



Review : 30 December 2009

The Natya Kala Conference on its fifth day gains momentum and throws light on some more facets of dance as a profession. Convenor Dr Ananda Shankar Jayant expresses her gratitude to Padmini Chettur for stepping in the last minute, as Kumudini Lakhia was unable to attend the conference.



Convenor Speak

Convenor Dr Ananda Shankar Jayant had made a prior announcement on the inaugural day, that due to the present conference shortened by one day, four daily sessions were included instead of three, so as to sufficiently address the broad issues of this year's theme, "Dance Matters!" Some speakers chose not to take questions and continued their presentation for the entire 50 minutes slot allotted to them. Hence, questions could not be entertained due to lack of time.

Dance and deconstruction



Padmini Chettur's post-modern approach to dance traces back to her rigorous training in Bharathanatyam and a decade of working with Chandralekha. "Yoga, Kalaripayattu, and Bharathanatyam formed the basis of Chandra's compositions. When I needed to take my dance further, I found my training in Chandralekha's vocabulary was already exhausted. There was an urge to unlearn and put the body in a neutral position to develop a dance vocabulary and to understand gravity, rhythm, and emotion afresh," says Padmini, who in the early 90s began her solo journey and thought she could *dance for expression of self* only to realize a decade later that her dance cannot cope up with the politics and reality of life. Here is where she emerges with a newer form with a process of deconstruction and abstraction.

"What is generally practiced as contemporary dance with classical dancers picking up from a mix of forms to create a fusion vocabulary was a complete NO for me! At the same time, my dance had to emerge as *dance art* amidst the strict classical forms on one hand and those popular, filmy entertainment dances of Shamik Davers on the other..." continues Padmini Chettur.

Though the conservative critics among the audience did not appreciate the videos of her productions, there were dancers like Uttara Asha Coorlawala including this present writer, who complimented the dancer for working with honesty and in-depth research. Padmini thinks about dance fifty years down the lane and finds its position precarious for lack of curiosity... Way to go Padmini!



Stretching and searching

Leela Venkataraman moderated an interesting dialogue between Geeta Chandran and Ramli Ibrahim. She gave credit to these dancers who are traditionally trained in classical dance forms and are passing the same to a newer generation. At the same time, they have been continuously pushing the envelope for their own artistic needs.

"Stretching for me is furthering my artistic language. I have collaborated with puppetry and theatre artistes and have incorporated various musical forms especially *Bhakti Sangeet*. Many dancers, even during yesteryears, have stretched in their own right. For example, Yamini Krishnamurthy stretched her solo idiom. Rukmini Devi institutionalized Bharathanatyam, along with a host of others who have been responsible for dance as it is today. And time will only tell what is in the future..." says Geeta, who is known for creating dance productions based on social issues.

Ramli Ibrahim, on the other hand, showed a presentation on his Sutra Dance Theatre in Malaysia. This dance institution has created a conducive atmosphere for painters, dancers, and theatre artistes to work in collaboration. "I find *stretching myself* really hard while working as an administrator," says the dancer on a lighter vein.



New ground for gurus

Yet another stimulating dialogue came from a panel of young gurus moderated by Leela Venkataraman. She began the talk by recollecting legendary gurus and their ways of teaching like Birju Maharaj, Kumudini Lakhia, Balasaraswati, among others. Here were gurus who had newer challenges to face from an increasingly preoccupied generation.

"I learned a lot by observation apart from my guru's teachings. While my own students question and seek reasons for what is being taught," says Kishore Mosalikanti. The young Kuchipudi guru tries to deal with his students as - they wish, while molding them in the way he wants'.

Anita Guha, a Bharathanatyam guru who is especially good at teaching young children, says, "I try and make the students fall in love with dance, and I inculcate interest in them by telling stories... in fact I myself become a child in their company."

Mohiniattam guru Gopika Varma adds, "I find it quite

difficult to teach *sringara padams* and *varnams* to ten and eleven year olds. So I have gotten into researching child-friendly pieces that a child can relate to and also enjoy the process of learning".

Deepika Reddy, a Kuchipudi guru from Hyderabad, says, "Teaching has always been a learning experience for me.... Speaking of my students in numbers, yes, it is large. I distribute classes throughout the week. I appreciate the fact that they make an effort to come to class despite their busy schedules. What bothers me is the anxiety of the parents for *arangetrams*, though I strive to educate them against premature performances, which can hinder the child's proper understanding of the art form."

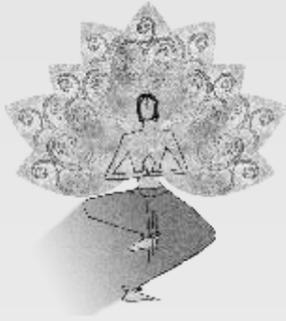
Leela Venkataraman suggests to include dance games like theatre games while teaching dance to attract the child's interest. A concerned parent from the audience, Deepa Krishnamachari, puts in, that she is fortunate to get a guru for her daughter who has the art of retaining the child's interest in classical arts.

Filmy fundas!

Here comes Saroj Khan, from the world of Bollywood, into the arena of classical dance enthusiasts at the traditional Krishna Gana Sabha! Amazingly, the filmy choreographer danced her way into the hearts of the onlookers! The auditorium boomed with popular Bollywood numbers, with young dancers wearing shimmering bangles and *kurtas* swaying across the stage. Saroj Khan was humble in accepting praises and more than happy to take pictures with the legendary Dr Padma Subrahmanyam.



- Pratima Sagar



Ravishing Rangs

Red and black were the dominant colors during the fifth day of the conference. Presenter Geeta Chandran looked stunning in a black and red batik embroidered sari. Dashing Ramli Ibrahim complimented Geeta's look with his black silk shirt and pin-striped black pants. Radica Giri was striking in an offbeat red Coimbatore silk sari with an unusual *zari* border with geometric patterns. Dr Ananda Shankar Jayant's gorgeous orange blouse had a unique chakra motif on the border. I must also mention that Prabha Prakash & Padma Dwarkana have been consistently stylish. These regular conference attendees have been wearing vibrant silk-cotton and Kanchipuram saris each day. Finally, Dr Sunil Kothari looked dapper in an electric blue silk shirt paired with well-fitted black slacks. Sadly, the conference ends tomorrow, but I wish you all a very Happy New Year filled with good fashion!

What They Said

"This marvelous conference would have been better had there been some economy in presentation. It would have given some time to refresh and recollect what was discussed. For instance, it was possible to engage in intellectual discourse during Padmini Chettur's presentation. More is less, less is more," Dr. Sunil Kothari, Senior Dance Critic, Researcher, & Scholar from New Delhi.

"As someone trying to pursue dance as a profession, the conference is absolutely informative. It is interesting to see dance in its many contexts, and not just looking at it from the traditional and contemporary perspectives. Also, the decorations are beautiful, especially the paintings," Rohini Acharya, Young Dancer from Los Angeles, U.S.A.

"During the panel with young gurus, I felt like someone was reading my thoughts and putting them into words. The best part of the conference was that I got to meet so many different people from the field of dance, and converse with them about the season," Janaki Rangarajan, Dancer & Teacher from Washington D.C., U.S.A.

"All the issues that were brought up today regarding teaching and performance are exactly the same as those we are dealing with in the United States. The students lack focus, but they are much faster at picking up movements. Grasp of technique has certainly increased from the past, but has artistry increased?" Patrick Suzeau, Dance Professor from Lawrence, U.S.A.

"I found that the present convenor has increased the scope of the conference and covered *natya* at its fullest by gathering a tremendous variety of dance styles on stage," Deepa K., Art Connoisseur from Hyderabad.

- Kiran Rajagopalan

Excerpts from the abstracts...

(for detailed abstract, pick up your copy of NKC Catalogue 2009)

Light up your dance!

Gautam Bhattacharya, casts light on the history of Stage Illuminations...

Candle : ● 1580-1618 Candles are introduced in both the academic (Teatro Olimpico) and court (Teatro Farnese) theatres in Italy.

Oil Lamp : ● 1780s Swiss chemist Aime Argand develops the modern oil lamp which soon replaces the candle as the primary light source.

Gas : ● 1792 William Murdoch begins experimenting with gas lighting and probably produced the first gas light in this year. ● 1802 Humphry Davy demonstrates arc-lighting in free air. ● 1816 The world's first gas stage-lighting system is installed at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. ● 1835 James Bowman Lindsay demonstrates a light bulb based electric lighting system to the citizens of Dundee. ● 1841 Arc-lighting used as experimental public lighting in Paris. ● 1854 Heinrich Göbel invents the first incandescent lamp by passing an electric current through a carbonized bamboo filament that was placed inside of a glass bulb. ● 1876 Pavel Yablochkov invents the Yablochkov candle, the first practical carbon arc lamp, for public street lighting in Paris.

Electric : ● 1879 Thomas Edison and Joseph Wilson Swan patent the carbon-thread incandescent lamp. ● 1879 Thomas Edison perfects the first practical incandescent electric

lamp : ● 1880 Edison produced a 16 watt lightbulb that lasts 1500 hours. ● 1881 London's Savoy Theatre installs the world's first electric lighting system-- 824- 16 candle power lamps were used to light the stage and an additional 334 lights illuminated the auditorium. ● 1890s: By the end of the 19th century most "modern" theatres have switched from gas lights to the much safer electric lights. ● 1903: Kliegl Brothers installs an electrical lighting system with 96 resistance dimmers (and 20 additional dimmers for house lights) at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.





IPR and Dance

Uttara Asha Coorlawala /
Jayaprada Ramamurthy / Universal - Legal



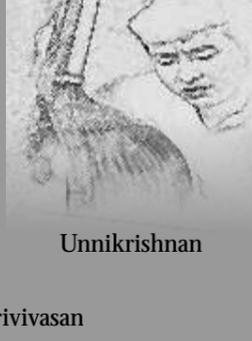
Copyrights in Choreography

Of issues based on ownership
rights of creative products

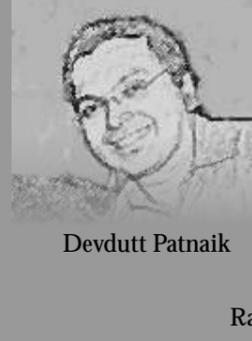
Panel : Art, Beauty, Creation - Moderator : Anil Srinivasan



Anil Srinivasan



Unnikrishnan



Devdutt Patnaik



Rajeev Menon

Excerpts from the abstracts...

(for detailed abstract, pick up your copy of NKC Catalogue 2009)

Healing touch...

Shanta Serbjeet Singh on dance and its therapeutic effects

DANCE AS THERAPY At this point, it may be argued that all exercise is conducive to good health. So what is so special about, say, the movements and canons of dance when seen as simply exercise? To answer this fully, we need to look at the attributes of an ideal system of exercise. These, according to manuals like Roger in his *Dance* – a basic education technique, stress three elements described as the three S's, namely suppleness, strength and stamina. They are required to fulfill the following requirements:

1. Make exercise an enjoyable experience, fulfill the urge for self expression and lead to becoming a habit that stays with one for one's lifetime.
2. Partake of the element of play, even as it makes the body supple, tones up the muscles and the nervous system.
3. Provide symmetry of movement and due exercise to each and every part of the body in proper proportion. This should address each and every muscle, tissue and cell and do so in a speedy manner, to suit today's severe limitations of time.
4. It should strengthen the heart, improve blood circulation and increase the capacity of the lungs.
5. Further, it should involve the brain, challenge the nervous system and push both to their outer limits so as to quicken the reflexes and sharpen the development of a sound body and an alert mind.

