

MARGI

Thirty fourth Annual Report – Year ending 31.3.2005

THE MARGI KALIYOGAM (Performing Group)

Margi, started in 1970, is currently functioning as a Kaliyogam (training cum performing group) from 1994-95. The important features of the Kaliyogam system are:

1. Maintaining a group of excellent artistes graded under different categories like Guru, Adyasthanam (Top level), Onnamkida, Idatharam, Kuttitharam (other levels) as against the old system of teachers and stipendiaries who had to leave the institution on completion of the time bound course like 4 years, 6 years etc.

(The main pitfall in the time bound course, as experienced in premier institutions like Kerala Kalamandalam etc. is that, on completion of the course, the artistes have to fend for themselves to remain in the profession. Junior artistes are seldom offered stage venues. In the result most of them had to earn their livelihood in other lay professions. Actually, Margi has absorbed number of artistes from Kerala Kalamandalam etc. and provided them financial support and performance opportunities. Many of them have turned out to be outstanding artistes).

2. Continuous training and performances side by side throughout the lifetime of the artistes and staying together as a well knit cohesive unit, which leads to high level production values.
3. This system is the one most suited to restore the arts to their former glory by enabling revivals, creative elaboration through poetic treatment etc.
4. There is a constant challenge to the creative talents of the artistes in every production and performance.

For a Kaliyogam (training cum performance organization) to function effectively, the main need is to have a long term programme of training/performance schedules. This was spelt out by the late Sri.D.Appukuttan Nair (Margi founder and a great theatre personality of our times) It

consists of new productions on a continuous basis; not really new, but revivals of a multitude of themes and theatre practices which had lost their way down the years of dwindling appeal for classical art forms. More precisely, for Kathakali, the continuous training is on enacting all popular plays in their entirety and bringing onstage, revivals of extinct plays. In Kutiyattam, the declining phase was more pronounced and whole plays/acts had disappeared from stage and much more ground had to be covered to build up a sizable repertoire, which alone can sustain an art for long. Hence, these processes were set in motion quite early in Margi by Sri. Nair as follows.

- (1) He wrote enlarged performance manuals for plays like Nalacharitha parts I, II, III; Banayudhom; which plays had infinite scope for elaboration and deep poetic treatment.
- (2) He wrote, perhaps for the first time, detailed performance manuals for extinct plays belonging to the series known as "Ramanattom" authored by the former ruler of the region known as Kottarakkara Thampuran (these plays are very significant as they mark, the very beginning of the art of Kathakali itself) The plays thus revived were Vischinnabhishekom and Kharavadhom and Sethubhanandanam (compiled by Scholar Sri. S.Ganesa Iyer)
- (3) For Kutiyattam, the revivals were Acts I, III and VII of Sakthibhadra's Ascharyachoodamani and Act II of Kulasekhara Varman's Subhadra Dhananjayam. The performance manuals were prepared for Margi by Veteran Guru Padmashree Ammannur Madhava Chakiar. More ground was covered later by adding Bhasa's Mantrankom and Mahendra Vikraman's Mathavilasom (taught to Margi artistes by the veteran Guru Sri. P.K.N.Nambiar)

For Nangiarkoothu, in addition to the 'Sri Krishna Charitham' series, Sri Ramacharitham by Margi Sathi is also being enacted continuously in the Margi programmes. Other additions are Subhadra's Nirvahanam in Act V of Subhadra Dhananjayam.

Every year Margi's working programme consists of training on the themes selected from the foregoing extensive material and performing them onstage. In this format each session is a new presentation, a challenge in creativity for actor, singer and percussionist alike to continuously hone their respective innovative talents. This greatly helps to revitalize the arts.

ACHIEVEMENTS 2004-2005

KATHAKALI

Following the long term guidelines spelt out already, the following Kathakali classics were staged in great detail without omitting any portion (Even in all night programmes this is not practicable due to constraints of time)

1. Kottayathu Thampuran's Kalyanasougandhikam - 6 days
2. Bakavadhom (Part) - 1 day
3. Ravanothbhavam – Tapassattom portion - 1 day
4. Nalacharitham Day 4 - 1 day

Lecture – Demonstrations: Several lecture demonstration were arranged in schools and University centers by Dr. P.Venugopalan, Vice President of MARGI. There was very enthusiastic response particularly from the younger generation. The press had also given very good coverage for these programmes.

The institutions covered in this programme were University College, Thiruvananthapuram; the Government College for Women; NSS College; Kariyavattom University Campus; Government School, Alleppey; Government College, Palakkad; St.Xaviers college etc.

The programmes in the educational centers mentioned above were in the context of a Seminar under the auspices of the Government of India. Comparative presentation of Kathakali and the Sanskrit theatre art of Kutiyattam, which have several common aesthetic elements, was done in these venues.

Tourists from all parts of the world invariably attended Kathakali programmes in Margi during the season. Kathakali has become so appealing to tourists, who are becoming increasingly appreciative of our heritage arts. Several tourists visit the Margi Kathakali center to watch training sessions also. A number of programmes were arranged for tourists in the Margi auditorium, which has a traditional setting and ambience; being located in a heritage structure of the capital city viz. the ancient Vettakkorumakkal palace.

THIRTY FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF MARGI

Margi was started in Thiruvananthapuram in 1969 for promoting traditional classical dances and theatre. Shortly thereafter a Kathakali training center in the Thekkan chitta ^(Southern style) was started in 1974, with grant assistance from the Government of Kerala. The Chief Guru was the renowned Mankulam Vishnu Namboodiri. There after Padmashree Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair joined Margi as visiting professor in 1980.

The Margi Kutiyattam center was started in 1981 in the Nambi Madam attached to the Valiya Sala Mahadevar temple. Guru Padmashri Ammannur Madhava Chakiar was the Chief Guru.

Margi was started in Thiruvananthapuram at a time when there was no center even for Kathakali in the Capital City, though it was being identified as the Capital of the land of Kathakali (Kerala).

Within a short span of time excellent artistes both in Kathakali and Kutiyattam were produced by Margi and these priceless arts, the pride of Kerala, were promoted further and further, culminating in the UNESCO proclamation of the Kutiyattam Sanskrit theatre as a world heritage art in 2001. The initiative and implementation in this behalf ^{is} was done by Margi.

To feature the above progress, the 35th annual day celebrations were held on 25th and 26th November 2004 in a specially erected dais in the open space in front of Margi in Fort. The function was inaugurated by lighting of the lamp by internationally known film maker Adoor Gopalakrishnan. This was followed by a seminar on Kutiyattam under the auspices of the UNESCO and Japan funds in trust. The five day long celebrations included Kathakali and Kutiyattam programmes and lecture – demonstrations. The seminar on Nangiarkoothu involving all the practicing artistes of the art, perhaps for the first time, was a notable event.

Shri. A.P.Anil Kumar, the Honourable Minister for Culture visited Margi on the occasion and took part in the proceedings.

The leading participants in the seminar were Sri. Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, Vice-Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Dr.N.P.Unni, former Vice Chancellor of Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Shri. Pirappancode Murali, MLA, Shri S.Srinivasan IAS, Dr. P.Venugopaln, Dr.M.G.Sasibhushan, Guru Panivada Tilaka P.K.Narayanan Nambiar, Guru Moozhikulam

Kochukuttan Chakiar, Smt. Kalamandalam Girija, Smt. Nirmala Panikkar, Margi Sathi, Smt. Usha Nangiar, Smt. Indu etc.

KUTIYATTAM & NANGIARKOOTHU
With support from Kendra Sangeet Natak Akademi

The Kutiyattam shows in Margi as well as outreach programmes as per ongoing programme of support by the Kendra Sangeet Nataka Academy, continued during the year. This is the 14th year of the SNA supported scheme and 63 programmes were staged during the year, covering a wide range; drawing from the vast repertoire built up in Margi during the previous years as well as from revivals after study of texts as per current scheme. (Please see list of programmes)

There was significant progress in taking this art to a wider audience. Outreach Programmes staged in temples, the city colleges and other University centres were very successful in spreading the art among the younger generation of lovers of classical theatre.

UNESCO Proclamation of Kutiyattam as world heritage art; the fallout

Mention had been made in the last few annual reports about Margi's initiative in preparing candidature file and submitting it to the UNESCO with a three hour video documentation on Kutiyattam, filmed in the Kidangoor and Haripad Koothmabalams, by Adoor Gopalakrishnan. On 18th May 2001. Kutiyattam, was proclaimed as one of the *"Masterpieces of the Oral and Inantigible Heritage of Humanity"*.

MARGI IS NAMED AS THE NATIONAL IMPLEMENTING AGENCY FOR THE UNESCO PROGRAMME

The implementation phase of the UNESCO sponsored Kutiyattam development programme started during the year. The Government of India, Ministry of Tourism & Culture provided funds for (i) Samrakshanam (preservation) (ii) Ujeevanam (rejuvenation) and (iii) Pradarsanam (stage presentation).

Under the above, several acts/sections from Sanskrit plays were presented in several venues including schools & colleges. A new production (Mahaendra Vikarama's Mathavilasam – latter

portion) was launched. A comprehensive seminar was organized in July at Theerthapadamantapam. Leaders of culture and senior artistes from all Kutiyattam institutions participated. The seminar was inaugurated by noted poet Padmashri Dr. Ayyappa Panikkar and the main participants were Prof. S.Guptan Nair, Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, Vice Chairman, SNA; Dr.V.R.Prabodhachandran Nair-Chairman, Kerala Kalamandalam, Dr. K.G.Poulose, Sri. E.K.Bharath Bhushan IAS, Secretary, Department of Culture, Kerala; Sri. S.Srinivasan IAS, Secretary Margi; Dr. P.Venugopalan; Dr. M.G.Sasibhushan; Shri. P.Narayana Kurup; Shri. M.Madhavan Nair, Treasurer, Margi; Shri. K.Prabhakaran Nair, Joint Secretary, MARGI; Guru P.K.N.Nambiar, Guru Moozhikulam Kochu Kuttan Chakiar etc.

Under a parallel UNESCO programme of support, activities like (i) training of youngsters (ii) production of new plays (iii) lecture – demonstrations and programmes for outreach and (iv) improvements to costumes and equipment were carried out during the year as summarized below.

Seventeen youngsters were given training for a period of 8 months as per a specially prepared syllabus, to cover the basics of the art with a view to instill genuine interest in the art at a very early age.

The new play (Act) Swapnakam from Bhasa's Swapnavasavadatta was produced and staged.

Semianrs, lecture demonstrations and live programmes were organized in schools, colleges, temples and Koothambalams.

SNA ASSISTANCE FOR REVIVALS – ONGOING SCHEME

From 1.7.2000, the Kendra Sangeet Nataka Akademy modified its pattern of assistance of support to Kutiyattam through Margi. Monthly payment was sanctioned to all artistes for the object of studying and enacting new dramatic texts (revivals of old and discontinued Acts/Episodes etc.) The performance subsidy was however reduced from aiding four programmes a month to two. The total assistance (benefit to the artistes) however showed an overall increase. (The assistance for costumes, percussion, instruments, programme expenses etc was reduced from RS.1 lakh to Rs.50,000/- This sum is proving to be very insufficient taking into account the cost escalation for these services).

Under the SNA assistance programme consisting of (i) Study of texts for revivals and (2) their presentation on the Stage after rehearsals (the performances also include outreach programmes); during the year, the following texts were studied

- (i) Act VI of Sakthibhadra's Ascharya Choodamani viz. Anguleeyankom. This Act, which used to be performed in brief as a ritual has been expanded to 32 days of performances in Margi, based on the performance manual by Kutiyattam Scholar Shri. K.P.Narayana Pisharadi
- (ii) Mahendra Vikrama Pallavan's Mathavilasom. Under the guidance of Guru P.K.Narayanan Nambiar, the drama portion, which is a very unique and rare section of Kutiyattam, was staged after study of text & rehearsals.
- (iii) Nangiarkoothu, Sree Ramacharitham. This performance manual, authored by Margi Sathi, is being studied, rehearsed and performed in the monthly programmes, episodally.
- (iv) Act VIII of Sakthibhadra's Ascharyachoodamani. Mishravishkamba, Sita's Agnipravesa, Narada's entry.
- (v) Bhasa's Balacharitha – Etnry of Sutradhara
- (vi) Act II of Subhadra Dhananyayam. Nangiarkoothu – Sreekrishna Charitham, new episodes.
- (vii) Act I Ascharyachoodamani. Parnasalankom, entry of Lekshmana
- (viii) Bhasa's Swapnavasavadatta, Swapnankom.

Out reach programmes

Only six programmes are envisaged as per ongoing scheme. There were several demands from various sources for staging Kutiyattam and Nangiarkoothui. *This is an indication of the outstanding success of the SNA sponsored Kutiyattam Scheme. Hence fourteen programmes were staged during 2002-2003; twenty six programmes in 2003-2004 and 31 programmes during 2004-2005.*

Many outreach programmes targeted the art loving youth of our State through lecture demonstrations and programmes staged at colleges, University centres etc. A few arts associations also requested and made local arrangements for Kutiyattam and Nangiarkoothu under the SNA programme of support.

We take this opportunity to place on record our sincere thanks to the SNA for supporting the Kutiyattam programme of Margi in a highly imaginative and result oriented manner. This support is also the reason for this ancient Sanskrit theatre art to receive world recognition; the initiative and

processing for which was taken by Margi, availing of the infrastructure / facilities made available under the SNA support programme.

(Please see also list of programmes done under Ministry of Culture, Government of India and UNESCO projects)

Training foreign scholars under ICCR Scheme

One foreign scholar received training in Kathakali with support from the ICCR. Margi has been empanelled as an institution for imparting training to foreign students. Our sincere thanks to the ICCR are hereby placed on record.

Three other foreign scholars also received short term training in Kathakali during the year.

A few foreign scholars were trained by Margi Sathi in Nangiarkoothu.

PROGRAMMES STAGED DURING THE YEAR

Kathakali - 12 programmes were staged during year at Margi, Trivandrum and 4 programmes in various temples, mostly in South Kerala.

Kutiyattam - 63 programmes were staged under the support scheme of the Kendra Sangeet Natak Akademi, in Trivandrum at the Margi Natyagriha, the Vailopally Samskrithi Bhavan (the traditional Koothambalam type theatre of the Department of Culture, Government of Kerala) Other venues were University Centres, Colleges in the State, various temples in South Kerala (Vide list of programmes appended) Out reach programmes were staged in connection with festivals etc. in centers outside the State also.

Seminars, lecture demonstrations and special programmes ^{were} organized during the year under (i) Government of India, Ministry of Culture Project and (ii) UNESCO Japan Funds in Trust project (vide list of programmes)

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, (MINISTRY OF TOURISM & CULTURE) GRANT

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India was kind enough to continue the salary grant assistance to 20 artistes and one Guru in Margi. But, since there are 40 artistes, there is a wide disparity in the earnings of the artistes. We have requested the Ministry of Culture to consider this aspect and sanction salary grant assistance to all the Margi artistes.

The salary grant assistance of the Ministry of Culture is an invaluable support and encouragement to the artistes of Margi, who are among the lowest paid and our heartfelt thanks to the Government of India are hereby placed on record.

HOSTING OF WEB SITE www.margitheatre.org

We have hosted our website – www.margitheatre.org. It features sections – History, Philosophy, Art centers, Information about Kathakali & Kutiyattam, UNESCO proclamation of Kutiyattam, Video documentation, publications, Foreign assignments etc. etc. With the aid of this InfoTech we expect much greater response to and appreciation of our traditional arts.

FOREIGN ASSIGNMENTS FOR MARGI ARTISTES

Shri. Krishnadas, renowned and senior chenda artiste of Margi performed in the UK on a two-month tour of that country during June – August 2004. Margi Vijayakumar, leading female artiste and Margi Ravindran Pillai, senior chutty artiste performed in the US on a two-month tour from March 2005.

REDUCTION IN THE RECURRING GRANT FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF KERALA

Mention had been made in the last annual reports about the inadequacy of the present grant of Rs.10 lakh, fixed in 1998-99. Within this grant, the 40 artistes of Margi could be paid only very low salaries. These artistes are all very accomplished and senior members of the profession and had given off their best for the development of Kathakali and Kutiyattam, maintaining the highest standards & traditional values of these essential Kerala theatre arts, which are increasingly being appreciated by more and more art lovers. *Margi is the only institution for Kathakali and Kutiyattam, functioning in the Capital city of our State.* We were hoping that Government would sanction a

rational salary structure for the very low paid artistes, comparable to that in the Kerala Kalamandalam.

But, sadly, the grant was reduced from Rs.10 lakh to Rs.7 lakh during 2002-2003; Rs.5.25 lakh in 2003-2004 and Rs.7 lakh during 2004-2005. The artistes' low salaries had to be slashed by up to 50% at a time when they were justifiably hoping for an upward revision.

We hope Government will be kind enough to take due note of this serious situation and sanction a rational salary structure for the artistes, in the absence of which it would be impossible to continue running Margi.

A committee has been constituted by Government ~~With Shri. P.C. as Chairman~~ ^{for reviewing and refixing grants to instns} and we have presented detailed memo at the first meeting of the committee held on 31-3-2005.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The committee would like to acknowledge its deep debt of gratitude to the Government of Kerala, Department of Culture and the Director of Vailopally Samskrithi Bhavan; Government of India (Ministry of Culture); the Kendra Sangeet Nataka Akademi; the Indian Council for Cultural Relations; the Kerala Sangeet Natak Academy; the Travancore Devasom Board; the UNESCO and Japan Funds in Trust.

Our sincere thanks are due to the Press in General and in particular the leading dailies like Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi, Kerala Kaumudi, The Hindu, The Indian Express etc. for their regular coverage of the programmes of Margi. We are extremely grateful to the visual media and the Invis Multimedia for featuring our programmes.

S. Srinivasan IAS
SECRETARY

Thiruvananthapuram
15th June 2005