



Review : 28 December 2009

## Realizing dance



“Inner world-outer world” offered the audience a vista of an artistic canvas- traversing across tradition to the modern world of dance inculcating the need to keep the creative juices flowing. Introducing these diverse performances on the third day of the 29th Natya Kala Conference, Convenor Dr Ananda Shankar Jayant further brought to the fore a thinking panel of commentators and writers who discussed *why media matters*.

## Physical to metaphysical



Owing her complete understanding of expressive dance to her guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Sujata Mohapatra tells the audience what it means for a dancer to imbibe experiences from real life and to translate them into spiritual arts. Demonstrating excerpts from her guru's choreographies, the danseuse showed the complete usage of body language for artistic expressions. From the devout Mohammedan poet seeking salvation, to a young village belle flirting with her lover Krishna... and the gaits of animals and birds used in the ballet *Rutusamhara* to the sculpturesque stances of a *Swadhinabathruka naayika* in the *Astapadi*-Sujata was quite entertaining.

## Timeless Srungara Naayika



Lakshmi Vishwanathan continues her dalliance with her favourite dance compositions emphasising *Madhura Bhakthi. Padavarnams and Padams*: the heroine sings and dances in her many moods... the seasoned danseuse subtly and expressively painted pictures of these *Nayekasin* love. Love in separation, in union, in anger...it was a soothing experience for the audience to see these languorously graceful *Srungara Nayekas* coming to life!

## Talking Dance...

Excerpts from the panel discussion on “Media and Dance,” moderated by Sadanand Menon “There should be a democratic sphere for a healthy mutual conversing between the media, public, and the artist...” says Sadanand, in a lengthy dialogue while calling for meta-criticism. “The writers' language is not able to cope up with art...relying on clichés doesn't make any sense. Not every artiste can be painted with the same brush...”

Chitra Mahesh takes on a different note, “It's all about communication. To match the younger generation and to attract them to culture and art, it is important for us to get into Facebook, with an exclusive artiste's group where the dialogue goes beyond artiste, critic/reviewer, and to the connoisseurs and masses.”

In continuation, Anuradha Ananth muses, “As a television programme editor, I find it difficult when a young correspondent is unable to merely report a cultural event let alone critique the same. I sincerely wish that the public and the entertainment media would be sensitive towards fine arts.”



V. Ramnarayan, on the other hand, calls for regular workshops for writers on art and culture. “Awareness, sensitivity, language, and much more is needed to develop the art of writing on arts...It is also important that the newspaper editors and senior journalists interact with artistes for a better understanding of arts and its media coverage.”

Anjana Rajan rightfully puts in, “It's about talking dance, especially when the media and its representatives are nonchalant towards artistes and think these dancers do not relate to real life... I feel, the more qualified one gets, the more one strays away from his culture. The need of the hour is that every newspaper has to have a special section where both editors and journalists are literate in arts.”

All said and done, media matters!!!

## Past Forward – Excerpts from New Works

The Natya Kala Conference also gave a platform for contemporary dance works that begin and expand beyond the classical idiom. Most of these presentations are commissioned for corporate shows and general entertainment. These productions, too, do require a lot of thinking to amalgamate the past with the present and to make it entertaining and also meaningful.

## Awesome Arangham

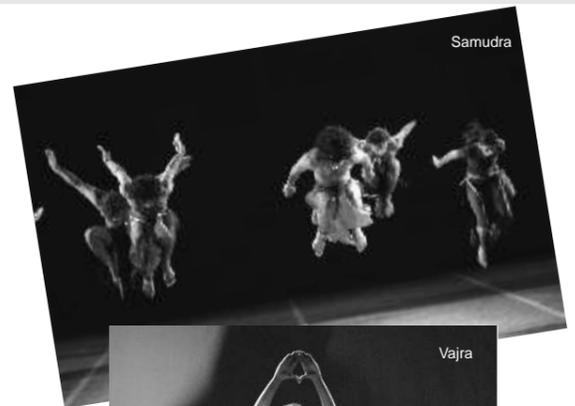
A group of diverse dancers trained in Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kalari and also Jazz come together under the umbrella of Arangham to choreograph contemporary dance pieces inspired by their current thoughts. The dancers let their mind out through brawny body language in these works titled “Framework” and “Tug.”

## The raising of the new-age choreographers

“Vajra,” as the Natya STEM Dance Kampni called their production, struck like lightning from and beyond the stage space! Well, this was a complete visual matrix that the dancers created as a collaboration of multi-dimensional and interactive videography juxtaposed with live dialogue and dance. All this and more, this ensemble digs into ancient texts to depict the esoteric through the modern tools of graphics and sound. All the while, a dynamic and fierce dance remained the backbone of the whole presentation. Yes, despite all the special effects, pure and abstract dance did take the centre stage!

## Corporates calling...

Choreographing commissioned work can also be fun! Tiruchelvam and his ensemble performed a few of his fusion compositions.



## Sensuous Samudhra

*Samudra* dancers from Kerala wowed the audience with their intense creations that were deeply rooted in Indian mysticism and yet were modern in their stage presentation. Yogic and magical, aesthetic and lush, the central piece on Siva and Sakti was quite haunting. The earthy music of flute and indigenous percussion as the background score was equally compelling.

- Pratima Sagar



**Programme :**

30th December 09  
 9.15 - 10.05 : Dance Choreography, Kumudini Lakhia  
 10.10 - 11.00 : In Conversation: Stretch Marks Geeta Chandran, Ramli Ibrahim  
 11.10 - 12.00 : Young Gurus - Gen Next Moderator: Leela Venkataraman A Lakshman, Gopika Verma, Kishore Mosalikanti, Deepika Reddy, Anita Guha  
 12.10 - 13.00 : Film Choreography, Saroj Khan

**Ravishing rangs...**

Basic tones such as white, beige, and black were the colors generally worn on the third day of the conference by attendees. Presenter Sujata Mohapatra was exquisitely dressed on stage in a traditional red, black, and beige Oriya sari accented with fine silver jewelry. CV Chandrashekar's white kurta with exquisite images of the Ramayana, hand-painted by his student, made heads turn. Sruti magazine's S. Janaki was both daring and "eco-friendly" in her lime green and bright pink striped sari accessorized with pink paper jewelry. Equally offbeat was dashing Pradeesh Thiruthiya, who wore a black designer kurta and almost passed off as a model! Boasting an exquisite collection of vintage Kanchipuram silk saris, Leela Venkataraman has been consistently stylish throughout the conference.

**What they said...**

"I'm here at the Natya Kala Conference, enjoying it as usual. I'm finding it [to be] the most eclectic collection of performances here today I've ever seen together in one session—very interesting, very stimulating. I hope everybody including writers will be stimulated to write, not to critique, [the conference], but just to say what is interesting about it. These arts need to be read and conversed by people," Katherine Kunhiraman, Senior Dancer & Teacher from Berkeley, U.S.A.

"I am very keen on attending this [conference] every year as it is a coming together and sharing of different dance dimensions," Kavita Ramu, Dancer from Chennai.

"It's such good exposure to attend this conference. Yes, dance gives you the utmost joy and it gives you the strength to fight all ailments," Anita Guha, Dance Teacher from Chennai.

"It is really a great pleasure to be part of the Natya Kala Conference. Thank you very much." Samudhra Madhu, Dancer & Choreographer from Kerala.

- Kiran Rajagopalan

**Excerpts from the interviews**

(for detailed interviews visit [www.natyakalaconference.com](http://www.natyakalaconference.com) and [www.narthaki.com](http://www.narthaki.com))



**Chitra Vishweswaran**

Recently, dance has become increasingly important in scientific research and medicine. In particular, dance has been used to treat some motor and cognitive disorders. What are your thoughts on dance therapy in Chennai? Is dance therapy another avenue which young dancers should consider exploring?

I have lived with a special child since age 5. My brother, Arun, was born normally but lost his speech due to an attack of encephalitis at age 3. Mental retardation set in. In 1956, when this happened, there was no methodology involving dance, music, or theatre for the rehabilitation of the specially challenged – in fact, several aspects of the conditions relating to the subject were comparatively unknown. So rehabilitation at that early stage was not possible for Arun. Fortunately RASA, a centre employing theatre arts and crafts for rehabilitating children and adults with special needs, is an institution run by Dr Ambika Kameshwar that came into our lives, and Arun has now been rehabilitated to a considerable extent. We, as mainstream performers, sometimes do not realise to what a helpful extent communicative skills, motor skills, and comprehension skills can be developed by employing the 'methodology of theatre for holistic development' in challenged people. There are now several excellent institutions in Chennai and elsewhere giving a new lease on life to the specially challenged through music, dance, theatre, and craft...

In an interdependent world, you have shown over the years the strength in collaborations. Tell us 5 points why it is so important?

The madness in the methods of fellow collaborators

Trust, Confidence, Affords me the peace and space to create, The sheer fun of it all

What is MA3KA? Do share your journey with us?

Originally, it was an innovative retelling of the traditional Goddess triad.. Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati. With events in my life over the last year impacting my creative arc, I have devolved Matrika from the divine to the mortal in all of us. Hence, Ma3Ka.

How do you always look so stunning?

My secret is swimming in untested "shark infested" waters!!!!!!

What do you think of the Natya Kala conference? As a yester year convenor, what do you expect for this year's conference?

For almost 30 years, it has become the mainstay/staple for dance academia. The success of the conference depends solely on the convenor. I know this from personal experience. So, kudos to Ananda for last year's phenomenal Ramayana conference and onto another great week this year. What I hope to hear and see is more curiosity, ruthless honesty and less pseudo deference.....



**Anita Ratnam**



**Radhika Shurajit**

What is your favorite Tamil film that features classical or semi-classical dancing?

I love films! In spite of my heavy schedule of classes and recordings, I end up watching minimum of six films a week! My list is so huge, but I especially like black-and-white films in Hindi and Tamil. "Thillana Mohanambal" is my all-time favorite not just for the dancing but also for the acting. Other films include "Salangai Oli," "Nayagan," and all of Balachandar's movies. I love Sivaji Ganesan. For theatrics and histrionics, he's the master, and I've improved my abhinaya by watching him.

**Panel : Dancing difference, Moderator : Anita Ratnam**

Lata Pada

Rama Bharadwaj

Siri Rama

Ratna Kumar

Aravindh Kumaraswamy



**The avant-garde on the fore**  
 Anita Ratnam and Astad Debbo  
 get into a conversation on  
 creative collaborations

