

Exclusive Review by Padma Bhushan Dr. Padma Subramaniam

The compositions of Guru Shri Kubernath Tanjorkar, Smt. Anjali Merh and Professor C. V. Chandrasekhar shows that culturally Tamil and Gujarat are not different, only the language is different, foundation is the same, it is the same bhakti, same Krishna and same Shiva. Same way of treating dance as a divine vehicle to reach god. All these are common for Gujarat and Tamilnadu.

All the three Gurus I see them as symbols of National Integration. That's the greatest contribution. Technique and skill anybody can develop, but contribution this way all three of them have really contributed for national integration.

I came to perform to Baroda. I came to the M.S University also. Guru Shri Kubernath Tanjorkar, attended my show. He liked my dance very much. He came back stage and talked to me. Anjali ben was also there at that time. I met Anjali ben also. I had dinner with Anjali ben. It was very nice to talk to Kubernath ji. He was explaining how his mother had migrated from Tanjavur to Baroda Palace with other dancers, Guru of dancers and musicians. His mother was a disciple of Panchapakesa Nattuvnar who is the grandfather of Guru Kalyan Sundaramji of Bombay. Guru Shri Kubernath Tanjorkar was well versed in Gujarati and Hindi. He was a very nice person, very open minded and very happily proud of his heritage. That is one thing I remember.

When I was, convening Natyakala conference in Krishna gana Sabha in Chennai, I organised traditional Nattuvnar's meet. About half a dozen traditional Nattuvnars were invited. He came to Chennai. In that conference, it was very interesting for everyone to know that that his ancestors were from Tamilnadu and that his mother and a group of musicians migrated to Baroda, and that is why he is called Tanjorkar, somebody from Tanjavur. He still remembered home town of his ancestors. That is very nice. He also spoke, there were other teachers and we took up one or two adavus for discussion. And saw how each Nattuvnar had remembered a particular adavu. Though it was all called Tanjavur style or Pandanallur style but still there was a slight change in the execution. This is something inevitable, it happens as time goes on, changes do take place. I remember he was a very warm person and a musician. He could play Veena and mridangam both. He was a typical dance teacher as per the shastras, knowing raga and knowing tala. This is what I remember about him. And a very fine human being. He lived all his life in Baroda and he trained so many students. He was a part of the faculty the University also, so naturally, instead of a few people in a private lesson, it is nice to be part of University.

Smt. Anjali Merh and Guru Shri Kuber Nath Tanjorkar both had very good relationship and were very friendly. It was very harmonious. Anjali Merh was totally Kalakshetra style and Tanjorkar was Tanjavur based but still there is harmony in them, this is very important. This is what all should learn. He was teaching Bharatanatyam items in Gujarati also. So the dance style is typically the Tanjavur style but using Hindustani music and Gujarati lyrics, so that is a big and a very major contribution. It shows an all India character for Bharatanatyam.

Smt. Anjali Merh was an angel, such a wonderful person. Very soft spoken very creative and it's very unfortunate that she had a premature death. I have seen her work, so brilliant. I have seen her students dance. She was a very warm and soft person. I remember visiting her house. I had dinner with her. We were talking a lot about her days in Kalakshetra. She knew Tamil very well, having lived in Kalakshetra. She was a great bhakta of Rukmini Devi, more than a disciple she was a bhakta of Smt. Rukmini Devi. I think she did a dance choreography on Navagraha. When she returned from the auditorium she passed away. It's a great loss, her leaving the dance scene. Her leaving the world was a very great loss. She was a personal friend of mine and very lovable person.

She is one of the earliest from Gujarat to come to Chennai and learn this dance style is itself a big contribution. Her coming all the way to Chennai. I think her parents were very fond of Rukmini Devi. Her coming and learning here, staying here. How much sacrifice it would have meant. Now everything is easier, not so in those days. She was one of the pioneer from North India to come and learn the art form. She stuck to the Kalakshetra style and that Tamil culture was also a part of her sarees. She was looking and speaking more like a Tamilian. It showed how she could gel completely.

Chandru Anna also is very well known to me for a very very long time, even from his Varanasi days. He is another bridge between North and South both musically and in dance. Jaya Chandrasekhar is very well known to us. He too is from Kalakshetra. Most of us call him Anna here. He is known for his music. His compositions are brilliant both in North Indian and South Indian styles and I have seen him in Baroda when he was heading the Department. I had come there as an examiner to the Department. It happened to be at the same time, when I had a performance in Ahmedabad. From Ahmedabad I came to Baroda for being an examiner.

All the three Gurus were like beacons, who have lived to remind the basic oneness of culture in India. This is the greatest contribution of all three of them.