

40th Annual Report

(Year ending 31-3-2011)

THE MARGI PERFORMING GROUP

MARGI, started in 1970 for teaching Kathakali as in Kerala Kalamandalam, is functioning as a *Kaliyogam* (training-cum-performing group) since 1994-95. The important features are:

1. Maintaining a group of excellent artistes graded under different categories like *Guru*, *Adyasthanam* (Top level), *Onnamkida* (Grade I), *Idatharam* (Grade II), *Kuttitharam* (Grade III), as against the old system of teachers and stipendiaries who had to leave the institution on completion of the time-bound courses.

(The main drawback in the time-bound course, as experienced in premier institutions like Kerala Kalamandalam, is that, on the completion of the course, the artistes have to fend for themselves to remain in the profession. Junior artistes are seldom offered stage venues, and thus most of them have to earn their livelihood from other jobs. Actually, Margi has absorbed a number of artistes from other institutions like Kerala Kalamandalam, Unnayi Warriar Smaraka Kalanilayam, Gandhi Seva Sadanam, Kalabharathi etc. and provided financial support and stage opportunities, with the result that many of them have turned out to be outstanding performers).

2. Continuous training and performance for the artistes, staying together as a well-knit and cohesive unit leading to high level production values.
3. This system is the one most suited to restore the arts to their former glory by imaginative elaboration and through poetic treatment.
4. There is a constant challenge to the creative talents of the artistes in every production and performance.

For a training-cum-performance organization to function effectively, the prime need is to have a long-term programme of training/performance schedules. This was clearly spelt out by the late D.Appukuttan Nair, the founder of Margi and a great theatre personality. 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. For Kathakali the continuous training is on enacting all popular plays in their entirety and presenting them on stage, and on reviving the extinct plays. In the case of Kutiyattam many whole plays or acts had disappeared from the stage, and hence much more ground had to be covered to build up a sizable repertoire which alone could sustain an art for long. Hence, these processes were set in motion quite early in Margi as follows:

- (1) Shri D.Appukuttan Nair wrote elaborate performance manuals for Kathakali plays like *Nalacharitham* 1st, 2nd and 3rd days and *Banayudham* which have infinite scope for detailed and deep poetic treatment.
- (2) He wrote, perhaps for the first time, detailed performance manuals for extinct plays belonging to the series known as *Ramanattam* authored by the former ruler Kottarakkara Thampuran (these plays are significant as they mark the very beginning of the art of Kathakali itself). The plays thus revived were *Vichinnabhishekam* and *Kharavadham*, and also *Sethubandhanam* compiled by the late scholar 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 *Subhadradhananjayam*. The performance manuals were prepared for Margi by the late Guru Padmashree Ammannur Madhava Chakiar from palm leaf manuscripts. More ground was covered later by adding Bhasa's *Mantrankam* and Mahendra Vikraman's *Mathavilasam* (taught to Margi artistes by Guru Panivadathilakan Padmasree P.K.Narayanan Nambiar).

For Nangiarkoothu, in addition to the *Sreekrishnacharitham* series, *Sreeramacharitham* by Margi Sathi is also being enacted continuously in the Margi programmes. Other additions are Subhadra's *Nirvahanam* in Act V of *Subhadradhananjayam*.

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

Complete Stage Presentation of the Kottayam Plays

Each year, one Kottayam play, (the universally acknowledged Attakadha text) is performed in full, taking about 5 to 8 days.

Training of New Artistes

A small number of basically trained artistes (up to five) are offered higher training with stipend support and stage opportunities. Part-time training is imparted to interested students without fees, making available the infrastructure of Margi free of charge for this purpose.

Training in Kathakali

A number of school students were enrolled for short-term training on Vijayadasami Day when vidyarambham was observed by all the Margi artistes. The classes are held on holidays.

Visit of Guests

Smt. Leela Samson, the new Chairperson of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), New Delhi visited Margi on November 2010 to evaluate the impact of the new training programme of the SNA with good stipendiary support. She interacted with the artistes. A few trainees had their Arangettom on the day of her visit.

ACTIVITIES

Kathakali

As usual one Kottayam Kathakali play (an acknowledged masterpiece truly representative of the art), *Bakavadham*, was enacted in full taking five days. (It is a matter of regret that, in recent years the true traditional format of this great art is getting performed less often. When done, there is often a considerable omission of certain portions of the play. Enacting at least one such play in full, taking about five to eight days, assumes significance).

New production

The great play *Kathaveryarjjuna vijayam* by Puthiyikkal Thampan has almost been forgotten over the last two or three decades. Margi revived this play by presenting it on the stage fully taking five days. Other plays staged at Margi were *Banayudhom*, *Nalacharitham* 2nd day, *Sitaswayamvaram* and *Narakasuravadhom*.

Fourteen programmes were staged at Margi, besides 69 programmes outside in different places, mostly in temple festivals of South Kerala and for tourists. Thus the total Kathakali programmes during the year were 83.

Commissioned Programmes in Temples

This is a great service done by Margi to keep alive the centuries old tradition of associating Kathakali with temple festivals. On an average, about 70 to 80 performances are done every year during the festival months of February to May. The existing infrastructure of Margi with about 25 artistes and the whole range of headgears, costumes and musical instruments etc. greatly facilitates the staging of such programmes at reasonable cost.

Uzhichil and Cholliyattam

Uzhichil (massage) was done as usual in the rainy season (June - July). Cholliyattam (rehearsals) were done continuously during the months of June-January, until the temple performance season starts in February.

Shri. Inchakkattu Ramachandran Pillai

The chief Guru and Principal Shri. Inchakkattu Ramachandran Pillai retired from Margi on 31-05-2010 after completing 60 years of age. He joined Margi along with Guru Mankulam Vishnu Namboothiri, the Founder-Principal in June 1974, the year of starting the Margi school for Kathakali, and had completed over 35 years before retiring. A true, traditional and accomplished artiste as he is, his services were acknowledged gratefully at a function held in Margi. He has been retained as Visiting Professor to avail of his services for some more time. Shri R.L.V.Somadas, who also joined Margi in 1974 itself, and now working as Manager as well as costume/stage specialist, has been made the Guru/Manager and Shri. K. Ravindran Nair, the Assistant Manager.

Shri Margi Vijayakumar was made Chief in Acting (Sthree veshom) and Shri Kalamandalam Ratheesan Pillai the Acting Principal. At a function held in Margi Padmabhushan Kavalam Narayana Panickar and Shri Nedumudi Venu felicitated Shri Inchakkattu Ramachandran Pillai, Shri R.L.V. Somadas, Shri Kalamandalam Ratheesan and Shri Margi Vijayakumar.

Kutiyattam & Nangiarkoothu Under SNA scheme implemented through the Regional Kutiyattam Kendra, Thiruvananthapuram

A total of 33 Kutiyattam and Nangiarkoothu programmes were presented during the year, of which 21 were in Margi and 12 in other venues as outreach and tourism programmes (please see list of programmes).

- The Kutiyattam presentations in Margi as well as the outreach programmes with the financial support of the Kendra Sangeet Natak Akademi, continued during the year. This is the 20th year of the SNA - supported programme.

Dr. Balasankor Mannath, Director of the Kutiyattam Kendra, was succeeded by Shri K.K. Gopalakrishnan during the year. The active encouragement and support of Dr. Balashankar is gratefully remembered.

The programmes staged during the year covered 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 the current scheme. (Please see list of programmes)

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

[The scheme of SNA support to Kutiyattam, launched in 1991, which proved a resounding success in rejuvenating and popularising the art, was drastically revised from 01-01-2007, introducing far-reaching changes. For the first time ever, the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, which has regional offices in a very few centres only, finalised its scheme of starting a Centre in Thiruvananthapuram as a result of the initiative and zeal of Padmabhushan Kavalam Narayana Panicker, the then Vice-Chairman, SNA, with the unstinted support from its Secretary Shri Jayanth Kastuar. The financial support to the

artistes was substantially increased. Provision was also made to recruit and train new artistes on full-time basis with stipend support. This scheme heralds a new era in the development of Kutiyattam.

The new scheme could be implemented only during the latter half of 2007-08, though financial provision was made from 01-01-07. The monthly remuneration to all Kutiyattam artistes was substantially raised. A full-fledged training unit started functioning from December 2007 onwards after recruiting new entrants, and veteran Guru Shri Kalamandalam Rama Chakyar was made the head of the training unit. Smt Margi (Kalamandalam) Sathi was included in the guest panel to teach female roles in all the seven acts of *Ascharyachoodamani* and *Nangiarkoothu*. (Shri Rama Chakiar could not join Margi as planned)]

The Kutiyattam Kendra of the SNA has a programme of Kutiyattam performances, drawing artistes from all its constituent units. Each performance will be preceded by explanatory session on the previous day and a follow-up discussion will take place on the next day of the programme. Many art-lovers interested in Indian theatre evinced keen and active interest in all the programmes, which are directed and closely supervised by the Director of the Kendra Shri K.K. Gopalakrishnan.

Eight students for acting and four for percussion (Mizhavu, Idakka, Thimila) were undergoing intensive training during the year, (Seven male and five female students). Their progress was satisfactory.

The arangettam (stage debut) of Kumari Vishishta, Master Akhil and Master Vishnu, who had completed over two years training and showed good progress, was done during this year. (Arangettam on the first day and Anvarambham on the next day as per tradition). Vishishta presented Nithyakriya on the first day and Mudra Varnanam from Srikrishnacharitham for Anvarambham on the following day.

Akhil and Vishnu presented Sutradhara of *Balacharitham* on the first day and a short portion from *Dasavatharam* on the second day.

Smt. Leela Samson, Chairperson of SNA, was kind enough to attend the arangettam of the trainees and interact with the young students and the

teachers. This was a great encouragement for them in pursuing their higher studies with the aim of attaining the level of excellence gradually.

Kutiyattam Festival and Kutiyattam Kenra (SNA)

The Director Kutiyattam Kendra Shri K.K. Gopalakrishnan organised a five - day Kutiyattam festival at Velloppilli Samskrithi Bhavan on 23rd to 27th of February 2011. All the Kutiyattam Institutions and practitioners of the art took part. The festival format was revised this time with a view to having more of performance time than discussions, papers, interactions etc. This resulted in all the performance starting on time. A good audience also turned up and critically evaluated the performance by all Institutions and artistes. It was very encouraging to see several young artistes, both male and female, perform this difficult art which had only a handful of performers by the close of 2000. A few artistes who had their debut performance in the festival showed great promise for the future.

Margi presented *Mathavilasom* on the opening day before a large gathering of art lovers. The presentation was a condensed and edited version based on the Attaprakaram provided to Margi by Guru P.K. Narayanan Nambiar. *Mathavilasom* has also the distinction of having one of the oldest attaprakarams in Kutiyattam.

The Managing Committee is particularly happy with the rapid strides in Kutiyattam which are a sequel to the UNESCO proclamation of the art as a world heritage art in 2001, for which the lead role was played by Margi.

Financial Assistance

Margi continued to receive financial and other supports from the Government of Kerala and the Government of India (Kendra Sangeet Natak Akademi, Ministry of Culture and the India Government Cultural Affairs).

a. Grant from the Government of Kerala

Mention had been made in the earlier Annual Reports about the inadequacy of the grant. Within this grant, the 40 artistes of Margi could be paid only 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 and traditional values of these theatre arts, which are increasingly being appreciated by more and more art-lovers all over the world. *Margi is the only institution functioning exclusively for Kathakali and Kutiyattam in the capital city of our State.*

The grant was raised from Rs.21 lakhs to Rs. 25 lakhs for the year and this provided some much needed relief to the artistes. We are hoping that there would be further enhancement in the coming years, particularly since there is no annual increment or other wage increase based on cost of living index.

We take this opportunity to record our heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Kerala on behalf of the artistes of Margi for enhancing the grant successively in recent years.

Margi has been in existence for the last 40 odd years and it is high time that a rational salary structure is evolved for the artistes, with provision for annual increments, index-based revisions, retirement benefits etc. The budget provision for the Margi should be made in the Non-Plan budget as was done at the time of starting Margi.

Margi deserves to be upgraded to the status of Kerala Kalamandalam, and we have made representation to the Government accordingly.

b. Ministry of Culture, Government of India :- Salary grant

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, was kind enough to extend salary grant assistance to 20 artistes and one Guru and this assistance has been continuing in Margi for several years now.

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

We also hope that the assistance will be extended to 25 artistes and Guru as per revised maximum fixed by the Government of India.

c. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

Margi has been empanelled by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Government of India, as an institution for imparting training to foreign students.

Margi is also participating in the cultural programmes the horizon series arranged by the Thiruvananthapuram Region of the ICCR from time to time. We would like to place on record our sincere thanks to the ICCR and its Regional Director Shri M.R. Krishnamoorthy for the opportunities made available to our artistes.

New CPF Scheme for Artistes

- Along with the salary increase of 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % during 2008-09, a voluntary Contributory Provident Fund scheme was also introduced from 01-04-2008: with 12.5% employee's contribution and 12.5% employer's contribution met from Government Grant. This was with a view to providing the artiste some form of retirement benefit.

Payment of Salary through Bank

With effect from the year 2007-08 all the artistes of Margi (about 40) were required to open Savings Bank Accounts with a nationalised bank (Syndicate Bank, Fort Branch). The salaries are credited to the respective bank accounts every month by Margi ensuring the utmost transparency in the utilisation of Government Grant.

Tourism Promotion

Located in the capital city, Margi has been serving the cause of Tourism ever since its formation in 1970. All the Margi programmes are invariably seen by a good number of tourists, particularly during the peak tourism season. The programmes are supported by explanatory writes-up in English for the benefit of the visiting tourists from overseas.

As in previous years Margi participated in the festivals of the Department of Tourism like the Onam festival and Nishagandhi festival. Our infrastructure was made available for these festivals free of charges leading to overall reduction in the cost burden in the Tourism Budget.

We are happy to record our sincere thanks to the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala.

Foreign Assignment

The Margi group of artistes visited Spain during September 2010. This was under the Twin-City Project - (Barcelona and Thiruvananthapuram) by CASA Asia. The group was led by Shri S. Srinivasan I.A.S. (Rtd). The tour was a great success.

Condolence



Shri Margi Muralidharan Pillai, senior actor who joined Margi at its inception, passed away on 08-10-2010. He was a very talented artiste. His Thadi veshoms are unforgettable to Kathakali enthusiasts. His services were gratefully remembered by Dr. V.R. Prabodhachandran Nayar in a function held at Margi on 29th October 2010.

Shri Kottakkal Sivaraman, all the time great artiste for sthreeveshom passed away on 17th July 2010. A function was arranged in Margi to pay homage to this doyan among Kathakali artistes. Dr. P. Venugopalan, Vice-President spoke on the occasion.

Remembrance Function

D. Appukkuttan Nair:



Shri D. Appukkuttan Nair, founder of Margi and a great theatre personality, was remembered at a meeting held on 17th July 2010 at Margi. Shri K. Jayakumar I.A.S., Chief Secretary, spoke with great feeling on the occasion extolling the virtues of a great personality.

Guru Padmashri Moozhikkulam Kochukuttan Chakiar:



Guru Padmashri Moozhikkulam Kochukuttan Chakiar was the founder Guru of Margi Kutiyattam Centre established in 1981 at the Valiyasala Mahadevar Temple Nambi Matam building. He served Margi for several years as resident Guru. An extensive repertory in Kutiyattam was taught by him to the Margi students including Nangiarkuthu to

the female students. A function was held on 25th July 2010, his death anniversary day to remember the great Guru. Dr. P. Venugopalan, Vice-President of Margi and Shri S. Vijayakumar, Secretary, Sreevaraham Nair Karayogam, spoke on the occasion.

Gurudinam

Padmasree Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair



Padmasree Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, who worked as Visiting Professor of Margi from 1980 till his demise in 1990, was remembered at a meeting held on 15th August 2010. The thespian Kathakali artiste Shri Nellyode Vasudevan Namboothiri delivered the remembrance speech.

Shri Mankulam Vishnu Namboothiri



Shri Mankulam Vishnu Namboothiri was the founder and the first Chief Guru of the Margi Kathakali Vidyalayam, started in 1974. He was fondly remembered on the Gurudinam.

Guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar :



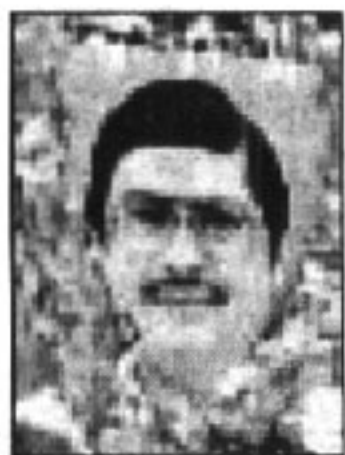
Guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar, all-time great maestro of Kutiyattam, was the founder/Guru of the Margi Kutiyattam Vidyalayam started in the Valiyasala Temple Nambi Matom in 1981. He worked as Visiting Professor till 1988 inspiring and shaping the career of Margi Kutiyattam students. He also made available rare Attaprakarams to Margi which now form part of the performance reprrtory, which is unique in several respects. He was remembered at a special function on 24th July 2010. Dr. V.R. Prabodhachandran Nayar spoke on the occasion.

Shri Paimkulam Rama Chakyar



Shri Paimkulam Rama Chakyar was the Guru to perform a Kutiyattam series for the first time at Thiruvananthapuum under the auspices of Margi. He was fondly remembered on the Gurudinam.

Shri Kalamandalam Haridas



Shri Kalamandalam Haridas was Head of the Music (pattu) wing of Margi from 1975 till his demise in 2006. He was fondly remembered on the Gurudinam.

Retirement

Shri Inchakkattu Ramachandran Pillai retired after a long and meritorious service of over 36 years. He joined Margi on the date of its inception (1974) and was teaching all the students in Kathakali with utmost care of attention. His services were priased at a function held in Margi on 18th July 2010. When Dr. V.R. Prabódhachandran Nayar and Shri P. Rama Iyer spoke.

Hosting Of Website

We have hosted our website – www.margitheatre.org. It features the sections of History, Philosophy, Art centers, Information about Kathakali & Kutiyattam, UNESCO proclamation of Kutiyattam, video documentation, publications, foreign assignments etc. With the aid of this Infotech we expect much greater response to and appreciation of, our traditional arts. Our site was improved recently in terms of layout, addtional information etc.

Award for Margi Publication – “Ascharyachoodamani”

Mahakavi Vallathol Award – instituted by the Kerala Kalamandalam was given to Margi Publication ‘Ascharyachoodamani’, assistance with the UNESCO-Japan-Funds-in-Trust – Edited by Dr. P Venugopalan, Vice President Margi.