accompaniment on Nattuvangam supported by M Narasimha Rao on vocals, M Edukondalu on mridangam, MS Raju on violin, BVS Sarma on flute and S Raju on pads.

Sudagani Ravi Shankar Narayan delivered the welcome address and BR Vikram Kumar, founder president of Nataraj Music and Dance Academy supervised the programme and pronounced vote of thanks. Dr Perala Balamuralikrishna did a brilliant job with his poetic narration.



# TORCH BEARERS



## SOBHA NAIDU THE SATHYABHAMA OF KUCHIPUDI

Text: **Paul Nicodemus**

Pic: **Avinash Pasricha and Paul Nicodemus**



"It is a rough road that leads to the heights of greatness," wrote Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a Roman philosopher. Dr Sobha Naidu has tread that road and reached the heights of greatness. The determination she showed in her journey to master the art form of Kuchipudi is fascinating. The girl from a small town in Andhra Pradesh became a leading exponent of Kuchipudi. Her performances won accolades not only in India but also around the globe. She devoted her life in pursuit and promotion of dance. For her service towards Indian Art and

Culture, the Government of India honoured her with Padma Shri and Sangeet Natak Akademi awards.

Shobha Naidu was born to Venkanna Naidu and Sarojini Devi in Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh. Rajahmundry was her native place. Her father worked as an executive engineer and because of his mode of work, they moved from one place to another. "Before I completed my eighth grade, my father had 12 transfers within Andhra Pradesh," she





says. Right from the age of 2, she had a sense of rhythm; lying in the cradle, baby Sobha moved her hands and legs to the rhythm of music being played on the radio. When she wanted something she asked for it with an expression on her face. She started learning dance from the age of 4, the first from her family. She hails from a conservative family where a lot of things were forbidden for girls, dance and music were a part. It was her mother, who believed children should pursue their passions and convinced her reluctant father.

Her father constructed a house in Rajahmundry. Though he had frequent transfers, her mother stayed in Rajahmundry for the sake of children's education. Especially for Shoba's dance training. PL Reddy, a local dance teacher was her first guru who visited her house every day in the morning to train her. "Reddy garu used to come home early in the morning to teach me to dance. Sometimes, he woke me up, made me drink milk and taught me to dance. It was during this period I developed a fondness towards dance," she reveals. He taught her dance with utmost care and love.

One day, there was a robbery in her house and someone stole all her dance jewellery made of gold. Her father bought it for her. It quite upset him and asked the family to move to Parvathipuram where he was working. It was a difficult phase for her, she had to leave her dance and guru. Within a short time, she had another jolt when her guru passed away with a heart attack. It was a lot to take for a 6 years child.

Sobha gave her first performance at 5. She performed at Lion's Club, Ramalayam and other temples in Rajahmundry. The dance she learnt was a mixture of Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam. "My guru told me he is teaching whatever he knew and asked me to learn from his guru Pasumarthi Krishnamurthy. He wanted me to go to Chennai and learn from him," she says. After the death of her teacher, she lost interest in dance for a brief period. It was her mother who encouraged her and reminded her of the guru's wish to see her a good dancer. Today, Sobha Naidu



is who she is because of her mother, who stood by her side. "She took me to programmes, did makeup and always encouraged me. I am what I am today because of my loving mother," she says. It was her mother who supported her to go to Chennai for learning dance. Sobha was in her 7th grade and her mother told her it is time to leave. Her father did not agree and later agreed to let her go on the condition she would return home after the arangetram.

Sobha moved to Chennai and initially stayed with her grandfather Keshav Rao, a Deputy Commissioner. They could not find the address of Pasumarthy Krishnamurthy and that was the time Vempati Chinna Satyam was becoming popular among the art

community in Chennai. Her grandfather suggested her to join master Vempati. Those days, he was choreographing for films and taught Kuchipudi. After visiting Kalakshetra and Adyar Laxman and they visited Kuchipudi Art Academy. She was impressed by the kind of teaching they master was delivered at the Academy. Later, she watched Krishna Parijatham by Kuchipudi Art Academy. She was thoroughly mesmerised by the performance and fell in love with the character of Satyabhama.

Her grandfather served as the secretary of the academy, so he invited Vempati to his house. Sobha was asked to perform whatever she learnt. She did not know how to sing and asked the master to sing



*Sobha Naidu in Kalyana Srinivasam*

'Madhura Nagarilo'; he sang, and she danced for two minutes. He told her grandfather that she had good rhythm and expressions but lacks perfection. He agreed to teach her. That was how her journey of becoming a doyen of dance began in 1968. Every day she travelled from Annamalai Puram to T. Nagar in Chennai. She studied at the Saradha High School near the academy. She reached her school at 8 am and after the school, she attended dance classes at the academy. She had a dance class from 6 pm to 8 pm. She had to travel in a bus and reached home at 9 pm. Day by day, her grandparents grew concerned about her safety. That was when she wrote a letter to her mother, explaining the situation.

Sobha's mother left her other children, husband and the entire household and came down to Chennai to help her daughter realise the dream. It was a sacrifice that her mother made for her and both of them stayed in a room. She took care of all the chores and even sat with her in the class. She accompanied her to the programmes, sat in the front row and became her best critic. Her father was not convinced with the





idea of them staying in Chennai and wanted them to come back. He also felt that it was becoming expensive. Sobha in a combative tone asked him to send only Rs 1000 per month. Master Vempati did not charge fees from her as he believed in her talent. Vempati's wife even served her breakfast whenever she missed it in a hurry to attend school.

Staying away from home in a different city came across as a big challenge for her. There were times when she did not have money to purchase rice. Her father would have immediately come down to her rescue but she endured it with fortitude. After a while, her mother requested master to finish her arangetram so that they can go back. Master agreed and she completed her arangetram at Rama Rao Kala Mandapam in Chennai. Rukmini Arundale attended the occasion as a chief guest. Those days, Rukmini did not have a good feeling about Kuchipudi and it made Sobha pretty nervous. She just prayed and performed seven items for 3 hours. Rukmini went in and praised her performance and told her that she would receive many film offers and asked her if she too came down to Chennai to get into films like many others? "I told her I am here only to learn dance. To confirm, Rukmini took me to the corner where sculptures of gods were placed and asked

me to make a promise. I gave her a word without any second thought," she says. Rukmini blessed her and told her that she would have a bright future. Those words had a deep impact on her. The next day morning most of the newspapers in Chennai showered praise on her.

Master Vempati pointing at the news coverage once again asked her to reconsider her decision of leaving Chennai. When she told him about the word that she has given her father. Master called on him and informed him about the upcoming programmes and asked him to extend her stay. She got an extension and continued to perform. As time passed, her father once again wanted her to come back and he personally came down to Chennai to take her home. "Along with my father we went to guru's house and he told him about the opportunity that she got from ICCR to tour abroad. He told him that nobody would leave such an opportunity." Her father agreed on the condition that she would return upon completion of the tour. It was the first time that she travelled abroad. She toured South America. "After coming back from South America, we travelled to Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and other places in India. It was for the first time that I visited these places. I have realised that it is not a good idea to go back when everything is



coming together. I told my father that I have just started getting the recognition. I assured him that I would come home but after completing all the good programmes," she says. Her mother stood by her side like a strong pillar.

Sobha got a chance to play the character of Sri Krishna in Krishna Parijatham, the ballet which inspired her when she first arrived in Chennai. After three shows, master felt that her walk looked feminine and changed her character to Rukmini. "We performed the ballet in Krishna Gana Sabha. It was

attended by Subbudu, a renowned cultural critic who was known for his slapstick criticism. Even established dancers stayed away from dancing in front of him. He attended our show. I did not know about him and performed as usual. Later on, I have learnt the popular character in the film Sagara Sangamam portrayed by Kamal Hassan was developed based on him," she says. The next day, a headline in The Indian Express newspaper read, 'A Boneless Wonder'. The review by Subbudu while mentioning good things about Vempati's ballet concluded with a suggestion that the girl playing the character of Rukmi should play the character of Sathyabhama and vice versa. The critic also praised Sobha for her flexibility. "My guru after reading the review gave me the character of Sathyabhama. That was how I secured the character. It is my favourite character and I am still playing it," she reveals. Irrespective of the ballet, she has always done a great job - be it Krishna Parijatham, Menaka Vishwamitra or Chandalika.



She completed her intermediate from Queen Mary's College. At a time when she wanted to leave Chennai to pursue her degree. It got delayed because of foreign tours. "After we completed our foreign tour, our guru went to Hyderabad and met Chenna



Reddy, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. He explained him the situation of the Academy and requested him to provide a building grant or a yearly grant. Chief Minister suggested him to come down to Hyderabad and establish an institution as the Government of Andhra Pradesh cannot fund an institution in Chennai. Guru told him that it is not possible for him to come down. That was when Chenna Reddy suggested him to send someone who became popular to Andhra. While Guru began to think, Chenna Reddy recollected my performance in World Telugu Conference in Malaysia and advised my guru to send me to Hyderabad. He did not know what to say and said okay. Then and there I was made the principal. My father was contacted over the phone and he became happy as I would be closer. I was surprised because I am not used to teaching. All that I knew was practising and performing. I told the guru that it is not possible but he chided and said

that now we have to grow. That was how I came down to Hyderabad as a principal in 1981," she reveals. Until then she was a performing artist without any responsibility and after coming down she had additional responsibilities as a teacher and administrator apart from being a regular performer. "By God's grace whatever I did turn out to be a success," she adds.

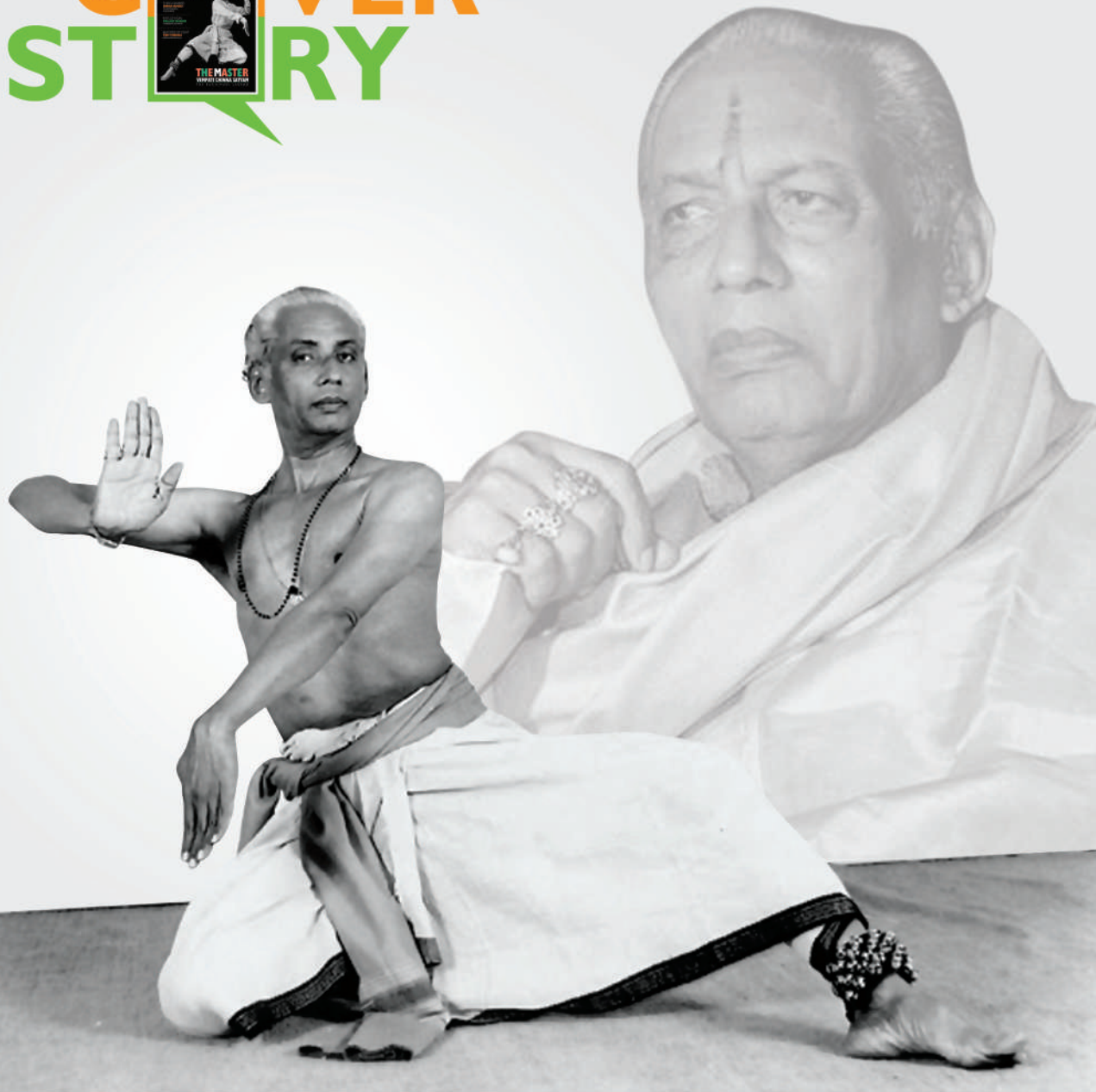
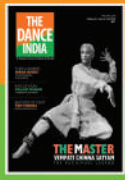
Through her academy, so far she has trained hundreds of students in the art form of Kuchipudi. She is a purist who wants to keep the tradition alive while experimenting judiciously.

She represented India and performed in the USA, UK, USSR, Syria, Baghdad, Kampuchea, Turkey, Hong Kong, Bangkok, West Indies, Mexico, Venezuela, Tunis, Cuba and West Asia.



*Sobha Naidu receiving an award from Nataraj Music and Dance Academy*

# COVER STORY



## MASTER VEMPATI THE KUCHIPUDI LEGEND

# MASTER VEMPATI THE KUCHIPUDI LEGEND



Text: **Paul Nicodemus**

Today, Kuchipudi enjoys proper classical status thanks to the efforts of a legendary personality. He took Kuchipudi from a small village in Andhra Pradesh and presented it on the global stage. His work in reforming the dance style is unparalleled. Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam brought relevance to the dance art form of Kuchipudi in the modern era with his brilliance. He reformed, refined and rejuvenated the rich tradition and brought it closer to the standards of Natya Shastra.

Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam was born in a traditional family of dancers in Kuchipudi village in Andhra Pradesh on 15 October 1929. Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Sastry, hailed as one of the Kuchipudi greats initiated him into Kuchipudi. It is believed that Vempati with a burning desire to learn dance left his native village at the age of 18 and went walking to Madras (now Chennai). Such was his passion for the art form. Vempati Pedda Satyam, his cousin was by then an established artiste in Madras and Vempati Chinna Satyam who was on fire for Kuchipudi trained

under him. His desire to spread Kuchipudi dance made him establish Kuchipudi Art Academy in Madras in 1963.

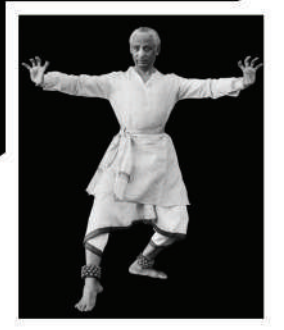
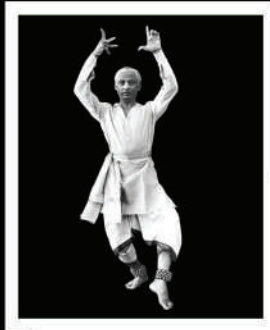
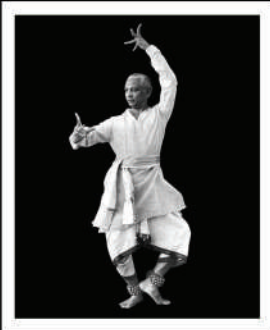
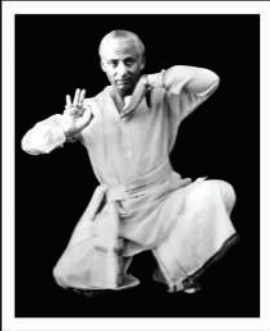
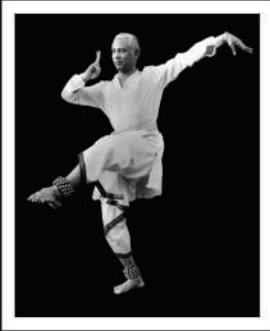
He refined the art form, bringing it closer to the standards of Natya Shastra and gave it a whole new perspective by introducing new elements while still protecting its purity. Kuchipudi operas Padmavati Srinivasa Kalyanam, Vipranarayana Cheritam, Menaka Vishwamitra, Shakuntalam, Bhama Kalapam, Chandalika, Rukmini Kalyanam, Haravilasam, Siva Dhanurbhangam and Ardhnanareeswara are some of his gems which attained a universal status. He also composed Kumarasambhavam, Padmavathi Thirumanam and Sri Krishna Parijatham in Tamil.

Guru Vempati along with his students made his debut trip abroad in 1971. He toured in London and France garnering widespread appreciation. He then toured South America and the Caribbean Islands, with his troupe in 1973. Since then he never looked back and continued to tour around the globe. He

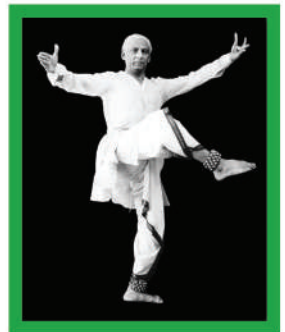
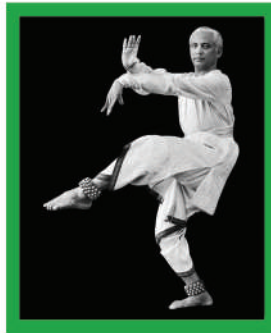
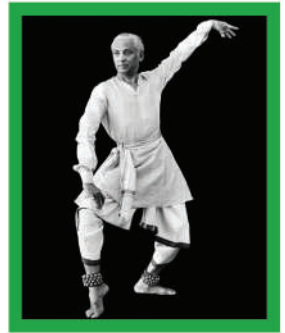
Pic: **Avinash Pasricha**

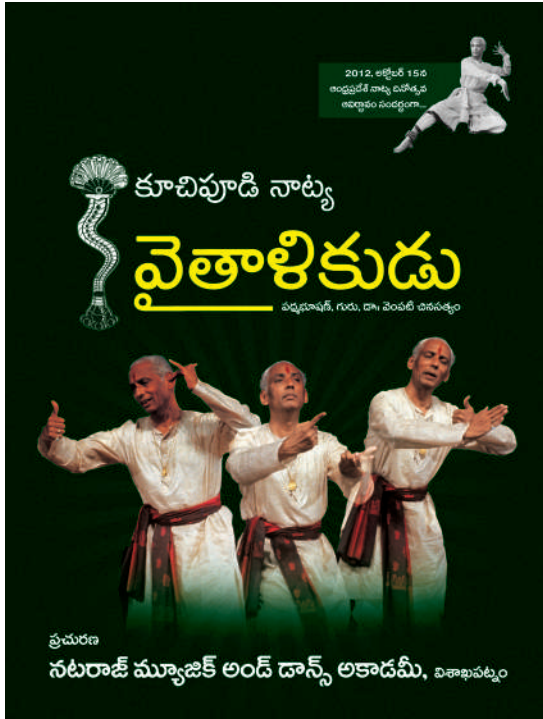


# VEMPATI CHINNA SATYAM



*Kuchipudi*





*Nataraj Music and Dance Academy published a book on Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam on the occasion of his birth anniversary on October 15, 2012 and has been celebrating it as the Andhra Pradesh Dance Day.*



*300 students of Kuchipudi perform in front of a 30 feet sand sculpture of Kuchipudi guru Vempati Chinna Satyam on the Ramakrishna Beach in Visakhapatnam on Monday on the occasion of the 84th birth anniversary of the late guru. The event was organised by Nataraj Music and Dance Academy*

travelled to countries like USA, Russia, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, and some Gulf countries with his students. He popularised Kuchipudi wherever he went. He toured the United States of America with his productions 'Kuchipudi Prathidwani 98' and 'Kuchipudi 2000' in 1998 and 2000 respectively. The two tours had covered approximately 50 cities across America. He breathed his last at the age of 83 on 29 July 2012.





*Vempati Couple*



*M. Kameswari and Chavali Bala Tripurasundari,  
daughters of Vempati*



*Vempati, Lakshminani, Aarudhra*

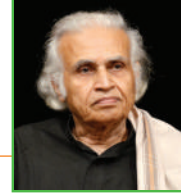
### Awards and Accolades:

Padma Bhushan by the Government of India; SNA Fellow by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi; Kalaprapurna by Andhra University; Kuchipudi Nritya Pramukh by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi; Honorary Doctorate (D. Litt.) by Sri Venkateswara University (Tirupati); Asthana Vidwan by Sri Venkateswara Temple (Pittsburgh); T.T.K. Memorial Award by the Madras Music Academy; Kalidas Puraskar by Government of Madhya Pradesh; Kalaimamani by Government of Tamilnadu; The Mayor of Miami presented the Golden Key award to him in 1984; The Mayor of Dayton, Ohio declared September 25, 1994, as Vempati Chinna Satyam Day; The Mayor of Ghana, Ohio declared April 27, 1984, as classical Indian Kuchipudi Ballet dance

Drama; The Mayor of Atlanta declared 3rd November 1994 as Kuchipudi Dance Drama Day; The Mayor of Cleveland conferred honorary citizenship on Dr.Vempati; The Mayor of Memphis declared September 24, 1994, as 'Ramayana Day' and the Key to the city was awarded to him; Gold medal was presented to him by the President of Tunisia at the Cartage Festival and Citations and Honors conferred at the Avignon Festival, France in 1995.



# DR VEMPATI CHINNA SATYAM: THE REFORMER OF KUCHIPUDI



Text: **Dr Sunil Kothari**

I was a greenhorn, rearing to burst on the Indian classical dance scene after Dr Mulk Raj Anand took me under his wings. I met Dr Mulk Raj Anand, got the address from him of Professor Mohan Khokar, corresponded with him, took his permission to translate his article on Bhagavata Mela Natakam and Kuchipudi from Marg magazine into Gujarati. I was curious to know more about Kuchipudi. I did not know that Bhagavata Mela Natakam and Kuchipudi dance-dramas were a part of the living tradition. Professor Mohan Khokar advised me to attend All India Dance Seminar at Delhi in April 1958, convened by Sangeet Natak Akademi.

It was a turning point in my life. I came to know a galaxy of pioneers of Indian dance, exponents, gurus, scholars, critics and dance enthusiasts. I saw for the first time demonstration of Kuchipudi dance by Kanchanmala. She performed tarangam placing a pitcher full of water and balancing herself on the rim of a brass plate. Vissa Apparao, the great scholar was presenting a paper at Vigyan Bhavan before the large gathering. I was sitting next to Banda Kanaka Lingeswara Rao who was in charge of Siddhendra Kalakshetram at Kuchipudi village.

My involvement in researches in the dance tradition continued and, when in Chennai, during that period, at T. Nagar, late YG Doraiswamy took me to Panagal Park to meet Vempati Chinna Satyam who had just started Kuchipudi Art Academy to train young dancers in Kuchipudi on lines of solo performance.

That was the first time I met Vempati Chinna Satyam, which resulted in friendship for a lifetime. Whenever I visited Chennai, I invariably spent time watching his classes. I had seen Chandrakala, a gifted dancer learning from him and was impressed by her dance. I was told later on that she gave up dancing and joined films. Never saw her again. But I did see Sobha Naidu and other dancers. They were up and coming dancers and Vempati was shaping them chiselling like a sculptor, turning them into dancers who reflected his artistry, how he was polishing the dance movement, which became a hallmark of



Kuchipudi dance and Vempati bani, if we may call it. I used to take photographs in those years for documentation. I have somewhere in my archive photos of Vempati and two-year-old Ravi also. Also some photos of dancers taking lessons.

I continued corresponding with him and was keen on visiting Kuchipudi village again for detailed studies and photographs for documentation. When I got an opportunity of visiting London under British Council scholarship in 1968, I met Kamdev in London who wanted to study Kuchipudi and also Chhau dances. He came to India and started studying Kuchipudi under Vempati. That brought us once again together.

Brij Narayan, Director of Sur Singar Samsad had by then accepted my proposal to have lec-dem series of classical dance forms for Kal-ke-Kalakar Festival at C.J. Hall opposite Museum, then known as Prince of Wales Museum. Vempati Chinna Satyam gave a superb exposition of nritya, pure dance and abhinaya to Telugu compositions. Of course, his demonstration was superb.

Vempati Garu brought dancers one after another for a decade to Mumbai twice one for Kal-Ke-Kalakar at C.J. Hall and other for Swami Haridas Sammelan at Rang Bhavan. I also wrote articles in Femina, Dharmayug, The Illustrated Weekly of India, The Times of India (reviews in daily), features in Sunday magazine section, also reviews in The Evening News of India and so on and we had great times. Vempati by that decade had composed dance-dramas and sometimes we had excerpts from these dance-dramas like Vipranarayana.

Vempati's own patralekha, in which repentant Sathyabama writes a letter to Krishna asking his forgiveness, both in padartha abhinaya, demonstrating each word and also in vakyartha abhinaya, as suggestive abhinaya would receive thunderous applause. In padartha abhinaya, he would stand up and perform dancing with such grace, the gem of the poem Srimad Ratnakar Putrika, Mukharvinda... that it would cast a spell on the audience. Such was his mastery over the form. He had invested the form of Kuchipudi with great

Pic: Avinash Pasricha



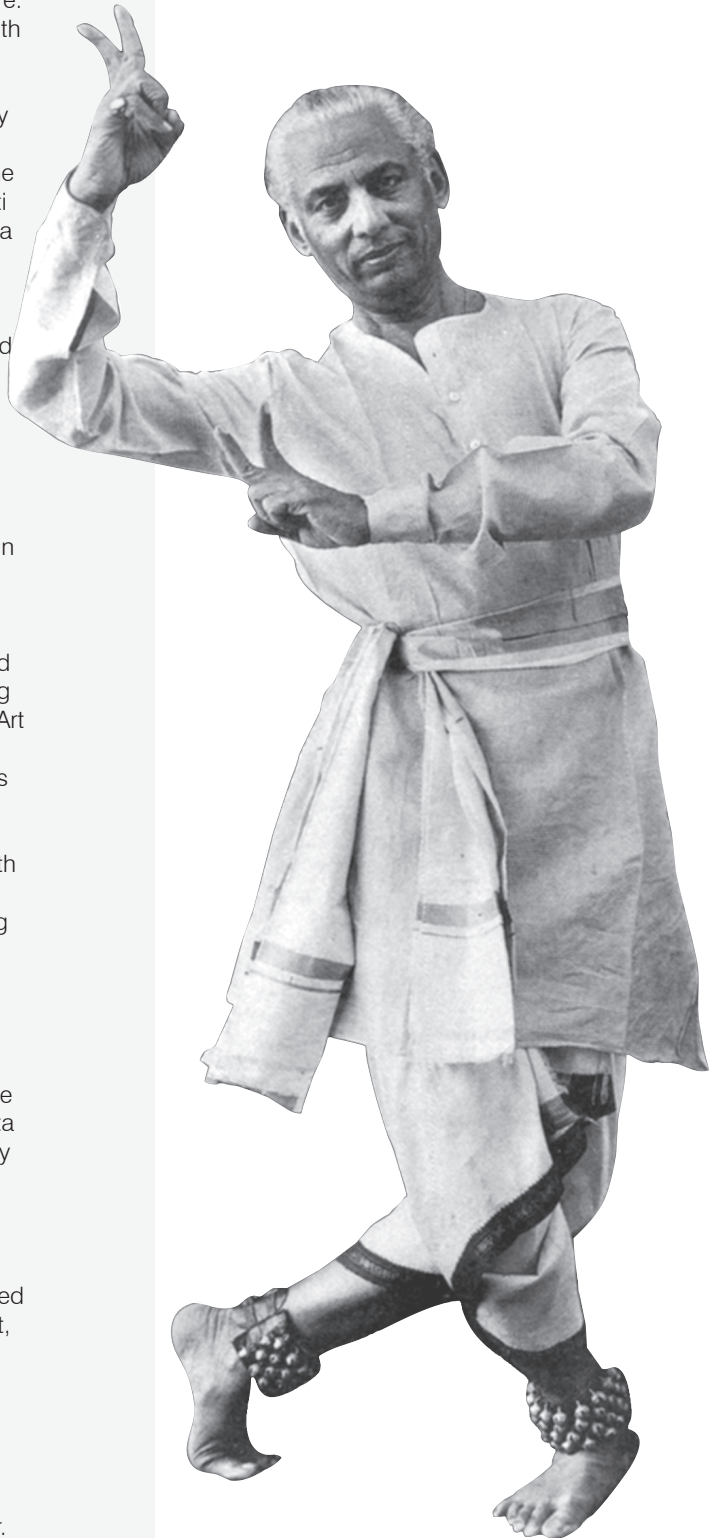
dignity and saushtavam, upright aesthetic posture. Year after year we used to watch it and relish it with delight.

Of all the illustrious gurus from the Vempati family group, Vempati Chinna Satyam's contribution to Kuchipudi has been outstanding. Born in 1929, he studied under Tadepalli Peraiah Sastry, Pasumarti Kondala Rayudu, his elder cousin Vempati Pedda Satyanarayana and Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastri. As a child, he played the roles of Lava, Kusha, Lohitasya and Prahlada, and then graduated to the female roles of Satyabhama and Gollabhama. Well versed in other male roles, he was known for the role of Lord Shiva in Ksheera Sagara Mathanam, a dance-drama choreographed by him.

Following the footsteps of Vempati Pedda Satyanarayana, he too migrated to Chennai and in the early years gave direction for dance in films. However, when he came under the influence of Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Sastri, he was extremely impressed by the guru's approach and erudition. When he got involved as a guru training dancers in Kuchipudi, he established Kuchipudi Art Academy in Chennai in 1963 and began choreographing and composing dance numbers for solo presentations. He had already made a deep study of the Natya Shastra and other texts and was obsessed to place Kuchipudi on par with other classical dance forms. He received good exposure during his initial stay in Chennai feasting his eyes on the productions of Rukmini Devi at Kalakshetra. He realised that Kuchipudi had to acquire poish and perfection with the aesthetic presentation.

With his creative genius, he brought a sea change in the execution of the nritya movements. The nritya numbers in the dance-drama lacked in the beauty of movements, were crude and rustic. He introduced sophistication, clean lines and a scintillating quality with perfect resolutions of movements of various dance units and created innumerable jatis and dance patterns. He classified them, correlated them with the Natya Shastra text, emphasising the sastric nature of the Kuchipudi dance form. He brought an order to the solo presentation of Kuchipudi dance on the lines of Bharatanatyam and other solo forms.

He brought in changes in aharya, costumes, as well as music emphasising its classical character.



He received support from P Sangeeta Rao, the veena player and music director. Bhujangaraya Sarma wrote at his behest, a homage to Siddhendra Yogi in the form of Brahmanjali with the words Brahmanjali tandava nritha shreshame. It was set to Todi raga by the young vocalist K Surya Prakash Rao. Most of his disciples perform it as an opening number with slokas from the Abhinaya Darpana. He composed and choreographed jathiswarams, thillanas, varnams and lyrics of contemporary lyricists like Devulapalli Krishna Sastri from the dance-drama Vipranarayana viz., Koluvaithiva Ranga Sayee and Vedalera Vayyarulu, which became extremely popular.

The repertoire he created over a span of thirty years is remarkable and Vempati's style acquired a distinct characteristic, setting his style apart from other gurus. His students are a legion. With star pupil Chandrakala, who left Kuchipudi to join films and Sobha Naidu, Vempati succeeded in having a large following in no time. From the leading lights of Bharatanatyam like film stars Vyjayanthimala, Hema Malini, Meenakshi Sheshadri to the celebrated dancers like Shanta Rao, Yamini Krishnamurthy, Sonal Mansingh, Lakshmi Viswanathan, Swapna Sundari, Kamala's sister Radha, a host of dancers studied under him in the seventies, performing some numbers learnt under him in their repertoire.

His disciples Kamala Reddy, Sasikala, Anuradha Nehru, Padma Menon, Manju Bhargavee, Rathna Kumar, Kamdev among others acquired a status of a star followed by so many including Kalpalathika, Anuradha Jonnalagadda, Shanta Rati Mishra and Shantala Shivalingappa based in Paris.

Besides solo numbers, Vempati Chinna Satyam choreographed a number of dance-dramas with imagination and deep understanding of how dance-dramas should be presented for metropolitan audiences. He has choreographed more than fifteen dance-dramas of which Padmavati Srinivasa Kalyanam, Rukmini Kalyanam, Hara Vilasam have received unprecedented success. Their production values and dramatic impact, music and uniform good performances by the well-trained dancers have received appreciation not only in India but also abroad. The several USA and European tours are a testimony to the Guru's genius. The tremendous support he received from Telugu NRIs abroad is historic. The services he rendered to Kuchipudi dance-drama and solo dance form is unparalleled.

Vempati has devised a course of training which is quite rigorous. Training in music and Sanskrit literature is compulsory along with practical lessons in dance. He himself used to supervise the classes until his health permitted. He conducted several workshops abroad and as a creative guru, his prolific choreographic works have placed Kuchipudi on a very high level. He has written a book in Telugu on Kuchipudi with hundreds of sketches for the technique and explanations of Natya Shastra principles.

With his own creative skills, imagination, observation and aesthetic approach, Vempati Chinna Satyam metamorphosed Kuchipudi into a highly classical dance form, meeting various norms of the Natya Shastra. He shall be remembered for long by generations of dancers for his genius. He taught with great generosity. Never charged any fee, fed dancers, allowed them to blossom and today wherever they are, they have done Vempati proud by continuing and following his tradition.

We all will miss him I owe him a debt of gratitude for when I undertook to write a book on Kuchipudi, Vempati assisted me and saw that there were no mistakes. He had bestowed upon me affection without expecting anything in return. Gurus like him appear on the dance scene rarely.



# IS VEMPATI'S LEGACY VANISHING?



Text: **BR Vikram Kumar**



An institution is better than an individual. It is a struggle for an idea conceived by an individual to become an institution. He was a pathmaker who persevered and withstood the test of time. The credit for integrating the Kuchipudi community, which was going apart goes to Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam. His efforts to consolidate the dance form after deep research into a single dance tradition was one of its kind. Vempati was a legend who laid the foundation to a new era in Kuchipudi by merging tradition and science. Needless to say, the majority of Kuchipudi dancers follow Vempati's style of Kuchipudi. His hard work of over 50 years has brought revolutionary changes in the art form. His efforts have made the Sangeet Natak Akademi under the Ministry of Culture to recognise Kuchipudi as one of the classical dances of India. Despite his humble beginning, he conquered continents of the world. He reformed the art form of Kuchipudi to last for the next hundreds of years but with no proper documentation of his work, the present day Kuchipudi has once again begun to disintegrate into various styles. It would be great if his direct disciples come forward to document his original choreography pieces before it vanishes.



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# RAYS HOPE



## PALLAVI SHAIKH A PASSIONATE KATHAKAR

Text: **Paul Nicodemus**



She did not forget her Indian roots and culture after moving to the United States of America. To make it even better, she has been promoting and propagating the Indian Classical dance form of Kathak on the foreign land. Pallavi Degwekar Shaikh, an accomplished Kathak artiste, choreographer and teacher has been doing a phenomenal job in New Jersey, USA. In the last 25 years, she performed at various prestigious venues in India and the USA and has been training the next

generation of dancers for the last 19 years. She completed her B.A. in Indian Philosophy from the University of Mumbai and Alankar (Masters) in Kathak from Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal.

Pallavi was born on 25 November 1980 in Mumbai, India. She learned Kathak under Guru Asha Tai Joglekar (Maushi) at the age of 10. Kathak was the first art form she learnt. She hails from a family with a



musical background. Her grandfather Mahadeo Degwekar was an outstanding singer of his time. Maestros like Pt. Ram Marathe and others visited and had mehfilis in her house. Her father Vishnu Mahadeo Degwekar was a Gandaband Shagird of Ustad Ahmedjan Thirakwa Saheb. He had a vision of her pursuing Kathak which compliments Hindustani Classical music and instrument. Her parents were familiar with Asha Tai's dance class at Dadar and put her on her waiting list. "When I met Maushi for the first time, she created an impression on me - a radiant inside-out beauty! Her charm and aura were commanding, and I was keen on learning under her. After one and a half years I was enrolled," she declares.

She revelled in her teens and never considered Kathak as her dream. It made her quit dance! Neither her parents nor her guru was happy with the decision. But Asha Tai, her teacher gave her ample space and believed she would come back to Kathak. After a year, Pallavi attended her uncle's (Balasaheb Degwekar, a tabla artist) 60th birthday celebration. As a part of the celebration, there was a concert with many renowned artists like Pandit Suresh Talwalkar and Pandit Bhai Gaitonde. The mesmerising concert and the ambience lit a fire within her, and she realised Kathak is her path and destiny. "Since then I have never looked back, and the rest is history," she says.

Her parents and guru played a significant role in encouraging her to learn the art form. They inspired and motivated her - gave her space but pushed her as and when the need emerged. "I credit all my Kathak success to both my Mausi and parents," she says. She is a senior disciple of late Guru Asha Tai Joglekar and has been groomed by



Pt. Suresh Talwalkar for Taal and Laya and by Pt. Birju Maharaj.

According to her, Kathak is a unique dance form of storytelling. "Its language is efficient and effective to relate to the audience. A Kathak dancer recites compositions before performing it. With the composition recitation, the dancer and the audience play the math and music game," she says. Kathak choreographies can express and emote themes from Indian mythology, philosophy and socio-economic topics. They can also blend into the contemporary dance forms. Since its background is deeply rooted in both Hindu and Muslim religion, the dance form is an integral part of the cultural fabric of India.

She derives her inspiration in many forms, a piece of music, a good chat with someone, nature - sunset, rain, snow or from watching artists at work. Apart from the dance, she is passionate about painting and singing. "I must confess I don't nurture those hobbies as much as I should," she says.

Her mornings begin with her duties as a mother. Then comes her time with a cup of tea! She does riyaz,



daily for at least an hour depending on the schedule. She dedicates her afternoons to classes. She usually ends her day watching a movie or a series. It helps her relax in her downtime.

In the years to come, she sees herself doing three things - sharing her knowledge, contributing art to the community and strengthening her skills.

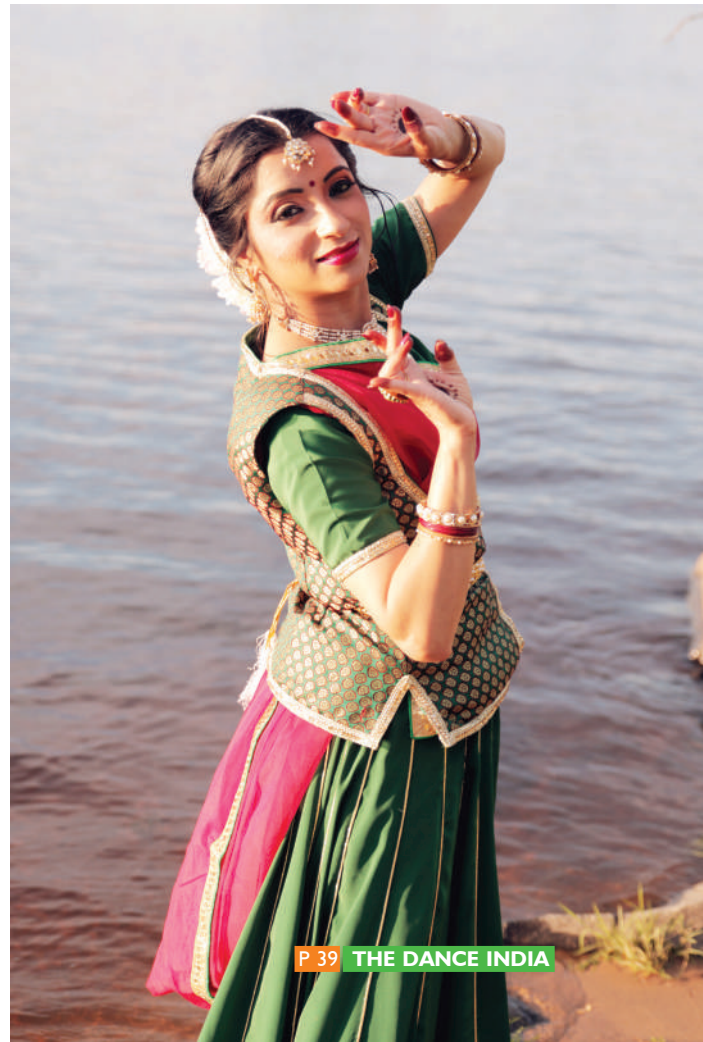
The most challenging moment in her career was to establish herself as an accomplished Kathak guru and artist in the USA. "In India, I had the base and backing of Mausi but here I was starting from zero. I am happy to say I have earned a good name for both me and Kathak here," she says.

She had the hardest time of her life when she lost both her brother and father in a span of two years. "By far, those were the darkest moments in our family. We are all now in a good place, we know both my dad and brother are looking down at us and smiling. Their happy memories will always be with us," she reveals.

There is nothing more gratifying and exhilarating than being a mother. She says that Jiah, her daughter is the best thing that has happened to her. "Today we share the bond of Kathak! Riyaz with her are the best times and knowing I can impart the most important aspect of my life into her has been deeply satisfying," she says.

She is a purist and wants to spread the traditional art form of Kathak in its immaculate form. Especially, in the USA where they have so many influences. Having said that, she likes experimenting with the music piece but her choreographies are traditional. "I am not against fusion. If my students' experiment I do encourage them to follow their heart. Maybe in the future, I may dip my toes into fusion but as of now, I do not see myself away from the pure arts," she explains.

Kathak literally means 'telling a story'. It is a versatile dance style. In its pure traditional form, it can be





entertaining or can bring out socio-economic topics and spread awareness. It is the light of hope that can turn on a spark within the dancer. This is a traditional art form and has existed for decades. "Many maestros from previous generations such as Pt. Bindadin Maharaj, Pt. Lachhu Maharaj, Pt. Shambhu Maharaj, and Pt. Birju Maharaj, Natraj Gopi Krishna, Pt. Sitara Devi, Pt. Rohini Bhate, Guru Asha Tai Joglekar. from more recent times have dedicated their life to rejuvenating this style. Their work has made it easy for students to pursue this art form. Kathak is available at ease nowadays. Families promote women to pursue this dance style. Isn't this enough to say it is a true independence of knowledge which anyone now can pursue with the full support of their family and the society?" she asks.

Awards and achievements she received over the years include Alankar from Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal; 'Sringermani' award from the national organisation of Sur Singar Samsad for Kal Ke Kalakar as an extraordinary dancer; 'Nrityangana 99' for outstanding performance in intercollegiate competition in Sydenham College; performed at Haridas Sangeet Sammelan in the honour of conferring the title 'Sringermani'; Performed at NCPA, Mumbai in Raindrop festival organised by Guru Uma Didi Dogra for Samved; performed at Kamani Auditorium, Delhi in Sadhana Festival organised by Kalashram under Pt. Birju Maharaj and performed at Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi.

Pallavi is an accomplished Kathak artist who loves performing, choreographing and creating novel dance routines. She is passionate about teaching

her art. She teaches beginners to advance level Kathak dance to kids and adults. She is a certified New Jersey Center in charge and examiner of the Bharti Vidyapeeth School of Performing Arts.



# CLASSIFIEDS

## KUCHIPUDI



### **Nataraj Music & Dance Academy**

Teacher: K V Lakshmi  
50-1-50/1, ASR Nagar, Seethammadara  
**Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India**  
Contact No: + 91-9553222969

## BHARATANATYAM



### **Geeta Nritya Vidyalyaya**

Teacher: **Girija Nair**  
'Gurukul' 32/2 Powai Chowk behind  
Shastri Nagar, Saibaba Temple Mulund Colony  
**West Mumbai - 82, Maharashtra, India**  
Contact No: + 91- 9867234249

### **Takshashila Nrityakala Mandir**

Teacher: **Kashmira Trivedi**  
A - 405, Asawari Co. Op. Hos. Soc.  
Pokhran Road No - 1, Varkat Nagar,  
**Thane (W) - 400606, Maharashtra, India**  
Contact No: + 91- 9820649671

### **Sri Krishna Kala Mandir**

Teacher : **Gayathri Gopinath**  
No 5-469 .18th St Sathuvachari Phase - 2  
**Vellore - 632009, Tamil Nadu, India**  
Contact No : 98945 29708

### **Shanmukha Arts Institute of Performing Arts**

Teacher : **Kala Srinivasan**  
D-309 , Usha Nagar, Village Road  
**Bhandup West, Mumbai- 400078**  
Contact No : 98671 14223

### **Nitya Veda Academy**

Teacher : **Vidya Sriram**  
E - 404, Krishna bldg. Vasant Sagar  
Complex, Thakur Village  
**Kandivli (e) 400101**

### **Nalanda Bharatnatyam Nritya Niketan**

Teacher : **Guru K. Shobhana**  
**Centres: Thane, Kalwa, Airoli, Ghatkopar,**  
**Kalyan, Dombivali**  
Contact No: + 91 9820520154  
rohinikhollam@gmail.com

### **Atharva School of Fine Arts**

Teacher : Mrs. Shamal Pawar  
C-1401, Gulraj Tower, Nehru Nagar,  
**Kurla (E), Mumbai – 400024.**  
+91 99690 23246/ 9869272392.

### **Bharatanatyam and Folk Dance Classes,**

Website-www.atharvaschool.com,  
Email-shamal@atharvaschool.com

### **Andaals fine arts**

Teacher : **Madhuri Prathap**  
A 804 Suprabhat chs Opp ushanagar,  
Village road Bhandup,  
**West Mumbai 400078**  
Contact No : 9892531605  
cpmadhuri@gmail.com

## KATHAK



### **Nritya Tapshya Kathak Dance Academy**

Teacher: **Chetan Saraiya. MA, Kathak.**  
Vasai Nallasopara, Kandival. Grand Road  
**Pune, Maharashtra, India**  
Contact No: +91-9821138190

### **Nritya Darpanan Foundation**

Teacher : **Paullumi B Mukheerjee**  
Alap C.H.S. B woing, Plot No 173  
Sir Bhalchndra Road,  
Opp. 2nd Lane Hindu Colony, Dadar (E)  
**Mumbai - 400014 .**  
Contact No. 9821583004

### **Kalanand Nritya sanstha**

Teacher : **Bhavana Sanjiv Lele**  
Shop No-2,3,4,5 Rosewood Building  
Prestige Residency, Dongripada  
Waghbil Naka, Ghodbunder Road  
**Thane West, Maharashtra**  
Contact No : 9223440605

### **Akshata's Dance Academy**

Shivaji housing society,  
Behind JW Marriott,  
Senapati Bapat Road,  
Shivajinagar, Pune- 411016.  
Email id: akshatasdanceacademy@gmail.com  
Contact: 9920990182



# TOM THOMAS KEEPING TRUMPET ALIVE

Text: **Paul Nicodemus**



Since the 1920s jazz has been recognised as a major form of musical expression. Many see it as America's classical music, it then emerged in the form of independent traditional musical styles across the world. Tom Thomas aka Jeevan Thomas is a renowned musician in India who has been keeping Trumpet, a brass instrument used in classical and jazz ensembles alive. He is a musical prowess who has worked with many great music composers in India including Chakravarthy, MS Viswanathan, Ilayaraja and AR Rahman. He made a name for



himself performing with great artistes, fusion jazz, contemporary jazz, western classical music and ghazals. Music is his life. Let my music reach all the hearts, body and soul. He is humorous, witty, creative person and lives his life with certain principles.

Tom Thomas was born in Ooty. His father, RY Dass was a great musician who played with Shankar Jaikishan, Madan Mohan, Anil Biswas, Roshan and many others. Later, his father moved to Chennai and played for most of the music directors of his time like Viswanathan Ramamoorthy, KV Mahadevan and Ghantasala.

Though born in Ooty, Tom grew up in Chennai. He started his musical journey under western music teacher Dhanaraj. "My journey into music began with a violin., I started off as a violin player and then learnt guitar but, I switched to my father's instrument, Trumpet. I learnt the art of playing the trumpet from my father," he says.

One day, he was trying to blow the trumpet and his father saw his interest and taught him. Gradually, he learnt to play the instrument and joined a light music group to play with an orchestra. He played for some music directors and then joined ace composer MS

Viswanathan. It was there where he was shaped into a trumpet player. "I joined as a group trumpet player, where I was the third trumpet player. Gradually, I studied music and became the second trumpet player, first trumpet player and a solo trumpet player," he reveals. He took three to four years for the transition. It could achieve it because of his hard work. Those days, musicians played with a full orchestra. "If I speak about music directors, Satyam and Chakravarthi in Telugu, all of them played with a



full orchestra, say, 80 members - be it for ANR or NTR," he says. Those days, there were big theatres to accommodate scores of musicians. Vijaya Studio, Gemini Studios and Prasad Studios were some popular places where he played. He gained a lot of experience playing with many musicians. Those were the days of live music recording.



There were loads of challenges; there was jealousy and there were politics but he stayed away from such things and focused on his goal of playing music and getting a good name. He loved all the musicians because he believed they are entertainers with a job to satisfy the audience. "We have to move like friends; a true musician as someone who feels the sound while playing an instrument should not keep unnecessary things in the mind. Concentration is important - be happy and make others happy. By doing these things we keep ourselves happy," he says.

He studied music and conducted background scores for various projects. "I did a lot of projects for Telugu film music director Chakri. I was the assistant music director for Keeravani for 7 years including his recent epic Bahubali. I have conducted the string section and also played," he reveals. He played music for most of the music directors. He



started his career with MS Viswanathan, then played for Ilayaraja and he is associated with AR Rahman since his first film Roja, a film considered a game changer in the music industry.

Tom studied music through correspondence from Berklee College of Music, 20 years ago. Through hands-on experience and by doing background score, he has learnt a lot of things. He expanded his knowledge by buying books and studying them and listened to popular composers. He says that a lot can be learnt by listening to the background music of films like Gladiator and Pirates of the Caribbean scored by Hollywood music composer Hans Zimmer. "I watch his videos. Those days, when we started, we did not have many opportunities to learn. I could not afford to go to America and study in Berklee, so I studied music in correspondence. I used to attend a lot of workshops and observed what people told. Nowadays because of media and advancements, it is essential to learn more. There are lots of practical learning than theoretical," he says.

Initially, when he learned music, he practised for 16 hours a day. "My father used to ask my mother about my condition. People from outside found it crazy as I was always on the trumpet. But that did not bother me," he smiles. It is because of such

rigorous practice, today people like Tom are still leading the industry.

He says that there were a lot of trumpet players twenty years ago. If you see in Bombay, films of those days had a complete brass section. After RD Burman, it gradually became a solo trumpet. Cut to the present, because of the advancement in technology and computers, the brass section has faded away, and it has become a one-man show. "They call me and ask me to play 4 or 5 parts and they will record. When every individual blows, the sound produced is different. Even if you take the example of clapping hands, a single person clapping hands multiple times differ from 3 to 4 people clapping at once. I feel technology is being used in a wrong way. Analogue days were better. If you look closely, analogue days are again coming back. Like how tube mics are back. It is a cycle. Nowadays, the music industry is even looking for melody songs with good lyrics," he adds.

Tom suggests that youngsters should come forward to learn instruments. The trumpet is not a tough instrument. There is a certain knack of blowing it. He says contrary to the popular notion, wind instruments are actually good for the heart. "People think if you blow air, the heart will become weak, that

is not true," he asserts. Trumpet as an instrument used for worship, funerals and weddings. In western music culture, they use it across, symphony and jazz orchestra. "There is no difference between Indian music and western music. For example, Keeravani ragam is equivalent to an Egyptian scale. If you take Spanish songs, they will have the same progression and scale. The notes are the same but the progression and implementation are different. Indian music is nice because we have many ragas. If you talk about Indian music fusion with Jazz, it sounds awesome," he adds.

He learnt Harmonium and singing in Carnatic music style from Nagaraj, an accomplished pianist. He further learnt music from Radha Krishna Iyer, a jalatharangam player. "Indian classical music is good, if you learn or listen to Hindustani music on a sitar, it brings you peace of mind. Same thing with the flute. I feel Indian classical and traditional music has a spiritual connotation which touches the heart," he says.

In the days to come, his goal is to set up a music school and teach brass instruments like Trumpet, Trumbo, French Horn and Saxophone. He wishes to teach kids beginning from the age of 5.

Thanks to social media, he can get in touch with other musicians and collaborate. "I am able to collaborate with big musicians in Mumbai, Kolkata and other places," he says. He gives concerts with his Jazz band 'Sound Spiders'.



"We play Jazz according to the American standards and we do some of my own compositions. I also like performing Jazz fusion," he says.

In the days to come, he wants to integrate Jazz music and performing arts because Jazz music compositions have a story behind them. "We have scope to make Jazz compositions into an opera and it would become even better. I am working on it, something on the lines of Broadway musical," he says.

He is someone who understands that every music director has a unique style of functioning and he is tuned to them. "I love to play music and I don't make a fuss because for me work is worship and music is a god," he says.

Music is the source of expressing love, pain and experience. Music is my life let my music reach all the hearts, body and soul. - Tom Thomas

# Frozen- in-Time

Photograph by Paul Nicodemus

**V**yjayanthimala Bali in performance at a recent event in Chennai. She is an Indian film actress, Bharathanatyam dancer, Carnatic singer, dance choreographer and parliamentarian. She was referred to as the first female superstar of Indian cinema.



## SPECIAL FEATURE

# MUSIC WINS OVER AUTISM



Text: **George S Paul**

Carnatic vocal recitals in Thrissur, dubbed as the 'cultural capital' of Kerala, are dime a dozen. But the one held recently at Chetana Music College was singular in many respects. As the vocalist began with a varnam and progressed through the concert in the typical conventional format, one could notice that most of the eyes of the listeners were moist and even some had tears rolling down their cheeks. As the artiste wound up with a tillana, they literally mobbed the vocalist whose performance created history since as a full concert by a genetically handicapped person, that to autism was unheard of until then.

The concert was the end result of a saga in the life of 21-year-old Pooja and her parents VS Ramesan and Sujatha. As for the concert, surprisingly, once the compère announced each number, she opened like a professional musician, after assuring support from the accompanying instrumentalists and proceeded with confidence. She reciprocated to the thundering applause with closed hands in the customary style peculiar to any musician.

"Pooja was a normal child until the first eighteen months when she had a fever. Post illness, certain abnormalities in her behaviour left us worried, especially since she was our only child," said Ramesan. She appeared totally withdrawn to herself and refused to interact with anyone. A series of medical examinations continued until the problem was diagnosed as autism. Notwithstanding the shock of their life, Ramesan and Sujatha steeled themselves to take on the challenge with alacrity.

Normal schooling was suggested by some experts and accordingly, she was admitted to the Model Girls High School, one of the oldest in Thrissur. During these formative years, the parents were excited to note that, the girl who would not utter a single word, began reproducing some songs which she had indifferently listened to, and even some jingles of advertisements on the TV. This was more than an eye-opener to Ramesan and Sujatha. While Pooja was in the lower primary classes, she was taken to Krishna Gopinath, a teacher of classical music. Krishna was well briefed by the parents about the child's problem. "Pooja's abnormal behaviour inspired me to explore more about autism; so much so, my research fetched me a PhD later," remembered Krishna who was felicitated in the function held prior to the historic concert.

Realising the positive effect that group singing had on such mentally disabled children, Pooja was allowed to



join the group. It took a few years before she could render the 'arohana' and 'avarohana' of Mayamalavagowla, the basic raga taught in Carnatic music. In five years, she was a regular member of Krishna's team of students who presented mainly devotional songs in temples. By this time she could learn around 40-odd songs. Concurrently, the Autism Training Centre jointly run by the Autism Society and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) provided holistic training which triggered her intellectual, emotional, social, artistic and creative instincts at least to some extent.

An accidental meeting with Dr (Fr) Paul Poovathingal, director of Chetana Institute of Vocology, Thrissur turned providential. The first vocologist in India, trained in universities in the US, Fr Paul tried to improve the voice culture of Pooja whose verbal output was meagre except when singing. After a series of sittings, Fr Paul could confirm that the right sphere of Pooja's brain - the seat of artistic sensibilities - was strangely active. He never had to think twice to admit her into the three-year degree course in music in Chetana Music College of which he was the principal as she had already completed VHSE course. Incidentally, Fr Paul had his PhD in Carnatic music from Madras University and he followed the same syllabus of the University for the Degree Course in his institution.

The department of vocal music in Chetana is headed by Narayanan Desamangalam, a postgraduate from the University of Delhi when the late veteran Professor TR Subramaniam was the Head of the Department. True, Narayanan is widely known as a musician and composer; he is also endowed with exceptional teaching skills. But strange was his experience with Pooja who would throw tantrums occasionally and the ubiquitous presence of her mother was helpful in encountering such abnormal behaviour. What surprised him was the astute sense of the rhythm of his student, however, complex the talas were and she would never fail to keep beating them with hands - an essential prerequisite for any vocalist. Corrections were necessary only for swarms, that too occasionally. He could foresee that with individual attention, the girl would create wonders.

For three years, Ramesan and Sujatha would travel to Vadakkanchery, the home of Narayanan, twenty kilometres away from Thrissur. This was possible only for two days in a week as Ramesan was employed in a tyre manufacturing factory near Chalakudy. Every time, they arrived at the home, they were received by the smiling face and the consoling words of Leela Namboodiripad (Sumangala), Narayanan's

octogenarian mother and a noted litterateur. This gesture emboldened them and further burgeoned their hope.

While Pooja was allowed the services of a scribe for the theory papers of the University examination held in Ernakulam, for practical examinations, she had to appear in Madras University, that too all the three years of the course. Narayanan was duty-bound to present his students including Pooja in Chennai. The examiners were overwhelmed by the performance of Pooja every time. They told Narayanan, "You are a blessed music teacher. Look at the sruti alignment and precision of rhythm which even a normal student cannot do justice to. Her artistry is unmatched and we congratulate you on this spectacular achievement".

As for the repertoire of the concert at Chetana, she took everyone by surprise by elaborating ragas Hamsadhvani and Sankarabharanam (Vandeneesamaham and Nagalingam bhajeham respectively). The latter, the main, had percussion Tani avaritana attached to it. Rapturous applause arose as she resumed in sync with the completion of the Tani. Verbal inhibitions never prevented her from singing the Telugu, Sanskrit and Tamil compositions with astounding diction.

An expression of felicity coupled with a sense of achievement was writ large on the face of Ramesan and Sujatha. Bouquets and shawls were showered upon Pooja, but Pooja stood oblivious to the euphoria around her. "That is the problem with autism patients; they cannot communicate their feelings", said Ramesan who has plans to equip for more concerts under the direction of Narayanan.

Much has been discussed and experimented with Music Therapy. But Pooja has proved that music is an elixir for mental disorders like autism. Her story further reminds the parents of such children about their responsibility of grooming them for whom Ramesan and Sujatha are role models.



# SAI NRITYOTHSAV CONTINUES TO DELIGHT



Text: **Kavitha Krishnamurthy**

Exactly, a year ago, Sai International celebrated its 100th edition of Sai Nrityothsav on September 1, 2017. Back then, a stellar line up of performances with the likes of the Dhananjayans performing Bharatanatyam, Sunanda Nair performing Mohiniattam, Sujata Mohapatra performing Odissi and Manju Bhargavee performing Kuchipudi mesmerised the audience. Cut to the present, the 112th edition of the festival carried the same spirit forward.

The evening began with the Bharatnatyam performance by Tincy Monnappa, a disciple of Guru Anuradha Vikrant. Having earnestly learnt Bharatnatyam from the age of five, she has truly mastered the art form. Tincy began with Chandra Chooda, a popular Devaranama composed by Purandara Dasa. She depicted various episodes of Lord Shiva. Next, she performed Yeanimahanandave an Antarpura Geete composed by famous Kannada writer DV Gundappa, in raga Hamsadhvani set to tala Adi. The artist paid complete justice to what she did with her good expression and movements which were perfect to the last detail.

Mayura and Hamsa, disciples and daughters of Guru V Balagurunathan from Chennai. They started their Bharatanatyam presentation with a Vinayaka Kouthvam invoking and offering their salutations to Lord Ganesha. In their very first performance, the duo struck a rapport with rasikas. The duo performed Kaanal Vari in raga Kadanakutuhala set to tala Adi. They concluded their performance with a





Thillana again in raga Kadanakutuhala. Every Korvai, the duo presented was breathtaking in its beauty, design and rendition. They provided absolute delight to the onlookers.

Guru Sandesh Bhargav presented his student Anusha GM. She received a huge round of applause for her performance. Her mastery of dance showed in her integrity of line maintaining control even when she lunged, stretched or twisted. She presented a Chaturashra Melaprapthi and Email Shloki Ramayana in Ragamalika set to Talamalika. She proceeded with a Kouthvam on Lord Nataraja and ended with a Krithi on Goddess Saraswati.

Disciples of Karnataka Kalashree Guru Dr Suparna Venkatesh presented Bharatanatyam. They



commenced their recital with a Shiva Stuthi 'Karunadi Kaayo Nataraja' in raga Lavangi set to tala Adi. Then they moved to present a Thodaya Mangalam, 'Jaya Janaki Ramana' in Ragamalika and Talamalika and concluded it with a Thillana in raga Brindavani set to tala Adi Tala.

Sai Nrityothsav got to witness a Kathak performance by the students of Kavyashree Nagaraj. They began with a Ganesha Vandana and a Tulasidas bhajan in Raga Bhupali. Their next choice was a Bhaavageethe composed by Rashtra Kavi Kuvempu 'Anandamaya Ee Jagahrudaya'. They then performed Mahadeva, a composition describing the greatness of Lord Shiva and concluded with Raag Taal Maal, a complete Nritha composition set to Teen Taal, ending with an intrinsic combination of footwork showing the complexity of the art.



# UNIQUE CARNATIC CONCERT WITH RARE RAGAS



Text: **Bandili Ratan Raju**

Classical music concerts have been in existence since ancient of days. Carnatic and Hindustani, two genres of classical music have become popular in India. Carnatic music is the signature of South Indian culture and bakthi has played a prominent role. Debunking the myth that Carnatic music only belonged to a sect or religion, Purushottam Choudhary Trust organised 'Purushottam Choudhary Shastriya Sangeetha Mahotsavalu 2018' at Kalabharathi Auditorium in Visakhapatnam on September 17, 18 and 19. Poet Purushotham Chowdary (September 1803 - August 1890) has written some memorable poetry in 'Andhra Kraistava Keerthanalu' which has a history of 220 years.

On the first day, accomplished Carnatic vocalist Musunuri Sasirani melodiously sang the works of Choudary and opened the three-day festival. She began her concert with 'Unnapatunna Vachuchunna' in Mukhari raga and continued with 'Idhigo Subhadra Kshanamu' in Shanmukhapriya raga, 'Deva Divyantha Prabhava' in Kedar Gowla raga. She received a huge round of applause from the audience. A Satya Vishal on violin, Kamesh on mridangam, Dhanunjay on tabla accompanied her. P Rajendra Prasad captivated the audience with his narration.



*Research Scholar, Historian and Vocalist  
Rev. Dr. BDP Rao (Rajahmundry)*

Singer Amen Samuel made the gathered audience revel in devotional fervour on the second day of the festival. He began his concert with 'Stuthintun Prabho' in Yadukula Kambhoji raga and followed it up with krithis like 'Ni Charanamule' in Sahana raga, and



*M Sasi Rani Performing Vocal Concert*



*S Rajakumari Performing Vocal Music at Kalabharathi*

'Payanamai Yunnanayya' in Yadukula Kambhoji raga. In the second part, Siddabathula Raja Kumari sang her heart out. 'Hrudaya Manedu Thalupu Nodha' in Bhairavi raga and 'Yahova Na Mora Lalinchenu' in Harivamsa raga, were some of the krithis she recited much to the delight of the audience. Ch Dhanunjay on violin, Harivamsi on mridangam, Baggam Dhanunjay Patnaik on tabla provided the musical accompaniment on day two.

On the occasion, the trust honoured BDP Ravu with 'Dr Jayakumar Rao Smaraka Sahithi Puraskar'. Dr Jayakumar Rao Nukathoti was the architect of the

festival. After his demise, his son, Sudesh has taken up the trust activities upon his shoulders. On the final day once again Musunuri Sasirani won hearts with her soulful singing. 'Entho Vintha Entho Vintha' in Hindola raga, 'Nannu Gannaya Rave Na' in Shankarabharanam raga and 'Aayandakarapu Reyilo' in Subhapanthuvareli raga were some krithis that she performed. The jugalbandi by Renowned violin artiste Avireddy Satya Vishal and his sister Vijayasri in Sankarabharanam raga filled the auditorium with excitement. All in all, it was a successful devotional concert thronged by classical and devotional music aficionados.



*Amen Samuel Performing Vocal Concert*



*Violin Duo Medly by A Satya Visal and Vijaya Sri*

# Vysakhi Nrithyotsav

## AN EPITOME OF INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE



Text and Pics: **Paul Nicodemus**

Vysakhi Nrithyotsav 2018, the 11th all India dance festival organised by Nataraj Music and Dance Academy with the support of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Department of Culture, Andhra Pradesh at Kalabharathi Auditorium in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh on 29 and 30 September turned out to be an epitome of Indian Classical dance. The festival saw the likes of Padma Bhushan awardee and Bharatanatyam guru, Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan; Bismillah Khan awardee and Kuchipudi exponent, Dr Chinta Ravi Bala Krishna; Chhau exponent, Dr Shashadhar Acharya and Odissi exponent, Dona Ganguly.



Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan

On September 29, Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan and troupe presented a Bharatanatyam ballet, Namami Gange, exploring the contemporary relevance of river Ganga in present times. The ballet highlighted the need for clean water bodies. The 15 member troupe from Ganesa Natyalaya under Saroja's choreography did a fabulous job with perfect sync. Guru Saroja began the ballet with flawless abhinaya and other artistes followed suit. It was indeed a great moment for gathered patrons of Indian dance to see her in action.

As a second performance of the day, Dr Chinta Ravi Bala Krishna who hails from a traditional family in Kuchipudi village near Vijayawada presented the tale of Mohini Bhasmasura in Yakshagana style. The presentation was lucid and the audience thoroughly enjoyed it. Dr Chinta recently received the Ustad Bismillah Khan Award from the Sangeet Natak Akademi. All the characters in the ballet did their part deft touch and contributed to the success of it.

On the occasion, the Academy presented the 'Golden Ghungroo Award' to Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan and 'Naatyasri' to Dr Chinta Ravi Bala Krishna for their contribution to Indian performing arts.



Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan



Dr Shashadhar Acharya



The final day of the festival began with a vibrant Chhau performance by Dr Shashadhar Acharya and troupe. Acharya has been propagating the art form of Seraikella Chhau all over the world and toured over 60 countries. The unique dance form with its roots in Indian martial arts had brisk yet flowing

moments. Unlike other classical dance forms, Chhau does not have the concept of abhinaya as the face of the artiste is covered with a mask. Artistes lost their identity and got the identity of the character. Acharya (costume) played a major role in expressing and even the slightest of movements had a meaning. Dancers conveyed emotions with their body



*Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan and troupe presenting a Bharatanatyam ballet, Namami Gange*



*Dona Ganguly and troupe*

language and interesting costumes, resembling night, moon, peacock, Radha and Krishna. Dr Shashadhar Acharya, Sukanth, Kumar Acharya and Chandranarayan Mohanty presented Chhau in two parts and received a huge round of applause.

Later on, Dona Ganguly, Odissi exponent and wife of former Indian cricket captain Sourav Ganguly performed Odissi with her troupe. The popular story of Mahishasura Mardini was presented in Odissi style in three parts. Different avatars of Durga was showcased in the first part. In the second part, the troupe brought the killing of Mahishasura



*Dona Ganguly and troupe*



*Padma Bhushan awardee Dr Saroja Vaidyanathan receiving Golden Ghungroo Award*



*Dr Chinta Ravi Bala Krishna receiving Naatyasri*



*Kottakkal Nandakumaran Nair receiving Naatyasri*



*Artistes from Ganesa Natyalaya with Guests*



*Artistes from Dr Chinta Ravi Bala Krishna and troupe with Guests*



*Dr Shashadhar Acharya receiving Naatyasri*



*Bathina Bhagyasri receiving Yuva Naatyasri*



*Dona Ganguly receiving Vysakhi Excellence Award*



*Kuchipudi Yakshaganam*



*Dr Chinta Ravi Bala Krishna*





*Chhau*



*Kuchipudi Yakshaganam*





by Durga to life. The third part emphasised the importance of man and women in the universe. Dona must be credited for showing the story through vachika abhinaya and footprints without losing the purity of the tradition.

Bathina Bhagyasri, a young Kuchipudi artiste from Visakhapatnam performed 'Choodaramma Satulala' with grace and poise. The dance recital in Ragamalika and Adi tala was a perfect interlude to Chhau and Odissi. Her performance recieved a huge round of applause.

Towards the end, the academy presented 'Vysakhi Excellence Award' to Dona Ganguly, 'Naatyasri' to Kottakkal Nandakumaran Nair, Kathakali exponent from Kerala and 'Yuva Naatyasri' to Bhagyasri.

Several eminent personalities including Y Lakshmana Rao, chairman of ICCR, Hyderabad; Ramana, Executive Director of HPCL and Sudagani Ravi Shankar Narayan, Additional Commissioner of Income Tax attended the festival as guests. Dr Perala Balamuralikrishna did a great job with his timely poetic narration.



*Bathina Bhagyasri*

# CHILD PRODIGIES MESMERISE

**C**hinnara Kalarava - 2018 organised by Shailusham Arts and Creations under the direction of Vidwan Ananth Vikram and Chaitra Ananth saw 45 child prodigies present unique art forms on a single platform perform at Seva Sadan Auditorium, Malleswaram, Bangalore on September 15.

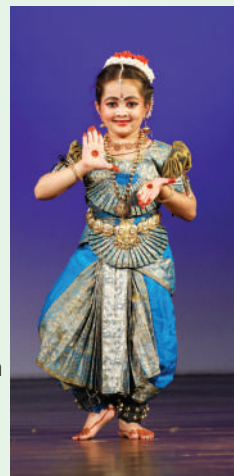
Vidwan Ananth Vikram, the director of the festival, provided live vocal and nattuvangam support for all the performances. He was accompanied by Vidwan Betta Venkatesh on Mridangam, Vidwan Skanda Kumar on Flute and Master Prajwal on Khanjira.

Some of the highlights from the festival include two unique Bharatanatyam

performances by 6-year-old Mahati Ananth presenting Alarippu and Ranjani Mala Kriti in Ragamalika, a 45-minute Andhra Natyam recital by disciples of Guru Divya Shivrinarayan from Gauribidanur, a vibrant group Flute performance by disciples of Guru HS Venugopal. A 45-minute Bharatanatyam performance by disciples of Guru Poornima Naveen.



Shailusham has also honoured eminent personalities Vidwan HS Venugopal and Vidwan Rajagopala Ballal with 'shailusham Sangeetha Ratna' and 'Shailusham Jyotishya Ratna' awards.



# THE FOSSIL VILLAGE OF SPITI

Text and Pic: Paul Nicodemus

Langza village in the Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India, is a cradle of fossils reminding us of the prehistoric times. It possesses a rich reserve of fossils from thousands of years ago when Spiti was undersea. The quaint village reminds of the marine past of the mighty Himalayas.

It is a picturesque high altitude Himalayan village at a height of 4435 meters, set against the scenery of the magnificent Chau Chau Kang Nilda peak. Green meadows, snow-clad peaks and barren landscapes surround the village. The towering golden statue of Buddha stands out from a distance. Inside the village, you will find houses made of mud and most people belong to the Sakyapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

Langza is located at a distance of 12 km from Kaza, the sub divisional headquarters of the Spiti Valley in the western Himalayas. It has a motorable road and one can either travel in their own vehicle, take a bus or hike through the mountains. The best time to visit the village is from May to September as snow covers the valley in winter.



Golden statue of Buddha at Langza



Pic: Paul Nicodemus

Langza Village in Spiti Valley

# TRIBUTES

**S**hirin Vajifdar was an Indian classical dancer, choreographer, instructor and critic. She was one of the first Parsis to take up Indian classical dance - a pioneer among Parsi community to take up classical dancing in early 1930s. Shirin studied Kathak under Jaipur gharana maestro Sundar Prasad. She also studied Kathak and other styles like Manipuri and Kathakali at Madam Menaka's Nrityalayam at Khandala, near Mumbai. She wrote as a dance critic for the Times of India. May her soul rest in peace. Her choreography in the film Mayurpankh (1954) garnered a lot of acclaim. Vajifdar married Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand in 1950.



Shirin Vajifdar, 92, passed away in Mumbai peacefully on September 29. Indian dance world has lost a veteran, pioneer dancer and a warm human being.



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**GENERAL ORDER SUPPLIERS AND CONTRACTORS**

D.No. 50-1-50/1/A, Seethammadara,  
Visakhapatnam-530013,  
Ph :+91 9390158006