



CHAPTER 13

THE CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTION OF *MARGAM*



A century since Bharatanatyam was ‘revived’ in India, it has come a very, very long way. Its socio-cultural acceptance in mainstream society has seen a quantum leap in the number of young children learning the dance form and of teachers spread across India in last 70 years at least. Especially in the private Bharatanatyam classes and institutions, it seems the main aim of the dance teachers to take their students to the level of the *arangetram*, which is the performance of entire *Margam*. Most dance teachers, if not all, would still be teaching the standard items format of the conventional *Margam*. This would be because they would be conforming to the expectation from the dance training offered by the tradition, the student and the parents. However, change is also important and inevitable, and as classical dance responds to new ideas and new audiences on one hand, and challenging constraints on the other. This thesis has most earnestly tried to document how Gurus/Teachers, dancers and choreographers have been, over centuries, re-interpreting traditional narratives or creating new ones to match contexts and perspectives offered of their times in the *Margam* format. Over the last many centuries, as classical dance styles have changed and evolved, they were dutifully codified in detailed texts. Historically dance had been performed in groups as well as solo presentations, and sometimes with a principal dancer supported by a troupe of dancers. Nobody really knows what came first – the solo or the group dance, but what we do know is that both survived, grew and flourished. In Bharatanatyam, the *Margam* continues to be the backbone of the form, energised by new thinking, creativity and innovation in interpretation and format.

The traditional *Margam* (post-Revival period) was designed to comprise items that conformed to *nritta*, *nritya* and *natya* (*nritta* + *nritya*) narratives and a format that started with *Pushpanjali* / *Alarippu* and ended with *Tillana* / *Shlokam*, with about 7-9 items in between, an easy total of two hours and more with a short interval in-between. It was thus able to showcase the many technical and *abhinaya* skills the dancer had mastered as well as her stage presence, physical strength and stamina. The *Margam* therefore became not only the most important performance tool, but a very useful teaching tool as well. Even today, the *Margam* continues to be the only strongest tool of learning and mastering every Bharatanatyam technique. Without exception, every guru, every dance teacher, every critic of Indian performing arts would agree to this basic fact whole-heartedly. The *Margam* and its structure as its

builds up to the crescendo, forms the core for training of the Bharatanatyam dancer in both the *nritta* and *nritya* aspects. To really get under the skin of what Bharatanatyam is, to understand its overall philosophy, to master it in its totality, a truly serious student must learn at least 4 to 6 *Margams* in his or her training of eight to ten years, before they are ready as artists for public performances (which is not the *arangetram*).



Fig.1 : Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai

During the post-Revival period itself (early 1940s), stalwarts like Smt. Rukminidevi Arundale (with dance schools such as Kalakshetra) had already started experimenting with dance-dramas – the popular *Kuravanjis*, the extended *Dashavatara*, or the *Navarasa* narratives – as an alternative to the *Margam*, especially when the need was to put many dancers on stage. The senior-most and the truly talented dancers were usually given the key roles. Dance gurus teaching in Performing Arts departments in Colleges and Universities such as Smt. Anjali Merh and C V Chandrasekhar (both Kalakshetra alumni) took this trend forward (1970s-1980s) in the productions they choreographed with their students and department teachers. Or sometimes, as in the case of Chandralekha, themes or projects such as “Leelavati, Angika, Stree etc. were selected. This trend is seen in almost all well-known and well-established dance schools across India, in Ahmedabad Darpana Academy (Mrinalini and Mallika Sarabhai), in Delhi Natyavriksha of Geeta Chandran, in Chennai Bharat Kalanjali of Dhananjayans and many more.



Fig.2 : Guru Smt. Chandralekha (Chandan Patel)

This allowed for creative, sometimes radical, interpretation of traditional themes that was exciting and challenging for the choreographers who could explore ‘modernist’ ideas. It also proved that classical Bharatanatyam did have the depth and breadth of dance language to be able to establish its relevance in the mid- and late-20th century. This scenario gathered momentum as the century came nearer its close in the decade of the ‘90s. Choreography and creative experimentation began to call the shots, and dance gurus began to harness their choreographic skills to make dramatic use of stage space, costumes, and most significantly, technology. As theatre technology (light, sound and colour effects) became more sophisticated and easy to access and use, choreographers could harness it in a variety of ways to enhance the visual effects and overall presentation quality of their performance. Hence, performance presentation became and continues to be a very important part of any public performance these days.

This is not to say that the *Margam* languished and was forgotten. Accomplished performers like Kamala, Padma Subrahmanyam, Yamini Krishnamurthy, Sonal Mansingh in the 1960s-80s period, Alarmel Valli, Malvika Sarukkai, Geeta Chandran, Leela Samson, to name a few in the 1990s, (more names in 2000s) continued to dance the *Margam* with an amazing understanding and study of all the pure classical norms that the Bharatanatyam performance was endowed with. During this whole time, there were many brilliant young and not so young dancers, who

danced Bharatanatyam *Margam* all over the country, where ever they got the opportunity. In the decades from 1960s to 1980s, a solo performance by any Bharatanatyam artiste, no matter what her seniority, was invariably a complete *Margam* presentation. But there was also a desire to present something new and unusual to keep the audience engaged and bring them into the auditorium, especially in the context of the fact that to these new audiences, there were now a number of ‘entertainment’ channels open – colour TV came into Indian homes in the early 1980s and in the 1990s, foreign channels stepped in and very soon, entertainment that appealed to everyone in the family was available 24 x 7, in a variety of languages, across hundreds of channels.



Fig.3 : Acharya Parvati Kumar



Fig.4 : Smt. Parul Shastri Zaveri

One of the earliest creations in the solo Bharatanatyam was perhaps Acharya Parvati Kumar’s work on the 18 *Nirupanas* of Serfoji. It was also an extremely precious experiment in solo Bharatanatyam choreography. He translated and transcribed the *nirupanas* and choreographed a few items of them which he first taught to Sucheta Chapekar. The one and only whole *Nirupana* that he created was taught to Parul Shastri Zaveri and she first performed it in 1980. He also put these in his book, *Tanjavur Nritya Prabandha*, wherein he compiled all the *nirupanas* that were found in the Saraswati Mahal Library. The book is called “*Korvyache Sahityache Jinus*”

which was the original title of Sarfoji Raje's work. It is in simple Marathi. In the *Nirupana*, each item is connected to the next forming an integrated chain while keeping its own individuality. This particular *Nirupana* is a dialogue between the young and bashful *Nayika* and an elderly and mature attendant. The story moving from one to another links all 18 items of *Nirupana* together in one Raga (*Pantuvarali*) and Tala (*Surfatka Tishra Ata*). From *Jaya Jaya*, *Sharanu*, *Alaru*, to *Shabda*, *Varna*, *Swarajati*, *Pada*, *Tillana* and *Mangale* are 18 items.



Fig.5 : Prof.Parul Shah



Fig.6 : Smt. Anjali Merh

Another path breaking creation and about 8 years before the *Nirupana* of Acharya Parvati Kumar was the *Margam* in Gujarati by late Smt Anjali Merh. I have discussed about this *Margam* in the previous chapter in detail. Because of the indepth knowledge of all aspects of Bharatanatya be it *Nritta*, *Nritya*, Music, Tala, Poetry and its metre (Chhanda) she knew it all and wrote all the *Margam* items in their original form and structure in Gujarati. Her desire to project the social and cultural ethos of the land of Gujarat and its richness drove Anjaliben to write the whole *Margam*, It was the most successful and bold work of using a different language in the traditional

Margam format. My guide Prof Parul Shah was one of the first to be taught by Anjaliben and she performed it in Delhi in November 1972.

As discussed in the last chapter, another of the first experiments with the *Margam* was the selection of a single theme to which the general items of the traditional *Margam* would then be designed for. For instance, choreographer dancer Smt Rama Vaidyanathan and Arshiya Sethi's collaborative *Bird Margam*, Francis Barboza's experimentation with Christian religious narratives in his *Margam*, Smt Mamata Niyogi Nakra's *Shishu Margam* to name a few. It is believed that in such *Margams*, the strength of the dancer's own belief in the subject/thematic powers their physical, emotional, mental faculties and contributes to the dance blossoming into a very enjoyable experience for the viewer as well. This is a good thing sometimes when compared to a regular *Margam* where the dancer might choose varied esoteric items - a *Devi Stuti*, a *Kirtanam* on Krishna, a *Padam* on Shiva --- that do not link in any way with each other.

On the other hand, dancers accept the importance and significance of solo performance and based on that many conceptualise and choreograph wonderful and challenging solos of one and a half to two hours. They are like *Margams* or can substitute the *Margam* while retaining its inherent strength but offering a more contemporary point of view. Dancer Geeta Chandran's "*Anekan*" and "*Gandhi*" are excellent examples of initiatives along this line; as are Shavita Shastri's "*Chain*", Rama Vaidyanathan's "*Chitravali*", "*Bird Margam*", the *Neo-Bharatanatyam* creations by Anita Ratnam, Mallika Sarabhai's theme-based productions that basically use Bharatanatyam techniques and formats. Sometimes, these can be interpreted as a new kind of *Nirupana* and *Prabandha*, where the *abhinaya* is interspersed with *nritta*.

Can we look upon these productions as *Margams*? If such productions engage audiences of today in a more meaningful way, do they mean the end of the traditional *Margam*? The new productions allow for creative interpretations, new narratives, and shorter performance periods (lack of time for urban audiences, getting home safely at night are major concerns). Should they be considered the new *Margams*?

The New Solo Thematic Productions

The trend initiated by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam in the early 1980s, with her choreography of “*Krishnaya Tubhyam Namaha*” and “*Ramaya Tubhyam Namaha*”, full-scale productions that exhibited the same level of seriousness and commitment as dancing the traditional *Margam*, can be interpreted as the first instances of contemporary Bharatanatyam dancer-choreographers veering off the straight and narrow path advocated by the purists. She Choreographed more than 20 Solo Dance production in different Language. Her Solo production is in "*banika*" Style compiled from multilingual literature. Here I putting the list of her solo dance productions name with language.



Fig. 7 : Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam

- Krishnaya Tubhyam Namaha - Sanskrit and Tamil
- Ramaya Tubhyam Namaha - Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi, Telugu and Malyalam
- Jaya Jaya Shankara - Sanskrit
- Purandara Bhakti - Kannada
- Kamba Ramayanam - Tamil
- Bhagavad Gita - Sanskrit
- Navarasa - Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu

- Sakti Darsanam - Sanskrit and Tamil
- Stree Kavi Ratna - Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada and Hindi

Veteran Dancer and Guru Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam, recalls how her vision came true for *Krishnaya Tubhyam Namaha*: "*Krishnaya Tubhyam Namaha*' is the title of my *Ekartha Eka Aharya* solo performance that created history in the technique of presentation. It is still a popular theme after its inaugural performance in the 1970s. The origin of this divine experience is an interesting story." She also tell in one of her interview, "Globalisation in art does not mean creating prototypes. Exchange is fine but not at the cost of one's identity. I remember adapting a Russian composer's symphony for Romeo and Juliet to my solo '*Jatayu Moksham*' piece. I just used that music to emote... the *sancharis*, *karanas* and my technique of using the whole body (derived from the *Natyashastra*) were all there and went well with the composition. Having learnt Western classical I understood the piece before choreographing it." She also believes that creating something new should be the natural outcome of one's artistic growth.



Fig. 8 : Shri V P Dhananjayan and Smt. Shanta Dhananjayan

Bhishma was a solo dance production by Shri V. P Dhananjayan for Naatyaranga, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha in 2009. The story of Bhishma is set as a flash back narration by Gangadevi, Bheeshma's mother - After the war of *Mahaabhaarata*, Sri Krishna and Pandavas bring the mortal remains - the ashes of Bhishma to

submerge into the waters of Ganga. Receiving the oblations, Ganga with great grief reminiscences how her formidable son who cannot be even vanquished by his own Guru Parasurama has fallen an easy prey to the presence of a eunuch - called *Sikhandi*. Created in 3 parts, the story has battle field and other scenes, along with all characters such as Bhishma, Ganga, Shantanu, Krishna, Arjuna and many more. As a solo production this is absolutely innovative and creative in the Bharatanatyam. It ends with *Mangalam Bhavatu... Jeyajeya Mahaabhaarata Bharatam*.

Bharatanatyam dancer Chitra Visweswaran believes that a dancer needs to have a spiritual approach towards the form. In her solo dance production her portrayal of different characters of woman in - *Ekaharya* concept - was impressive work. '*Sthree Shakti*' speaks of the sage of Indian women. Indian women have been known for their strength of mind, their will power, their dexterity with words and for their Imperishable love for their country.



Fig.9 : Smt. Chitra Visweswaran

Lyrics from various texts in different languages have been put together to illustrate the strength of four well known Indian women. Sita from ' *Valmikiramayana*' displays tremendous will power and self confidence during the " *Agni-pravesha*", Savitri win her husband, Satyavan from Yama, Panchali- Draupadi takes her terrible

oath, which leads to the great war at Kurukshetra in the lyrics of Subramania Bharthi, Lakshmi bai - Jhansi Ki Rani, fights and dies for her country as expressed through the Hindi lyrics of Subhadrakumari Chauhan.



Fig. 10 : Smt. Malavika Sarukkai

Malavika Sarukai, solo dancer and choreographer, has always been on a creative journey, facing challenges in the process of learning. She strongly believes that Bharatanatyam for her remains a solo form which she would like to revalidate and it has a magical stylisation. She has choreographed diverse themes in Bharatanatyam technique. Her major thematic productions are

1. Fire Flies (a multi-media presentation which explores Shringara using dance, miniature paintings, with English text).
2. Khajuraho (It is her homage to the temples which celebrate the secular and resonate with the sacred).
3. *Kasi Yatra* (A very interesting theme which shows the journey of a Courtesan to Varanasi, the holi city. It is the exploration of celebration of life at multiple levels).
4. *Srinkhala* (The choreographer in this production looks at the inner and outer space, through our links with the environment).

5. *Uthkanta* (This is expression of yearning, longing and expectations, across space and time lesser known voices speak).
6. *Krishna RutuKrida* (celebration 6 *Rutus* with *Krishna Lilas*)

Culled from the Jaina Philosophy, the fundamental mantra in GeetaChandran's "Anekanta" is that there are multiple realities to every issue – cultural, political, social, economic and, in fact, to every aspect of life and living! "Anekanta" celebrates the acceptance of multiple truths, embracing diversity and universal acceptance. The performance has been guided by the intellectual inputs from author, Smt. Sudhamahi Regunathan, a renowned Jaina scholar.



Fig. 11 and 12 Smt. Geeta Chandran in *Gandhi* and *Anekant*

Geeta Chandran's *Gandhi: Warp and Weft*, explores the main concepts of Gandhian philosophy. It is feted as one of the most creative and milestone performances of our times. It explores key concepts through the narrative in the 21st century by a female dancer. Through narrative gestures and abstract movements the choreographer plays with the Gandhian ideology. It has incorporated contemporary movement theatre in its physical vocabulary perfectly with classical Bharatanatyam. The six concepts interpreted through dance flow contiguously from one to the other. The one hour choreography has Geeta Chandran as the solo participant, using the *Nritya* and *Abhinaya* as well as more contemporary choreographic explorations of the traditional techniques.

Rama Vaidhyathan, another very versatile and valuable dancer-choreographer excels in the solo *Margam* performances. But her creative solo works are also so welcome addition to the “New-ness” of 21st century Bharatanatyam. Her “*Chitravali*” is a visually danced picture book on the idea of *Krishnamaya*. She celebrates the vastness of Krishna's physical presence through various forms of art, bringing together the three creative paths of painting, music, and dance thus creating this picture book where we can see, hear and experience Krishna. So ancient miniature paintings, Sanskrit verses, *bandishes* from Hindustani music, and the dance form of Bharatanatyam, all come together to help the viewer experience ‘*Krishnamaya*’, a complete immersion in Krishna, in the sweetness of his unparalleled beauty.



Fig. 13: Smt. Rama vaidyanathan inChitravali

Rama Vaidyanathan has also choreographed more such pieces. “*Dwita*” is about the duality of life, exploring the double aspects of Man and God. The narrative uses the figures of a mother and her daughter (danced by Rama and her daughter) who remind us of the duality that exists in every walk of our lives. While both complement and empower each other, one symbolizes the present and the other is significant of the future. While we accept that there are always two sides to a coin, two perceptions

and two paths to a goal, the challenge is to recognize both and understand that both co-exist.

Rama Vaidyanathan's *Mad and Divine* is also another effort at the modern *Margam*. *Mad and Divine* was commissioned by the Mad and Divine Festival held by the Kartik Fine Arts Chennai 2011 curated by Anita Ratnam. This work focuses on the work and voice of two female mystic poets –the 13th century Sant. Janabai from Maharashtra and the 14th century Lal Dev from Kashmir. It offers an insight into the life and teachings of both saints, who went through tremendous hardships before they were finally recognized for their spiritual awakening and the poetry produced as a result. They crossed all barriers of social norms to fearlessly express their love for the Supreme. Janabai, who belonged to the Warkari tradition that worshipped Lord Vitthala of Pandarpur (Krishna), wrote Marathi Abhangs that reflected her clarity of thought and her state of spiritual consciousness.

Born in a Sudrafamily, she was a devoted maid-servant in the house of the great Sant Namdev, another mystic poet. Lalded's Vakhs or sayings in Kashmiri touched the common man for its simplicity yet multi-layered interpretations. Championing the cause of Hindu Muslim unity in Kashmir, her Vakhs are also a testimony of her deep love and devotion for the supreme. They also reflect the life teachings that she imbibed from a tormenting mother-in-law and an indifferent husband. Janabai was a Vaishnavite while Lalded was a Shaivaite. Janabai believed in the form while Lalded believed in the formless. Janabai took the path of devotion while Lalded took the path of tantra. They both appear to be different, but there is no denying that they were both Mad and Divine.



Fig.14 and 15 Dr Anita Ratnam in “Spiral”

Chennai-based Anita Ratnam’s productions, “Spirals”, “Un-Earth”, “Her and Bliss” are sharp new *Margams*, bringing the convergence of dance, music and theatre. “Spirals” features Anita Ratnam with Anil Srinivasan and Sikkil Gurucharan. Ratnam's perennial fascination with mythology and the power of metaphor course through the presentation. Mythology of the Sacred Feminine and Her consort are re-imagined and re-created through her Neo Bharatam aesthetic. The use of props to convey and deepen the theatrical experience follows Ratnam's 25 year journey in new ways to retelling the old stories for contemporary audiences. The overarching imagery is water... its depth, density and dramatic possibilities ... Water ... from which the lotus blooms and the milky ocean atop which the Lord Vishnu floats in a dreamy reverie. The music combines Western minimalism with the Indian/Carnatic raga motifs. “Un-Earth” is an interdisciplinary work combining dance, movement, storytelling and improvisation to re-tell mythological metaphors in a contemporary way. Based on the theme of the BhutaYagna and ecology, Anita and her team of three musicians and set as well as lighting and costume designers have created in a single story multiple narratives to reimagine our cultural metaphors. Mahavishnu and his eternal image atop the milky ocean... the chants of Margazhi and the urgent call of the earth are all part of the voices in “Un-Earth”. “Her and Bliss”

are experiments in neo-Bharatam, a collection of dances exploring the divine feminine through dance, voice, storytelling and ritual gesture. Dr. Subrahmanyam's Bharatanrityam and Anita Ratnam's Neo-Bharatam continue, however to remain branches of the large banyan tree that we all know as Bharatanatyam.



Fig.16 : Shri Vaibhav Arekar

The motif of the beautiful, enigmatic but fragile relationship between the mother and her little boy is explored through Tagore's poem 'Debotaar Grash from Sanchaiti by Vaibhav Arekar. The Crescent Moon collection which is written from the perspective of either the mother or the child has "The end, My song, and Bir Purush/Hero" all imaginatively integrated by him. He says that, "There has been for long a deep desire to explore the mother-child relationship through my medium of art-classical dance. To explore something much deeper in its emotional content than the usual songs used in dance. Thus was born 'Debotar Grash"- a solo dance drama on the saga of a mother and her child."The voice from the margins, Mukti is his another solo production. Nandanar...Tamil saint is born in a low caste, with his fears, suppression and angst. The "Mukti" comes with his determined faith in the god and he attains the divine vision. The struggle of the people on the margins is voiced here as a universal experience. It is the story and voice of any individual on the personal level who has tried and overcome worst obstacles.



Fig.17 : Ms. SavithaShastry in “Chain”

Savitha Shastry Her solo Dance Production ‘Chains: Love Stories of Shadows’ is a production that tries to un-masks, the daily masking of the ordinary people. She tries to expose and explore the freedom of choice that we have. Following the ground breaking successes of our earlier productions, Chains takes a long hard look at a woman’s life. The compromises, the expectations from her family and society, does it allow her the freedom of choice? According to Savita though the times have changed and parameters broadened, there exists a fence. Chains explores the dividing line between compromise and free will and. She creates many solo dance productions such as, The Music Within, Soul Cages, The Yudh, The prophet- Destiny, Divinity and Doubt.

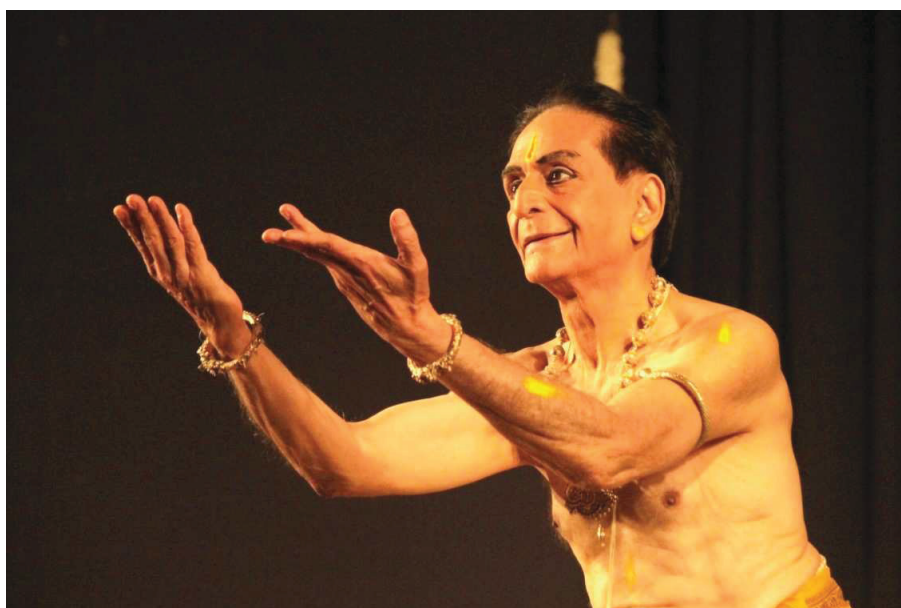


Fig. 18 Prof C. V. Chandrasekhar

One of his Interview Prof. C. V Chandrasekhar speaks about the changing in performance area "There are many reasons. Firstly among the overwhelming number of *arangetrams* these days, not at all are up to standard. People's exposure to Bharatanatyam is largely confined to these mediocre performances. Too much of anything can be tiring. Secondly, the audience base for music seems to be more learned than that for dance. For dance, however unless you make an effort to watch performances, the exposure is almost nil. The language of *abhinaya* requires some understanding and concentration on the part of the audience. All these factors have forced organisers to woo audiences by re- packaging the traditional format. It is important to reach out and create a new audience but it is just as important to preserve the quality of a *Margam*. A thematic production or a dance- drama gives more opportunities for group work and to continue our tradition of storytelling. However, the *Margam* is designed to preserve the intrinsic qualities of our art form and bring out the nuances of the Bharatanatyam technique. Many dancers feel that *Margam* is easy to perform and that not much thought needs to go into it. He strongly disagree. He further says we cannot be careless when performing the traditional repertoire. He believes and also other serious dancers to ensure that the *Margam* does not become obsolete. It is a continuous effort."

Since the coming out of Bharatanatyam from temple to the theatre, its traditional format has undergone a sea of changes. There is a perception today, that the *Margam* is obsolete, boring, lacking in contemporaneity, that it puts the dancer in a figurative strait-jacket. People question and wonder how relevant is *Margam*? What are the new trends? What is the response of the viewers? A lot of people are not interested in seeing the same old themes and such. They want to see a new repertoire and feel that the old regular *Margam* is redundant. So is the *Margam* outdated? At times it does get repetitive and at times boring if the artist is not so very communicative to see the stories of Shiva, Krishna or Devi again and again.

According to Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar, “It can never lose its appeal. But what worries me are the changes being made to the format by way of new interpolations. It’s not that I am against creative ideas but these ideas need to be backed by complete understanding of the structure of the composition. The final outcome should be an embodiment of aesthetics. The other aspect that has come into vogue is elaborate storytelling in place of subtle *sancharis*, quite often irrelevant and unnecessary to the lines of the poem, a disturbing trend indeed.” Interview in Hindu Dec 2014



Fig. 19 : Smt.AlarmelValli

According to Alarmel Valli, the *Margam*, with its perfect structural balance and harmony, is but a beautiful framework for the performance that gives ample scope for individuality and creative expression. It is up to the dancer, to invest it with life and meaning. She Says, "*Margam* gives me a vast and divers palette to choose from with exciting colours to paint many dancing spaces. If it is 'boring', surely we have

our selves to blame. The strength, power and beauty of the *Margam*, lies in its ability to integrate the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of life"

As we know '*Arangetram*' is the Bharatanatyam dancer's debut performance. The practice of performing a *Margam* in the *Arangetram* is long established. The earliest reference to this we find is a whole chapter devoted to the *Arangerrukatai* in *Silappadikaram*. There is a great importance to such a performance in presenting a newly trained dancer. It had a very important economic and artistic role in the temple and court. Post 1930, as we know the history of Bharatanatyam, the *Arangetram* became entirely artistic, where the teacher and her disciple would be judged for their artistic achievements. In such a scenario, there is a readymade audience consisting of friends and family of the artist involved. Since the 19th century till now, all students doing *Arangetrams* have performed the *Margam* or repertoire devised by the Tanjore quartet which is the standard format. This is first solo *Margam* performance of the dancer. It is certainly a big boost to her or his confidence as a performer. They will definitely feel suddenly 'I can do it'. From then till now, with all said and done, the traditional *Margam*, remains a most appropriate format for the solo recital. "*Margam* will always be relevant as it has a beautiful structure where one goes on a beautiful journey from the physical to the sublime," "You first begin by understanding your own physical form (*aangikam*) with *Alarippu* / *Mallari* / *Jatiswaram*, then move on to explore and exploit the emotional potential (*abhinayam*) and then reach the realm of enjoying the beauty of poetry, music and rhythmic fervour" says Sheejith Krishna.

The inherent desire to change, to create and present something new, has taken different shapes and sizes in the items of *Margam*. Instead of simple *Sancharis* in a *Varnam*, one finds extensive stories, long *nritya* passages are used to show the stamina, virtuosity and command over the tala! Also a lot of times the dancers are very well trained and competent technically. The strength, stamina, understanding and hard work put up by the younger generation of dance learners and the knowledge of their teachers that I met and interviewed is really heart-warming. Without losing the base of the traditional practices they want to go ahead in the new world. The new social, cultural, economic and political order of the 21st century is so much changed.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, different language and theme based *Margams* are choreographed in which there is logical progression of ideas which reaches the

audiences easily. Definitely such creations need a lot of practice and detail knowledge of all aspects of Bharatanatyam. The beauty of the Bharatanatyam *Margam* is that it is always open to innovation and experimentation. There is no way that it could be outdated. It depends on how the dancers approach it. Of course, the innovations should be effective enough to solve the purpose of any recital i.e. *Rasanishpatti*. *Margam* is a frame work, a concept, a basic idea. It is subjective and relative, an approach, a well thought of plan which will ultimately create the possibility of experiencing the Rasa. It incorporates a variety of dance compositions using the set Bharatanatyam movement vocabulary. I believe after going through my eight years on just the format of the *Margam* that there is no rule that one must only perform the Tanjore Quartet items. It has to be a perfect balance of all technical aspects of Bharatanatyam with its aesthetics integrated fully. *Margam* to me is an eternal concept. It is to be performed to make the performance of Bharatanatyam more meaningful to the performers and the audiences equally. A person learning Bharatanatyam earnestly must learn basic *adavus* in detail at least for 2 years, and learn all items of minimum 2 *Margams*. She or he becomes a full-fledged dancer after carefully learning in this way. There is no short cut. *Margam* is the root of the choreographic principles that are practiced through Bharatanatyam and the innovative pieces are its branches.

The students of Bharatanatyam today are very versatile, more intelligent, and if taken on the correct path will work very hard. This is what my friends and me did during our university days and still try continue the same. We love to perform the *Margam* and all items. At the end of two and half hours of practice, the kind of pleasure and energy that we feel is not easy to explain. So many of the Gurus, Teachers and all connected to different aspects of Bharatanatyam have worked with love and passion towards the continuity and furtherance to Bharatanatyam and all that it stands for through their hard and dedicated work, have expanded this rich dance style.



Fig. 20 : At the feet of Balamma, with Paruldididi, Douglas, Suzan and Aniruddha Knight.

From my interviews with artists, students, readings from books and archival materials, I just hear one strong voice that the *Margam* will always remain a very strong and accepted teaching tool of Bharatanatyam. Its performance will depend on many issues of economics, time, cultural context and such. Since last couple of years Aniruddha Knight and Scripps Foundation and some cultural bodies have started encouraging performances of full length *Margams*. This is to encourage youngsters to continue practice, performance and creativity of Bharatanatyam *Margam*! The new creative endeavours and the tradition which is also ever evolving has moved together and always will do so.

This was my most humble and most sincere effort to know and work on a very small dot in the vast ocean of dance, the structure of the Bharatanatyam *Margam* and its changing dynamics over the centuries. With the blessings of my Gurus, elders, experts, dance connoisseurs, dance students and friends! I hope and pray I have done justice!

PHOTO REFERENCE / CREDIT

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