

ಕಲಾ ಸಂಭಾರ

Kalaspandan

ಶಾಸ್ತ್ರೀಯ ನೃತ್ಯ, ಕಲೆಗಳು, ಆಧುನಿಕ ಸಂವೇದನೆಗಳು
ಮತ್ತು ಜನಪದ ಕಲೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಮೀಸಲಾಗಿರುವ ಮಾಸಪತ್ರಿಕೆ

ಕಾರ್ಯಕಾರಿ ಸಂಪಾದಕರು: ಗುರುಶ್ರೀ ಉದಯಕುಮಾರ್ ಶೆಟ್ಟಿ

• Volume: 3 • 10th OCTOBER 2011 • Pages: 16 • Issue: 29



Dances of
Orissa

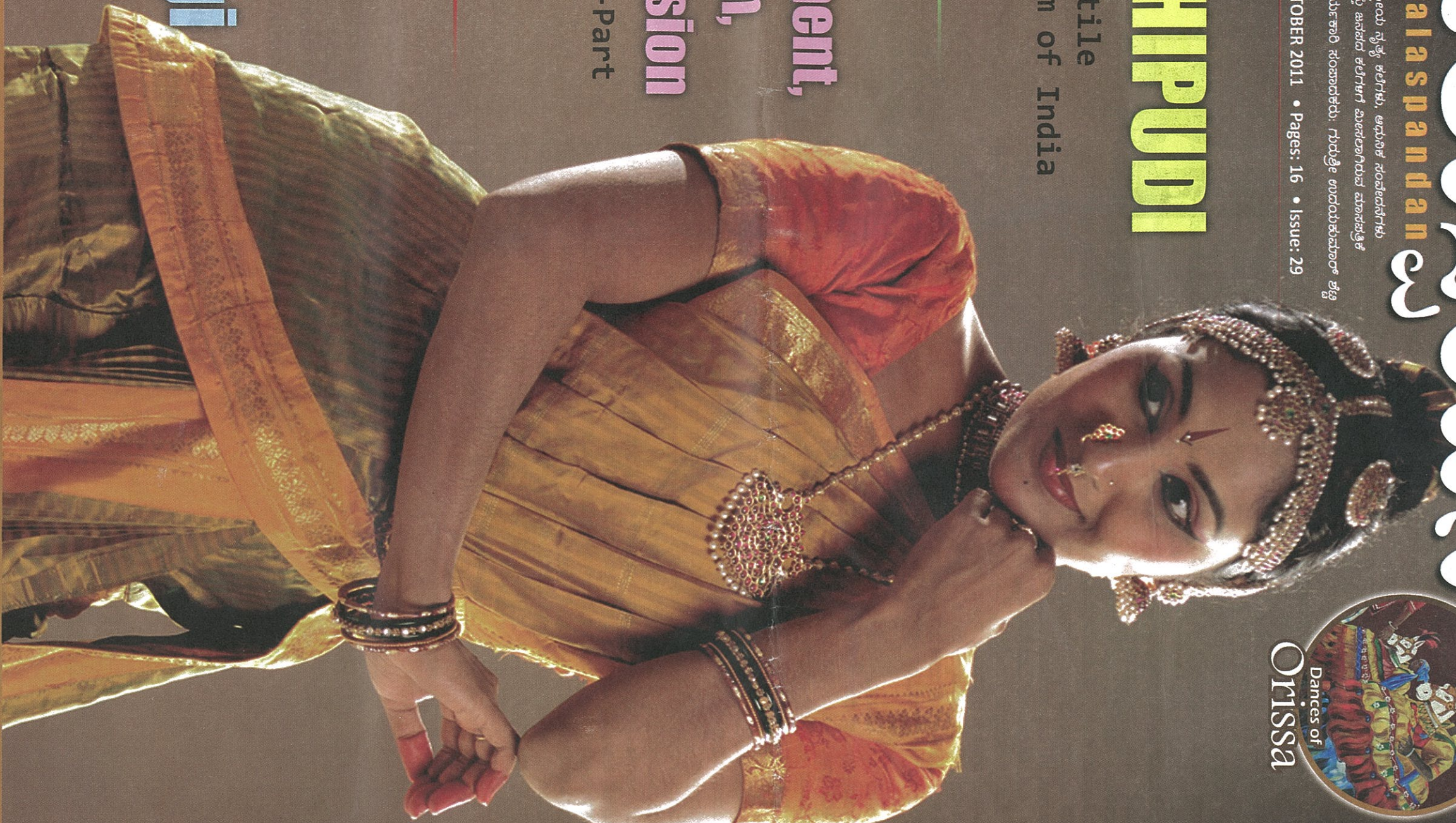
₹ 15/-

KUCHIPUDI

The Versatile
Dance Form of India

**Movement,
Rhythm,
Expression**
The Three-Part
Journey

**Desi
&
margi**
tradition
of dance



Historical perspective.

The southern part of India, now divided into several states was ruled as one vast empire by powerful dynasties many centuries ago. *Andhra* was the name of the tribe of southern India inhabiting the Telugu country geographically located between the rivers Krishna and Godavari. This region is often called the *Andhra Desha* or the country of the *Andhras*. *Andhras* are mentioned in the book *Aitareya Brahmana* (around 500 B.C). Pliny, ancient Greek historian described them in his book *Historia Naturalis* (300 B.C) who probably quotes from Megasthenes as one of the powerful kingdoms of the southern part of India next to the *Mauryan* Empire. The dynasty under which *Andhras* ruled their great empire bears the general name of *Satavahana* and many of its kings were called as *Satakarni*. At various intervals during their reign of 460 yrs we are enabled from inscriptions, coins, literature and comparative philology to understand about their culture and life of the people. The *Satvahana* capital during the first half of their reign was a place called *Srikakulam*. During this time Vedic religion was predominant. One of the customs as described in the Vedic religion was to worship the lord with song and dance. The *Andhra Vishnu* temple named after the king *Andhra Vishnu*, one of the most prominent kings of the *Satvahana* dynasty was a great center of pilgrimage and had 300 *devadasis* attached to it. During later part of the *Satvahana* reign the *Satvahana* capital was shifted from *Srikakulam* to *Amaravathi*, another ancient city in India. The Vedic religion lost its pre eminence and Buddhism gained popularity. Buddhism laid emphasis on the philosophical aspect of religion and did not attach importance to the rituals and customs. Thus the *devadasis* lost their importance in the temple structure and order. *Ghantasala* a famous port close by became an important centre due to increased trade relations with the surrounding kingdoms. The *devadasis*, seeing a chance to prosper among the merchants and traders shifted there. Thus, a moral deterioration set in affecting both the *devadasis* as well as the dance form. Temple protection and sacred dedication was replaced by royal patronage and material prosperity. *Devadasis* came to be known as *Rajanarthakis* or court dancers since they started to dance in the courts and palaces of the affluent kings and traders.

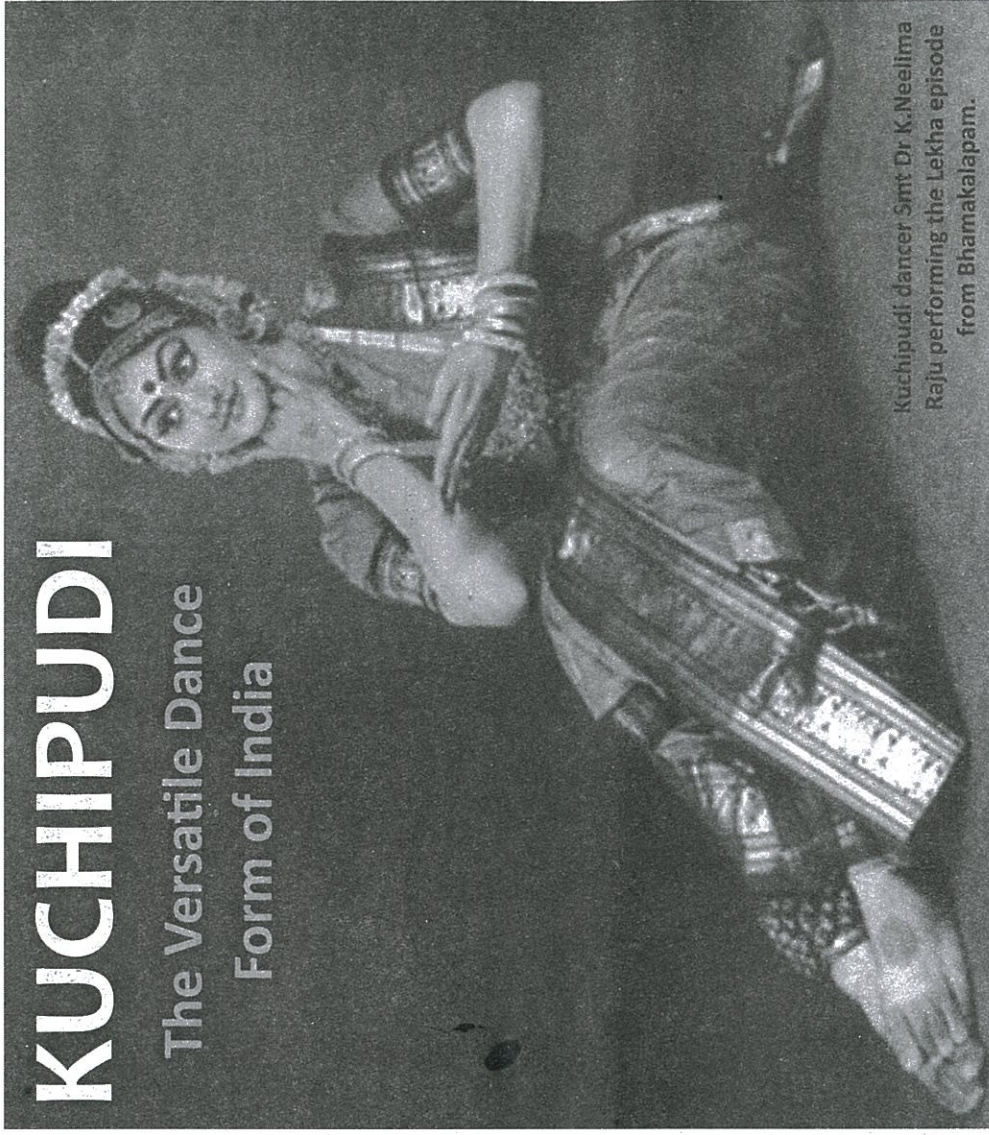
In the 6th century A.D the *Chalukya* dynasty rose to power. The *Chalukya* kings were followers of Hinduism. Music and dance received an added impetus since they resorted to different forms of



Abinaya for a Kshetravya Padam.

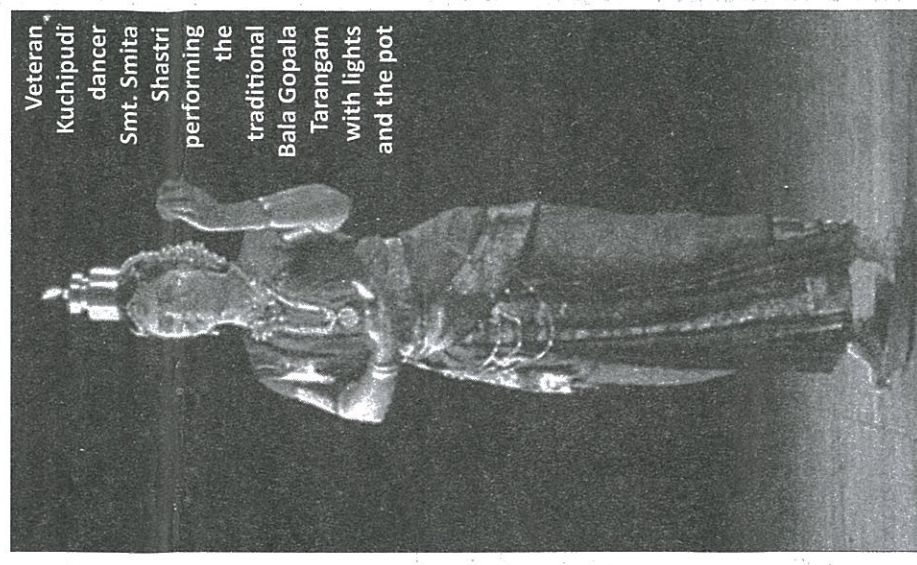
KUCHIPUDI

The Versatile Dance Form of India



Kuchipudi dancer Smt Dr K. Neelima Raju performing the Lekha episode from Bhamakalapam.

entertainment to spread Hinduism. The *Kakatiya* dynasty ruled the region from 1110A.D to 1326 A.D. During the early part of the 13th century *Kakati Ganapathi Deva* one of the prominent kings of the dynasty united a large part of the present day state of Andhra Pradesh. One of the smaller kings defeated by *Ganapathi Deva* was a king named *Jayappa* of the *Ayya* dynasty. Deeply impressed with the personality of *Jayappa*, *Ganapathi Deva* made a peace treaty with him by marrying his sister and making him the commander of his elephant regimen. *Jayappa* was a scholar of the theoretical and the practical aspects of the *margi* (classical) and *desi* (folk) styles of dance and music. *Jayappa* expounded the principles of dance and music in his three great Sanskrit treatises *Nritta Ratnavalli*, *Gita Ratnavalli* and *Vadya Ratnavalli*. *Jayappa* also built a temple installing 300 *devadasis* for the spread of *Shaivism*, which was an offshoot of the original Vedic religion, but the primary deity of worship was Lord *Shiva*. The *Kakatiya* kings also constructed many temples for propagating *Shaivism*. In A.D 1263 King *Viranarasimha* of the neighboring *Kalinga* dynasty annexed the region and converted it to its own religion *Vaishnavism*. *Vaishnavism* also an offshoot of the original Vedic religion retained the rituals and the customs but the primary deity that was worshipped was Lord *Vishnu*. Saint *Narahari Tirtha* regent of the young ruler moved to *Srikakulam* to propagate the faith. It was also during this period that *Jayadeva's Gita Govinda* (lyrical poem written during the 12th century A.D dealing with love and devotion between lord *Krishna* an incarnation of Lord *Vishnu* and the milkmaid *Radha*) had become very popular. The *Gita Govinda* inspired and influenced Hindu sculpture, painting art and architecture. *Narahari Tirtha* brought dancers from *Kalinga* (seat of power of the *Kalinga* dynasty) to *Srikakulam* and the local artists learned how to sing and dance the *Gita Govinda*. It was during this time around 1350 A.D that *Siddhendra Yogi* an ascetic composed songs of love between Lord *Krishna* and his consort *Satyabhama*. He was aware of the growing moral corruption amongst the *devadasis* and so he decided to teach the song and dance to Brahmin (the caste of priests) boys who were devout students of the sacred scriptures. Men played all the characters including that of women. Female



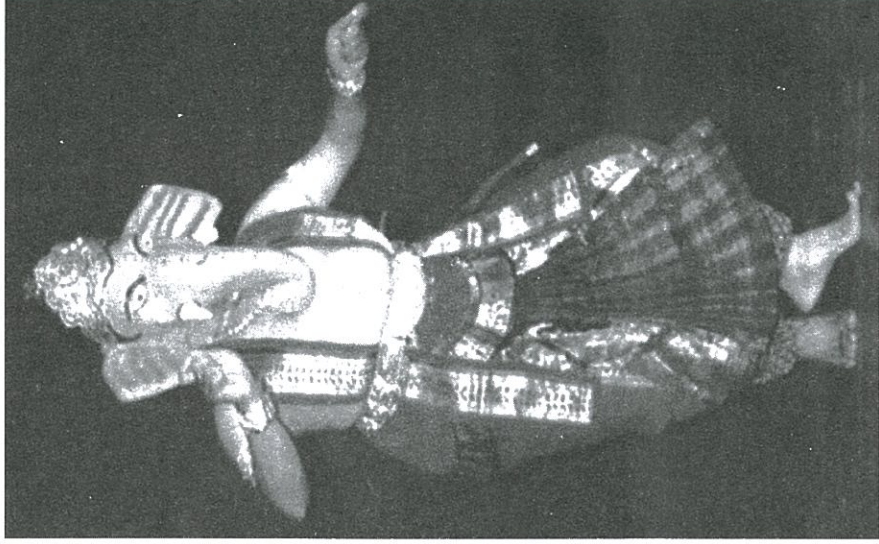
Veteran Kuchipudi dancer Smt. Smita Shastri performing the traditional Bala Gopala Tarangam with lights and the pot

impersonation was used to depict the various female roles in the dance dramas. *Siddhendra's* troupe was immediately ostracized and to avoid constant criticism he took them to a wasteland near the Krishna River. Soon the group came to be known as *kuchelu* (traveling actors) and their settlement as *kuchillu* (broken house) because they were poor. The wasteland was named as *Kuchelapuri*, *Kuchelavaripuri* or *Kuchipudi*, which means the village of the poor. Another version for the origin of the name *Kuchipudi* was that since the dance technique was formulated using the methodologies of the experienced *devadasis* known as *kuchi* (from Tamil *kooti*, an actress) the Brahmin dancers were called *kuchi* and their wasteland as *kuchipudi*. In due course of time a

unique style of dance drama came into being. The themes employed were mainly religious themes based on mythology and the dancer took the role of a storyteller, telling about the heroism and the escapades of the gods. Since the dancers enacted excerpts from the *Bhagavata* (book describing the stories of Lord Krishna) the performances were called *Bhagavatam* and the actors as *bhagavatulu* or *bhagavatars* and their troupe as *Bhagavata Mela* or *Kuchipudi Natya Mela*. “*Natya*” refers to a combination of pure or abstract dance, gestures, vocal or instrumental music, prose and poetry. “*Mela*” means a group that toured the countryside. Soon the troupe of actors/dancers was also called *veshadharulu* (character actors literally, one who dons a costume) since they donned the roles of the mythological characters, gods and demons to enact their stories.

The *Vijayanagara* Empire ruled the region from 1336A.D to 1646A.D. The *Kaifiyath of Machupalli*, written document mentions a *Salva Narasimha Raya*, the emperor of *Vijayanagar* in the 1502A.D being entertained by the *Bhagavata Mela*, which performed a “*Kelika*” or a short dance drama. King *Krishna Deva Raya*, one of the famous kings of the dynasty was a great lover of arts and he constructed a school for dance as evident in the “Chronicle of Paes” in 1537A.D. During this time around 1550 A.D Saint *Narayana Tirtha* enriched the repertoire with his magnum opus, the opera named “*Krishna Leela Tarangini*”. The dancers also performed excerpts from this opera enacting the childhood pranks and stories about Lord *Krishna*. In the mid 16th century the *Nayak* Dynasty started ruling the region around the present day state of Tamil Nadu. Many scholars migrated to Tamil Nadu to gain their patronage. The king *Achyuthappa Nayak* donated land to 500 families at *Melattur* and *Soolamangalam* where the artists domiciled subsequently furthering their traditions of dance and music. This offshoot later came to be known as the *Melattur Bhagavata Mela Natakam*. The Nayak kings also enriched the repertoire with their compositions mainly the *Yakshaganas* (dance dramas), *Natakas* (dramas) and *Dwipadakavyas* (short poetic verses). *Kshetragna* one of the court poets of the King *Vijayaraghava Nayak* enriched the tradition with his poems dealing with love and man women relationships where a unique blend of dance and musical composition can be seen.

In 1678 A.D, The *Nawab* (king) of *Golconda*, *Abdul Hussain Tanisha* (1672A.D-1687A.D) of the *Qutub Shahi* Dynasty was visiting *Kuchipudi* with his commander *Pingali Maddana*. Camping on the outskirts of the village he saw the young boys of the village enacting a play. Deeply moved by the music and dance he issued a copper plate grant and donated the village to the *bhagavatars* as an *agraharam* (village free of any taxes and levies) so that they could cultivate the land become self sufficient as well as practice their art. Meanwhile the *Maratha* kings succeeded the *Nayaks* and they were great patrons of art. *Raja Pratap Singh Shaji* who ruled from 1684A.D-1710A.D authored many dance dramas including the famous *Pallaki Seva Prabhandam*. *Shaji's* son *Thullaji* wrote the treatise *Sang Ita Samayasara* a book that described the basic footwork that forms the building blocks of dance. *Shaji's* grandson *Serfoji* (1777A.D-1832A.D) was also a great patron of the arts and the famous *Tanjore* brothers *Chinnaya*, *Ponniah*, *Sivanandam* and *Vadivelu* studied under the famous composer musician *Muthuswami Dikshitar* in his court and established the order of the present day *Bharatanatayam* dance repertoire. Meanwhile the ritual dances in the temples continued as they did in the palaces in addition to the *Bhagavata* tradition of dance and drama. There was an exchange of knowledge between the *devadasis*, the *rajanarthakis* and the *bhagavatars*. With the advent of the British rule in India, the arts lost their royal patronage, protection and were neglected. While some of the *bhagavata* families



Kuchipudi dancer V.V.S Jaganadha Rao as Nartana Ganapati with the mask.

resorted to agriculture and cattle herding giving up performance completely, some in spite of poverty remained wedded to being *bhagavatars*.

The Devadasi Abolition Act of 1930 brought a final blow and the development of ritual, temple dance and music came to a standstill with the traditional practitioners forced out of their profession. In the early post independence era of Indian history the classical dance of the present day state of Andhra Pradesh came to be recognized under the name of *Kuchipudi*. Some scholars argue that since the name *Kuchipudi* is associated with the dance tradition of the *bhagavatars* the dance form should encompass only their lineage. Others suggest that since the ritual dance of the *devadasis* was the original dance tradition that prevailed and since that *Kuchipudi* was formulated by taking in the dance tradition of the *devadasis*, the ritual dances of the *devadasis* should also be included in this tradition.

In light of the foregoing paragraphs of the history of the origin of the dance form, it seems likely

Veteran Kuchipudi dancer Shri Pasumarthy Sitarammaya as Sutradhara in a Kuchipudi Yakshagana.



that the second view seems more appropriate. It is also to be noted that the name *Kuchipudi* was given to the dance tradition of the Andhra region named after the village of the *bhagavatars* only after *Siddhendra Yogi* formulated this unique style, which until then might not have had a structure or we do not have concrete evidence to prove that it had one. So if this viewpoint is taken into consideration it seems very appropriate that *Kuchipudi* should encompass only the tradition of the *bhagavatars*.

The dance tradition extant today is a beautiful amalgam of both the traditions. Another unique characteristic feature of this dance tradition is the beautiful blend of the classical and the folk elements of dance and drama, since through out its rich history the dance form served as a means of entertainment for both the educated elite and the rustic commoner. The distinct beauty of this style is its plasticity, which gives ample space to the choreographer/dancer to relate to a non-specialist viewer without ever compromising the codified traditional grammar of the dance/drama form.

The preliminaries, performance techniques and characters in a traditional Kuchipudi performance.

Henceforth the word *Kuchipudi* refers to the dance form. It owes its name to its village of origin. The traditional *Kuchipudi* stage is an embodiment of simplicity in itself. It is either a temple yard or a temporary stage raised with a few bamboos and Palmyra leaves. Two village *dhobis* (people belonging to the caste of washer men) with their medieval torches made of rags provide the stage lighting. They stand patiently thorough out the performance, which as a rule lasts a whole night or a couple of nights. They also hold a multicolored curtain across the stage taking it off and holding it on when an actor enters or leaves the stage. The characters are at first perceived dimly through a screen of incense smoke and then revealed through a sudden flash of light, caused by throwing the incense powder “*Guggilam*” on the glimmering torches.

The prologue of the play lasts nearly a couple of hours and is called “*Purvanga*” or the preliminaries. The show begins with a sudden flash of a “*jathi*” or mnemonic rhythmic syllables on two “*Mardalas*” or drums. The “*Mardangika*” or the drummer enters the stage and sets the drum to the correct “*Shruti*” (Shruthi or quarter tone is the microtonal interval between two successive scale notes). This act is called “*Arambha Asravana*”. Next comes “*Amba Paraku*” (a prayer to the goddess *Amba* for forgiveness for one’s sins) or “*Vinayaka Prarthana*” (a prayer to the lord *Ganesha* also known as *Vinayaka*, one of the gods of the Hindu pantheon who is a remover of all obstacles) or both. Two actors bring the “*Mangala kalasam*” or “*Purna Kumbha*” (a pot with sacred water decorated with mango leaves signifying purity and prosperity) to the stage. The actors sprinkle the sacred water on the stage and on the audience, dancing to the tune of a “*Todaya Mangalam*” (auspicious song in praise of a particular deity to whom the play is dedicated by its author). “*Indra Puja*” (a prayer to Lord *Indra*, one of the gods of the Hindu pantheon who is the king of the heavenly world) and “*Naivedyam*” (sacred food generally a rice pudding specially prepared for the prayer) follow this. The last of the series is the entrance of the “*Sutradhara*” (the main character or the connecting thread) who introduces the play proper. He announces the title and beginning of the story with the words “*Katha Prarambu Ettidanina*” which means, “As the story begins”.

Then the “*Sutradhara*” has his own prayer under the head “*Gitavidhi*” and announces the title of the main character. Assisted by the “*Natal*” or the “*Pari Parswaka*” (accompanist)

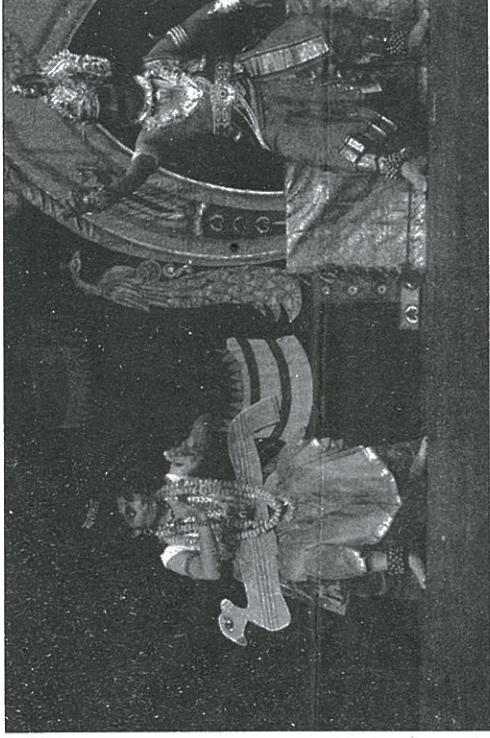
the *Sutradhara* recites “*Naandi*” which is a prayer to *Nandikeshwara*. The *Sutradhara* is in many ways the most important character played by a very senior and learned actor. He is the narrator, interpreter who acts as a thread holding together the beads, which are the elements of the drama. The *Sutradhara* welcomes the connoisseurs giving them the gist of the story and its implications.

A “*Patra Pravesa Dharuvu*” introduces the important characters in the play. This dramatic technique, which resembles the soliloque, describes the attributes of the characters in song with appropriate “*Raga*”(melody) and “*Tala*”(meter). This technique in short is the choice of a suited melodic mode and rhythmic meter to enhance the dramatic effect of the entrance of each character. Each character is brought behind a curtain, which is taken away. A significant feature of this style is the way which each character introduces him self or her self-enunciating their characteristics and their purpose of their arrival. The characters introduce themselves in first or third person.

The narrator reads the transition between the scenes; parts of the action of the play are accompanied in song by the chorus; sung or spoken by the actor-dancer himself or interpreted through pure dance alone, or elaborated with stylized acting as in verses or “*padyas*”. These are



Veteran Kuchipudi dancer Shri Pasumarthy Sitarammaya as Shiva in a Kuchipudi Yakshagana.



Kum Ameya Jammi as Narada and Shri Hari Rama Murthy as the demon king Vrikasura from the ballet Mohini Bhaskmasura. Choreography-Shri Hari Rama Murthy

the variety of stage techniques used in interpreting the story. Men played all the characters. Men dressed up like women also played the female characters.

Until recently the *Kuchipudi* artists were applying yellow orpiment or “*Haritalam*” to the face, hand, and body. They applied lac “*Laksha*” for the lips and palms. They used various vegetable and herbal pastes for different colors. They used yellow from turmeric, red from vermilion and white from zinc, each mixed in coconut oil. *Kajal* or Kohl was used to elongate their eyes and underline their expressiveness.

The female characters were dressed in bright silk saris parted in the center and taken separately along each leg to show off the movements of the body and facilitate dancing. The ornaments were elaborate, made of wood and decorated with metallic paper and pieces of glass.

A lady in the title role is decorated with “*Maharika Patras*” (head ornaments in the form of decorated plates) on the forehead and temples, hair combed and twined into a long braid and decorated with glittering stones of different colors. On the two sides of the parting of the hair were worn ornaments denoting the sun (*Soorya*) and the moon (*Chandravanka*) representative of day and night. On the parting was a line of pearls ending in a small parrot at the top of the forehead denoting nature (*Papite Pinde*).

At the back of the top of the braid she wears

an ornament denoting the hood of the serpent (*Nagaram*) symbolically representing fertility and abundance. She also wears ancient head ornaments called “*Ragidi*” a decorated plate worn at the back of the head. In addition to the earrings, a nose ring or the “*Nattu*” is the most essential of all the ornaments.

The hero wears “*Bhujakirtis*” (arm wear) and “*Kirita*” (crown). The men in other main roles wear various grades of helmets and turbans called “*Siroveshtas*”.

The *Sutradhara* and his retinue wear the “*Siroveshta*” and cover themselves with Kashmiri shawls. He also carries a crooked stick or a “*Vakra danda*”, symbolic of his clownish pranks during the play. These interludes give comic relief. Wicked characters of demonic nature are given a ferocious type of make-up. They have ruddy faces. Teeth overdrawn and eyes painted with black borders to look fierce. Characters like “*Vinayaka*”(Lord of the Hindu pantheon who has an elephant head) and “*Narasimha*” (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu who is half lion and half man) have masks specially made up for this purpose either the mask of an elephant or lion head. In short make-up is given to each character in accordance with the role he is intended to portray.

Traditional repertoire of Kuchipudi.

with 27 stars each representing a constellation. Hanging at the bottom of the braid were three round tassels representing the three worlds and below these are smaller ones in triple bunches denoting the nine planets of the solar system. The braid is also decorated with gold ornaments denoting the ten incarnations of Lord *Vishnu*.

Before the beginning of the play there is a “*Jaddapattu*”. Here the beautifully decorated plait of *Satyabhama* is placed over the curtain and the actor in the role of *Satyabhama* challenges the audience to have an academic discussion. If a challenger wins, with the sanction of the audience he is allowed to cut off the braid and take it home as a trophy.

The actor performs a series of items before she comes out of the curtain. First there is a peep from the curtain showing only the face to the audience called “*Mukhadarshana*” and then she exhibits herself only up to the waist from the top and does stylized expression before coming out to perform the entrance song. *Satyabhama*’s pangs of separation from Krishna, owing to a love quarrel, sending a maidservant as a mediator with a letter and the final reconciliation and reunion of Krishna and *Satyabhama* form the original treatment of *Siddhendra’s* “*BhamaKalapam*”. The entire *Kalapam* runs as a dialogue between *Satyabhama* and her maid, Krishna entering the scene at the close of the play.

(c) *Kuravanji*- it is a short ancient play, which deals with folk characters named “*Singi*” and “*Singadu*”.

(d) *Vesham* – The word “*Vesham*” literally means cast in a role. The themes in this category are either historical, religious folklore or mythology. Examples in this category are “*Dadinamma Vesham*” which is a story of a *Chola* princess and “*Balinta Vesham*” which is the story of the first confinement of a young woman.

(e) *Tarangam*-The word “*Tarangam*” means waves. It describes the deeds of Lord Krishna and they are essentially solo pieces. The songs are excerpts from the opera named “*Krishna Leela Tarangini*” or waves of wondrous deeds of Lord Krishna written by *Saint Narayana Tirtha*. These solo pieces contain sequences where the dancer balances her feet on the rims of a brass plate and executes highly rhythmic mnemonic patterns. They stand as a testimony to the dancer’s ability to maintain balance as well as concentrate on precision. In earlier days these pieces were done on the plate along with a brass pot and a lighted candle balanced on the head.

(f) *Veedhinatakams*-they were the offshoots of the *Yakshaganas*, which were developed by mixing comic episodes into the themes so as to make them humorous, light hearted and accessible to the larger public.

(g) *Dharuvus*- The word “*dhruv*” in Sanskrit means to establish. They are solo pieces that have mnemonic verses interspersed with expression and song. “*Khandartha Dharuvus*” (*Dharuvus* set to the time beats of 5) are a special forte of the Kuchipudi dancers. The verse portion of the dance is interpreted by hand gestures (*Hasta Vinyasam*) and facial expressions (*Mukha Vinyasam*). The song portion of the *Dharuvu* is set to dance with jumping steps (*Parugudu Varusa*) and linking steps (*Kalpudu Varusa*) of footwork.

(h) *Shabdams*- “*Shabda*” in Sanskrit means word. In items called as *Shabdams* the lyrics take precedence over music. In these pieces every word of the poem is translated into the language of gesture. *Padartha abhinaya* takes predominance in these pieces. *Shabdams* are usually composed in brisk rhythmic structures. *Shabdams* are most notable for their vitality, complicated rhythms and quick changing moods. The most popular items in this category are

Krishna sabdam- In this devotionally romantic dance the lovelorn heroine *Usha* is depicted as

unable to bear the separation from her beloved Lord Krishna.

Mallikarjuna Sabdam- This item is dedicated to Lord Shiva, the presiding deity of Sri Sailam known as Mallikarjuna.

Mandodari Shabdam-This item is dedicated to king Krishna Deva Raya of the Vijayanagara Empire. It deals with the story of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka and his marriage to the beautiful frog maiden Mandodari.

Ramayana Shabdam- This item elaborates the story of the Ramayana.

Ardha Narishwara Sabdham-This item deals with the legend, which describes the descent of the river Ganga on the earth. This item is usually performed during the festival of Vijayadashami and performed in the style of a "Pagati Vesham" (street plays performed during daytime).

(i) Among other items of interest in the repertoire of the Kuchipudi Dancers include "Jathis" and "Swarajathis" which are pure dance numbers set to intricate rhythmic patterns.

(j) In the expressional numbers of the Kuchipudi repertoire the lyrical and emotional content of the poetry enacted gains predominance. Facial expressions, monoaction and expression with hand gestures become more pronounced over dance movements and rhythm. *Padartha* (literal translation of every word into gesture), *Vakyartha* (translation of meaning of the entire verse, that is implied meaning using gesture and mime) and *Sanchari* (metaphorical meaning with usage of similes) modes of interpretation of the verse is employed. Poems on different shades of love and complexity of man woman relationships are dealt with. The main pieces usually performed in this category are excerpts from the

Gita Govinda-Jayadeva's dramatic lyrical poem *Gita Govinda* is a unique work in Indian literature and a source of inspiration in both contemporary and medieval *Vaishnavism*. It concentrates on the love between Krishna and the cowherdess Radha in a rite of spring. Intense earthy passion is the example *Jayadeva* uses to express the complexities of divine and human love.

Padams of Kshetravya- The word *Padam* is now understood as songs of love. These short poems deal with love between *Paramatma* (hero-usually Krishna) and *Atma* (Nayika). A wide variety of emotions and shades can be delineated from the lyrics. These poems were composed by *Kshetravya*, court poet of the king Vijayaraghava Nayak (1633-1673).

Javalis-These are lighter love lyrics in tone and language and they include poems by *Sarangapani*, *Subbramayyar*, *Ghanam Krishnayyar*, *Melattur Kasinathayya*, *Chinnai* and many other later poets of the 16th and 17th century. They deal with love between a *Nayaka* (man) and *Nayika* (woman).

Samkirtanams or Kirtanams are songs usually sung in religious gatherings. Since, the Kuchipudi style was so filled with devotional fervour these were adapted into the repertoire and became highly popular. Notable among them are poems of *Bhadrachala Ramdas* who composed on Lord Rama in the 15th century and the Saint *Annamacharya* who composed songs on Lord Venkateshwara in 1424 A.D.

Kuchipudi in the present scenario and future directions.

Kuchipudi over the years like other traditional arts of India has incorporated a lot of changes in its repertoire, technique of presentation and grammar. Traditionally the plays were staged in open spaces on the temple yards and fairs, which lacked proper stage paraphernalia like the curtains, backdrops, lighting and acoustics. Since the dance form had many characters, it needed the presence of glimmering torches on either side of the stage for lighting. The characters were also brought on to the stage behind a temporary curtain. In the

modern theatrical context with the presence of advanced stagecraft the present day dance dramas do not employ these techniques, since theatres have well equipped lighting, backdrops and curtains that serve the purpose. The present day dance dramas also do not employ the technique of having incense smoke or "Guggilam" which blinds the stage before a character enters the stage or at the end of every act or scene since modern theatres have well equipped curtains from where the characters can enter the stage. After every act or scene the lights are switched off and this serves the purpose and represents the ending of every act and the beginning of another. The themes employed in the present day dance dramas are historical, sociological and abstract themes in addition to the traditional mythological themes taking into context the changing times and outlook of the audience since any performing art which has evolved to entertain people should cater to the aesthetic sensibilities of the people to survive the changing faces of time.

Traditionally the actors who played their respective characters were also trained in vocal rendition and they sang their respective pieces of the verses or the song. In this context actors concentrated only on the mimetic aspect of the play with minimal dance or movement. In the present day the dance dramas have given rise to dance ballets where movement and dance have taken predominance so generally playback is given



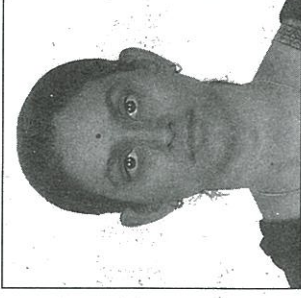
Smt Sasikala Penumarthi as Sita and Shri Hari Rama Murthy as Ravana in the ballet Ramayanam. Choreography-Padmabhushan Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam

by a vocal artist and musical accompaniments while the actors concentrate only on the dance, movement and mime. The dance dramas previously also employed prose interludes which provided comic relief and had satire and humor in the verbatim exchange between the characters in the native language Telugu which could be well appreciated only by the audiences who were the native speakers of the language. The plays also were enacted in series for a period of seven to nine nights. In the present scenario the prose interludes are rarely used since the international audiences or non-Telugu speakers who are not familiar with the language do not enjoy them. Because of the constraints of economics, space and time the dance ballets are choreographed to represent the key features of the tradition integrated with movement and dance with decorative stage setting and paraphernalia to achieve the maximum impact in a short span of time generally a one night show extending for a couple of hours. Although the purists argue that the authenticity is compromised the changes are incorporated to achieve the maximum balance between aesthetics, economics, space and time to bring innovation in the existing tradition without compromising the structure of the dance form.

Kuchipudi in the present day is also very popular as a solo tradition in addition to the traditional

dance dramas or ballets. Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Shastry (1880-1957) was one of the first traditional practitioners and teachers to introduce the art form to women. He also developed a solo style more suitable for female dancers and ironically in the present era Kuchipudi has become a female bastion with women donning the roles of the male gods and heroes in the dance ballets and dramas. Although the purists argue that this intrusion has brought about some changes in the technique and movement of the dance, which could be argued as inevitable since the same movement performed by a man, and a woman respectively would be different because of the inherent differences in the structure and anatomy of the bodies of both the sexes which manifests in the dance. The solo tradition of Kuchipudi though it may look similar to its close cousin Bharatanatyam one of India's most popular dance forms to a novice is not the same. Kuchipudi is more distinct because of its sparkle, scintillating rhythm, fast tempo, and curvilinear and angular movements. The sharp split second change between graceful wide curvaceous movements and straight lined movements of the upper torso that clearly define the movement of Kuchipudi give the dance form a distinct beauty and style. Some popular solo pieces performed in today's recitals include invocatory pieces, *shabdams*, *thillanas* and expressional pieces like *padams*, *javalis* and *tarangams*. Traditionally the *Tarangam* was performed with feet firmly placed on the rims of the brass plate and having a pot with a lighted candle and with lighted candles balanced on either hand. This would be more of a balancing act, which hampers dance and movement. In the present day the dancers dance on the brass plate with their feet secure on the rims of the brass plate but albeit the pot and the lighted candles. They execute highly structured pure rhythmic verses known as *jathis*. This is choreographed in the form of a question answer session between the drummer and the dancer. This technique is more movement and dance oriented and is very effective in communicating complex rhythmic patterns even to laymen audience. Two of Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Shastry's illustrious disciples who further modernized and popularized the art form were Padmabhushan Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam and late Guru C.R.Acharya. While Dr Vempati formulated and established a repertoire for Kuchipudi solo dance, Guru Acharya concentrated on the ritual dance traditions of Andhra Pradesh. Dr Vempati also modernized the traditional Kuchipudi dance dramas into classical dance ballets integrating movement, dance, music, prose and poetry blending stage aesthetics effectively combining existing tradition with modern sensibility.

Although there is a divided opinion regarding all the changes that were incorporated in the dance form with the purists arguing that the tradition was compromised in this process it should be noted that any change for the better, that enhances the beauty of the dance form is always welcome. It is also to be noted that any work of art which encompasses the best of the existing tradition and retains authenticity while at the same time caters to the needs of modern aesthetic sensibilities is a masterpiece with creativity at its best while all other attempts that fail to strike this perfect balance and harmony is just novelty that fades with the changing faces of time.



- Dr. Neelima Raju Kakarlapudi

References

- 1) Kuchipudi Indian Classical Dance Art- Sunil Kothari and Avinash Pasricha Abhinav Publications. ISBN 8170173590.
- 2) Understanding Kuchipudi- Guru C.R. Acharya and Mallika Sarabhai. INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE ARTS and Darpana Publications.
- 3) Kuchipudi Bharatam Of Kuchipudi Dance: South Indian Classical Dance Tradition- Guru Uma Rama Rao. Sri Satguru Publications, 1992 ISBN 81-7030-291-9.