



Review : 27 December 2009



In love with legacy...

As the title suggests, "legacy" on the second day of the Natya Kala Conference probed into the individualistic styles propagated by legendary dance maestros. "I dedicate today's conference to our guru Rukmini Devi Arundale and to my mother, and to all the mothers of my co-dancers who made us what we are today..." said the convenor Dr Ananda Shankar Jayant while humbly introducing the theme of the day as part of "Dance Matters!"

Back in time...



Nandini Ramani, in her presentation, brought back memories of the renowned dancer Balasaraswati. Tracing back this *Maargam* to the Thanjavur Quartet, Nandini said, "my guru Balasaraswati revealed the spiritual through corporeal... her style simple and unassuming... she was humble in receiving praise..." Nandini's and her daughter Sushama's demonstration of both pure and expressive dance showed the same understated elegance and grace. This form endeavours to retain the originality with a strict grammatical language. Most touching was Nandini's singing and dancing of an expressive piece, "Enneramum," from Balasaraswati's *Maargam*. This first presentation as part of the "Legacy" was a humbling experience for the audience.



Propagating the *Purusha*

Dance like a man!! Naatyachaarya VP Dhananjayan makes a potent statement by introducing twelve well-trained male dancers who rhythmically invaded the stage and made a telling statement, that they were here to stay!! And this was only a sample of what was to come... as the Naatyachaarya went on to describe his own training as a male dancer under the able tutelage of Rukmini Devi at Kalakshetra. The maestro's branching out saw him establishing Bharata Kalaanjali. He developed a complete repertoire especially meant for the 'man dancer' - with angular, geometrical and rhythmic body lines. It was awe-inspiring, to see his disciples, now spread across the world, some of whom were here to participate in his present demonstration of *Purusha*...more came when the maestro himself enacted an expressive piece where a man is seen suffering from the pangs of separation from his beloved!



Dancing once upon a time...



And 'time' almost seemed to have been captured by a visionary who decades ago saw the importance of documenting dance! The one and only late Prof Mohan Khokar whose passion for documenting the performing arts has passed on to his son, Ashish Mohan Khokar. Ashish took the audience down memory lane with telling grace...a young Punjabi boy taking up dance and traveling across the country to dig deep into the art and to realize the importance of documenting, writing, photographing and filming the performing arts. If it weren't for him, we would have lost the dance manuscripts of the pre and post-independence era and how the evolution and classification of varied classical forms came about. Not just this, but included were those rarest of rare pictures of dance conferences way back in 1958 to pictures of yesteryear dancers and their newspaper reviews, invitations, brochures, books and more. In Ashish's own words, only 0.1 percent of the whole collection was made into a crisp documentary film for the present conference. The audience was indeed awe struck!!

Kuchipudi stylized



Dr Anuradha Jonnalagadda represented the legendary Vempati Chinna Satyam who researched, the *Natya Shastra* to rediscover Kuchipudi in its present stylized form. "The guru internalized the outward energy of those typical swinging and swaying graces of Kuchipudi movements," she said while demonstrating this transformation of dance into a complete and focused body language of pure dance. Of *gamanas* and *charis*, sculpturesque stances and the elements of drama in both solo and dance drama choreographies, the presentation also had some of the rare video clippings of Vempati demonstrating an extract from the "Bhama Kalapam" and also of props and settings of those benchmark Vempati's Kuchipudi dance dramas.

- Pratima Sagar

Ravishing *rangs*...

It was all about tradition on the second day of the conference as the classic Indian shades of orange and green dominated the scene. Prof CV Chandrasekhar was dazzling in an offbeat emerald green kurtha paired with a white cotton dhoti while Dr. Ananda Shankar Jayant was radiant in a dark green and copper silk sari with a *Kalamkari* embroidery designer blouse. Both Gayathri Balagurunathan and Priya Murle looked classy and elegant in traditional Kanchipuram orange silk saris with contrasting borders. Whoever said that tradition is passé has not been to the Natya Kala Conference! Classic attire never looked better!

- KR

What they said...

"Each session was interesting today, and I thought that Kalakshetra was very lively. Dhananjayan Sir's work I enjoyed, and he spoke beautifully. After that, it was a revelation; I thought Anuradha spoke very well and brought out most of the important features of Guruji's style. The last session was mind-boggling!" Jamuna Krishnan, Senior Dancer & Teacher from Delhi.

"I have attended the Natya Kala Conference since its inception almost every year. This conference and the last one I feel are permeated by the word *ananda*. I think the sessions have been designed in such a way that there is only sharing and not controversy. Last year it was all practice that was shown, and this year the conference is looking at history. It brings form to where we are contextually," V.R. Devika, Senior Art Critic, Educationist, & Researcher from Chennai.

"Interesting sessions; great efforts of Ananda!" Nandini Ramani, Senior Dancer, Teacher, & Art Critic from Delhi.

"Each one of the speakers brought out the concept of legacy really well. Although I found Dhananjayan sir's presentation insightful, I was hoping to see more about the concept of male dancing from the past. The last presentation on the documentation of dance was very telling. We are the torchbearers of just one legacy. It is only at the documentation level that you can preserve everything at one go," Swarnamalya Ganesh, Dancer & Teacher from Chennai.

"The variety in the way each speaker addressed the legacy of these great gurus was awesome. Nandini Ramani presented the beautiful *jatis* of Balamma, but we were hoping to see more of her *abhinaya*. Dhananjayan Sir was mind-blowing! We can truly see how Rukminiji's vision has been passed down to her students and how they have taken it further. Anuradha's presentation, was very pleasant and soft like Kuchipudi. Ashishji's was enchanting as it was a beautiful combination of the past, present, and future," Nirupama & Rajendra, Dancers & Teachers from Bangalore.

Addendum

We sincerely apologize for the following errors in yesterday's "What They Said" - Jaykumar's name should be Jay Kumaren Iyasamy, and Vijay Madhavan's quote should be read as, "we must look upon music as an integral part of dance..."

- Kiran Rajagopalan

Edited & Designed by Pratima Sagar, Interviews by Dr Ananda Shankar Jayant & Kiran Rajagopalan, Snippets compiled by Lalitha Venkat



Programme :

29th December 09
 9.15 - 10.05 : Re-imagining the image, Chitra Vishweswaran
 10.10 - 11.00 : In Conversation -Collaborations Anita Ratnam, Astad Debbo
 11.10 - 12.00 : Thaka Dimi Tha, TV, Reality shows and dance, Radhika Shurajit
 12.10 - 13.00 : Dancing Difference Moderator: Anita Ratnam
 Lata Pada, Rama Bharadwaj, Ratna Kumar, Harikrishnan, Aravindh Kumaraswamy, Siri Rama

Excerpts from the interviews

(for detailed interviews visit www.natyakalaconference.com and www.narthaki.com)

With audiences making a beeline to the door after a varnam, how do we retain interest in padams?

I do not see any current dancers dancing any padams worth mentioning. So where is the question of any worry that audiences dont sit and watch after the varanam. It is the extra long varnams with no worthy merit in content that probably drives audiences away. Crisp varnams in tempos which do not drag and aim to show all that a dancer can show in mythology, should be edited so that the varnam itself is restored to its original glory as a centre piece without making it a burden on lay viewers.

Where do we draw the line for Shringara on stage? Must we not take into context the audience and place before choosing our repertoire? (Eg: doing highly erotic padams, for a young audience)

For children, don't dance erotic padams! For adults, include sensuous padams, treat the subject with the subtleties available in plenty in the histrionic and technical aspects of classical dance- subtlety is the key word....not exaggeration either in ideas, content or ex-pression. Shringara depicts love.... not lust.



Lakshmi Vishwanathan

Panel : Media & Dance

Did U Know

In 1965, the Govt of Mysore sent US Krishna Rao to London to work in the Asiatic Dance Circle for 2 years. That was the first ever time that a chemistry teacher was sent to teach Indian dance in a foreign country!

Mati-akharas are the basis on which the physical structure of the Sattriya tradition rests. They are the oral methodology relating to the grammar evolved from local traditions through a process of absorption, filtration and refinement that took place in the Sattria institutions. Some even serve the purpose of fitness exercises.

'Sattriya Dance-an Overview' by Pradip Jyoti Mahanta, Nartanam, Oct-Dec 2002)

Bangalore Nagarathnamma and other devadasis formed the Association of the Devadasis of Madras Presidency on Nov 3, 1927.



Sadanand Menon



Ramnarayan



Anjana Rajan



Chitra Mahesh



Anuradha Ananth

What makes abhinaya in Odissi uniquely lyrical? In particular, what are the distinguishing features of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra's style of abhinaya?

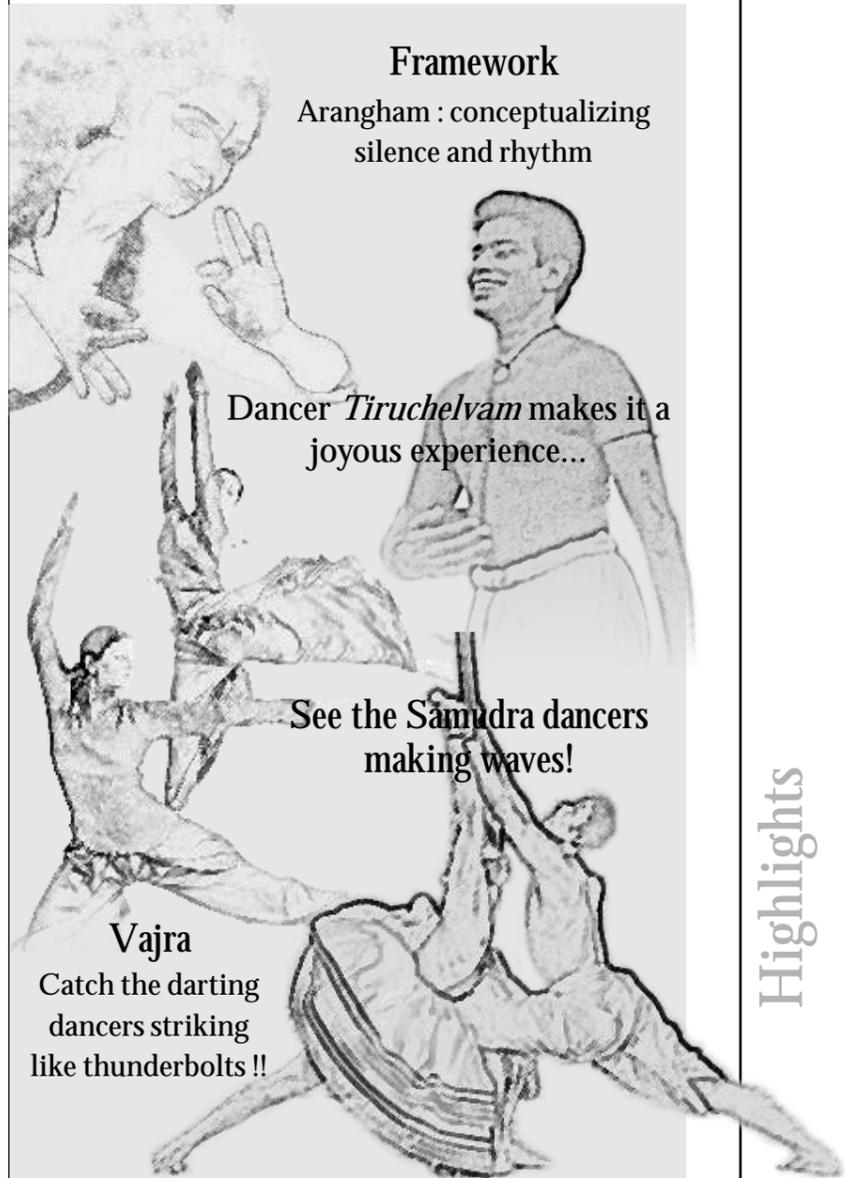
In Odissi dance, abhinaya has a particularly lyrical quality because of the Odissi parampara which has continued from the Mahari tradition of temple dance. Mahari dance evoked a combination of bhakti bhava and rati bhava which gave it a quality of freely surrendering to the divine through the emotions of devotion and of unconditional love. These sentiments still permeate Odissi abhinaya. Sculpturesque still points, circular gaits, and sensuous torso and wrist movements in Odissi technique, all lend softness and grace to the body while facial expressions have a subtle beauty...



Sujata Mohapatra

Framework

Arangham : conceptualizing silence and rhythm



Dancer *Tiruchelvam* makes it a joyous experience...

See the *Samudra* dancers making waves!

Vajra
 Catch the darting dancers striking like thunderbolts!!

Snippets

On June 7, 1998 a worldwide simultaneous 30-minute dance event was held in cyberspace at 12noon GMT. More than 25 dancers from 12 countries including Hong Kong, Canada, Israel, Argentina, Australia, India, Italy, Kenya, Slovenia, South Africa and several cities in the USA participated in the event. The 2 Indians who participated were Kuchipudi dancer Siri Rama who enacted scenes from Ramayana and Prakriti Kashyap who presented Bharatanatyam and Seraikella Chhau. The dancers performed in unusual venues like mountains, desert, computer lab or kitchen to name a few.

The earliest form of classical dance in India to have been presented outside India, that too in a very professional manner, was the Seraikella Chhau of Bihar. In 1938, the Royal

Chhau Dancers of Seraikella went on a tour of Europe.

('Requiem for a royal legacy' by Mohan Khokar, Sruti, Apr 1997)

One use of computer graphics in a dance performance has been for the generation of backdrops. Substantial use of this idea was made by the San Francisco ballet in the dance 'Pixellage.' The results were very sophisticated, with the backdrops seeming to provide all the props, such as a ball, which appears to be thrown from dancer to dancer.