

KALAKSHETRA FOUNDATION, CHENNAI

Monthly Report April 2016

A) Rukmini Devi College of Fine Arts

The semester examination for both Diploma and Post Diploma ended on 12th April, 2016 and the college closed for summer vacation on 16th April, 2016 and will be reopened on 16th June 2016. Both full and part time diploma courses applications are being issued.

B) Crafts Education and Research Centre

Showroom sales

Total sales during the month of April 2016:

Kalamkari	Rs.5, 32,576
Weaving	Rs. 2, 43,766
TOTAL	Rs. 7, 76, 342
Visitors fees	Rs.6,400.00

Executive members of the CERC met with the CAO on 25th April 2016 to plan for a weaving workshop in June/July 2016.

C) Museum

The month of April continued with the segregation of books of Smt. Shanta Rao Collection, which is work in progress. Further 48 accessions (50 objects) of Smt. Shanta Rao Collection was measured and described. The rearrangement of museum artifacts was completed this month. Kalamkari paintings from the art department were collected and stored in the museum.

D) Rukmini Arangam Theatre

The Theatre was used for BASS school rehearsals on April 12, 13 and 15 followed by the school annual day on April 16

The Theatre was also hired by Rukmini Natyakshetra for rehearsals on 19 followed by their annual day on April 24

E) Besant Arundale Senior Secondary School

The school reopened on 1st April for the academic year 2016-2017.

Teachers handling classes 10 and 12 took up spot evaluation in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, History, Tamil, Hindi and Business studies at centers allotted by the CBSE. The Principal took up spot evaluation as the head for communicative English for class 10.

Workshops:

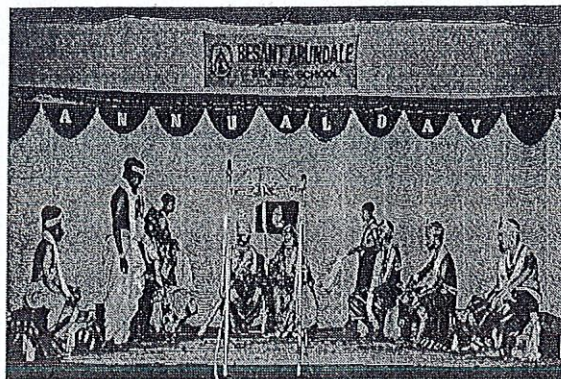
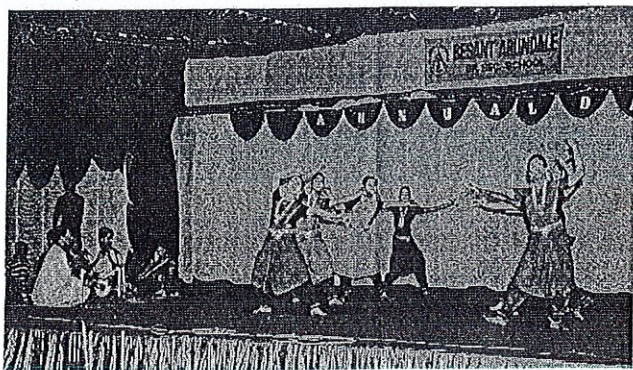
The students of the school participated in a workshop conducted by the Institute of Mathematical Sciences on April 10th.

On April 18th and 19th a workshop was organized by the Chennai Sahodaya school for physics teachers and representatives of the school participated in the workshop.

Annual Day

The annual day of BASS was celebrated with much grandeur on 16 April at Rukmini Arangam. Dr. Thirumagan, Controller of examinations, Madras University consented to be the chief guest. Dr. Thirumagan inspired the children to do their duty and to think creatively. He distributed prizes to the academic achievers in all subjects. A cultural programme including Kollattam dance performed to Bharatiyar songs, other patriotic songs like "Mile Sure Mera Tumhara" were performed with the highlight of the evening being a dance drama of Ramayanam choreographed by Sri. Surya Narayana Murthy.

The admission process for class 11 was conducted on the 21st, followed by the interviews for the non-teaching staff on the 22nd. Smt. Renukadevi, a teacher retiring with 39 years of service was honoured at an informal function on the 22nd.



F) Besant Theosophical Higher Secondary School

The higher secondary school public examination got over by April 1 and the tenth standard public examination ended on April the 11. The common annual examination for class 11 came to an end on the 2nd of April. The extra tutoring for class 12 commenced on 4April and continued till the April 29. For standards 1 to 9, the annual examination were conducted from April 5 till April 21.

The class 11 results were taken to CSI MohananHigher Secondary School for verification by the panel and finally approved and signed by the CEO. The results for classes 6 to 9 was taken for verification to Gopalapuram Boys Higher Secondary School. The results were verified and approved.

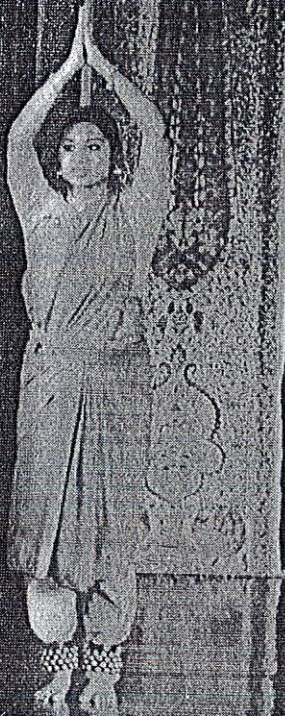
Application forms for all standards were issued on April 21. The admission process was largely handled by the management staff.

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Bharatanatyam banis - the way forward

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan

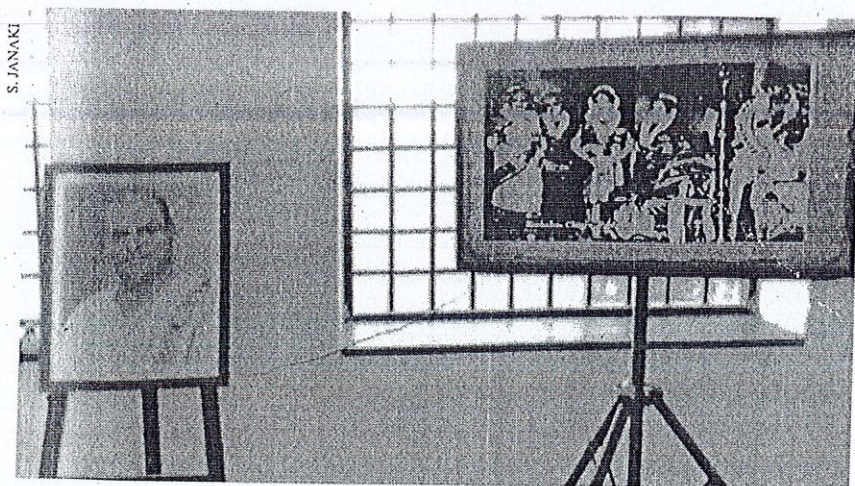
Are there banis in Bharatanatyam?
 “Yes, there are.”
 “No, there are none.”

With such polarised reactions, bani has become a contentious term in Bharatanatyam over the last few decades. In the nineteen forties, fifties and even in the sixties it was common to speak of the Pandanallur Bani, the Vazhuvoor Bani, the Thanjavur Bani and the Mysore Bani. These took their prefixes from the names of the villages and towns from where the prominent natyacharyas hailed. And these gave a suggestion to the connoisseurs to look for the distinct graces of each bani.

Sometime from the late seventies it became a questionable matter to speak of banis. As all the banis had common adavu and abhinaya codification, it was argued that there is no such thing as bani and the difference was only between good and bad dance, determined by their grammar and technique. Perhaps the tendency to place one bani above the other might have prompted such a vehement denial of bani. Matters reached a stage that whenever there was an attempt to point out a feature in one bani, it was pronounced an aberration.

In music, bani is an accepted fact while it is common knowledge that all the musicians adhere to the same tenets of melody, rhythm and lyrics. An Ariyakudi bani is distinct from Semmangudi, Madurai Mani, Alathur or GNB bani. The hallmarks of each bani are recognised, relished and appreciated by the cognoscenti as well as the lay audience. In literature too there are different styles, called “nadai” in Tamil. These may refer to a period or a particular author. It is only in Bharatanatyam that the mention of bani has acquired a negative connotation in certain quarters.

A frame from the Vazhuvoor bani display at the exhibition curated by The Sruti Foundation at Kalakshetra



The natyacharyas who migrated to the cities from their native villages were aware of the special features of their own banis and those of the others and each one held his as sacrosanct. They maintained cordial relationships with each other as very often they happened to be connected by relationships through marriages. And they respected the art of each other and would refrain from any kind of criticism.

When asked to speak about the differences in the Pandanallur and Vazhuvoor banis, Natyacharya Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai went on record saying that the Pandanallur abhinaya was descriptive while the Vazhuvoor school preferred the demonstrative, and explained with reference to the padam *Kalai tookki*.“ Decades later when I interviewed him he said that every style was beautiful if it was properly executed and stated that in his own bani *“Adavukkey bhavam undu.”* (The pure dance movements themselves have expression). He demonstrated it with the opening movements of the alarippu where the tilt of the head and the darting glance communicated the joy in execution.

How does one define bani in general?

The aesthetics developed by each parampara through several generations would be the hallmark of each bani. It is not static but flows with the sensibilities of the guru, who cherishes his tradition and enriches it with his own contribution. It has its stamp in all the four branches of abhinaya – angika, vachika, aharya and satvika.

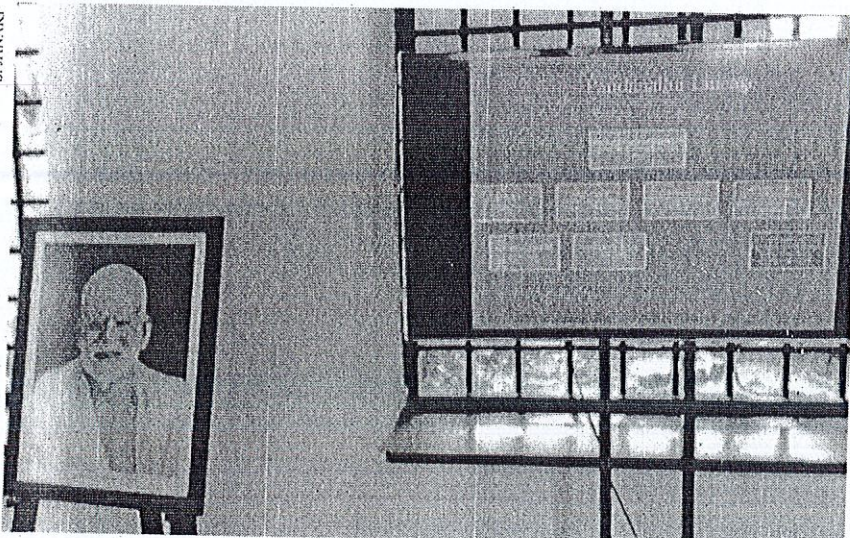
In *angika*, the manner in which each *adavu* is executed bears a distinct stamp that is at once apparent. Speaking of *vachika*, the kind of music and the repertoire are found to be specific to each school while some popular numbers are included in all the schools. *Aharya* is another pointer in the visual aesthetics of the *bani*, and *satvika* shows the differences in the approach as well as execution of expressive dance. The variety that the *bani*s offered made each dancer unique and the same item handled differently by each of them had a freshness and spontaneity.

The *natyacharyas* guarded the intricacies of their *bani*s as the intellectual property of their family and never revealed them to any outsider, including their own disciples. They imparted the art and hid the craft. Some of them were of the view that the art once mastered and ingrained in their disciples would enable them to proceed on the right path instinctively when they were on their own.

The last couple of decades have been witness to the merger and vanishing of the *bani*s, which is a matter of concern. *Kalakshetra* had codified its *bani* from what had been imparted by *Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai* and *Kattumannarkoil Muthukumara Pillai*. The individual disciples who had learnt from their gurus adhered to their *bani*s for a few decades. But the passing away of senior *natyacharyas* created a void. Some of them had no descendants and some had descendants many of whom did not choose to continue the profession.

Some senior dancers moved away from the *bani*s and created their own version of what they had learnt. Promising young dancers started to leave their initial gurus for various reasons and moved to others from different *bani*s. A few young dancers struck out on their own and tried to build their own repertoire choreographed by them. Lacking an awareness of the basic principles of choreography and aesthetics, they tried to include whatever caught their fancy, resulting in a patchwork that did not jell. Without the watchful eye of a senior guru to point out aspects that were unaesthetic or not consistent with their own *bani*, they lost their identity. Since a number of dancers are now including common fancy aspects, there is a cookie cutter sameness in every dance and the body language.

A frame from the *Pandanallur* lineage



Natyacharyas who were not performers themselves imparted the movement while seated and if needed would demonstrate them. And they would hone the student to perfection until the movement suited the body structure of each pupil. *V.S. Muthuswamy Pillai's* prime disciple *Dominique Delorme* said that whenever he learnt an *adavu*, the guru would correct it limb by limb. After the pupil was convinced that he was doing it to perfection, the master was still not quite satisfied. "Style wanted" would be the terse comment from the guru, who would then demonstrate either a turn of the head, the angle of the chin or the holding of a *mudra* that would breathe life into the movement. Such training preserved the individuality of each pupil, while the basic execution ensured the high standards of the *bani*.

Mannerisms are sometimes mistaken for the special graces of a *bani* and this leads to fostering of clones of their guru: *Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer* was often heard to tell his pupils not to copy him but to learn only what he taught. "Due to my age and voice problems I may produce certain tones. Don't try to copy them. You should learn to retain the *saaram* (the essence), and not the *chakkai* (the wrung out pulp)."

A pupil, who had gone away after her wedding, returned after six months and showed her guru *Rhadha* that she had been practising every day. *Rhadha* watched her for an hour and remarked, "Good. I see that you have been in practice. But you have also acquired quite a few mannerisms which need to be weeded out." Since dancers cannot watch themselves while dancing, unlike musicians who can hear their own music, they would not be aware of their mannerisms or



L to R: K.R. Radhakrishnan, T.K. Mahalingam Pillai, V.S. Muthuswamy Pillai, Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai, Vasanthi, Kamala, Rhadha and K.J. Sarasa at the National seminar on Bharatanatyam traditions organised by The Sruti Foundation in 1989

mistakes. It needs the eye of the teacher to spot these flaws and help the student to get rid of them.

In 1989, the Sruti Foundation conducted a national seminar on bani or traditions in Bharatanatyam, in which senior natyacharyas of five paramparas participated (see *Sruti* 65). The Thanjavur bani was presented by K.P. Kittappa Pillai, the Vazhuvoor bani by Rhadha and Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, and the Tiruvudaimarudur lineage by Gurus T.K. Mahalingam Pillai and T.K. Kalyanasundaram Pillai. Vaitheeswarankoil Muthuswamy Pillai presented the art of his guru Kattumannarkoil Muthukumara Pillai and his own innovations, while Guru Dakshinamurthy Pillai represented the bani of K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai. In day-long sessions the banis were analysed in detail with demonstrations by the respective disciples. The proceedings

of the five days were recorded with the purpose of making them available for dance schools and institutions where Bharatanatyam is taught. One DVD on the Vazhuvoor tradition was released more than a decade later. If the other four are also released with subtitles in English, they would go a long way towards helping the dancers and teachers of today to go back to the roots. (Unedited versions of the seminar sessions can be obtained by placing an order with the Sruti Foundation – Editor).

The recent seminar by Kalakshetra brought the bani into focus again. With sustained efforts to reiterate the image of the banis, Bharatanatyam can regain the lost glow and grace of the traditions that enriched the art more than half a century ago.

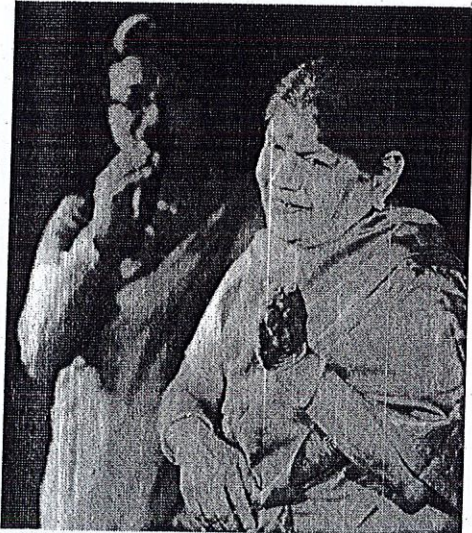
(The author is a writer, musician and dance scholar)

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Various views on bani

Pushkala Gopal

The 'Baani 2016' conference and festival, hosted by the Kalakshetra Foundation in March, presented a galaxy of persona in Bharatanatyam, with veteran viewpoints and experiences shared through 'insight' lectures and demonstrations and performances over six days (11-16 March) in Chennai. The word



Indira Rajan

Nandini Ramani

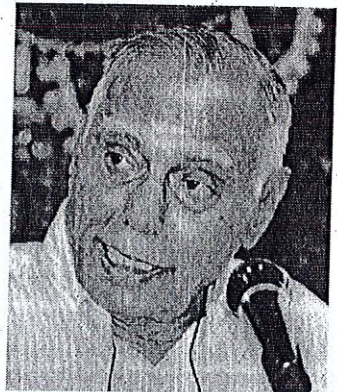


'bani', as explained by scholar Dr. R. Nagaswamy, refers more to music, with an equivalent word 'pravritti' to be found in the *Natya Sastra*. In the Indian classical music world, the concept of bani or gharana is indicative of a style or a school which has a prescribed form and, when performed, is easily recognisable by the aficionado. The north Indian gharanas pertain to places or courts whilst the Carnatic banis are mostly artist-led. This term must have come into being in the natyam or dance tradition, when it was led primarily by the oral tradition, that is, the nattuvanars who were also the makers of the repertoire and the nartakis or dancers.

Does Bharatanatyam and its scene today have the same scope to be preserved, or defined by the bani?

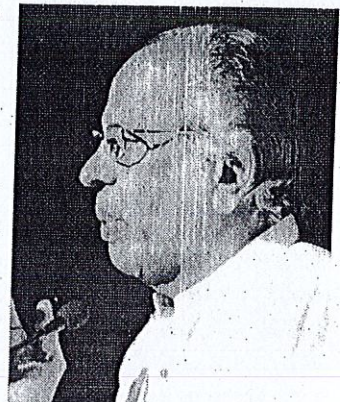
Prof. A. Janardhanan corroborated in his talk, that bani was synonymous with shaili, vazhi, paddhati, and sampradayam. The demonstrations that one saw across the board, had their own tale to tell. Whenever practitioners demonstrated vintage repertoire, one could see the presence of a visual dialect. With pieces going back just a couple of decades, or with spontaneous abhinaya expositions, the lines of exclusivity of style were blurred. For instance, we saw *Aduvum solluval* performed by Indira Rajan, Urmila Satyanarayanan, and Lakshmi Viswanathan. What was exemplified was the individual skill – you could not identify bani particularly – which then sets up another line of inquiry: Is bani defined by the nritta form with the item content, and is abhinaya ex-bani?

Nandini Ramani's demonstration in the Kandappa Pillai-T. Balasaraswati bani, emphasised that the artists do not change, add or vary pieces learnt, in any way. This must apply to pieces involving nritta. You cannot imagine that Bamma would have had a single version of a padam. Again in the nritta content of the Pandanallur style demonstrated by Meenakshi Chitharanjan, or in the presentation of the Vazhuvoor tradition by Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, the stylistic content of nritta in the different banis was highly discernible. Some demonstrations highlighted the approach of the nattuvanar, notably



R. Nagaswamy

A. Janardhanan

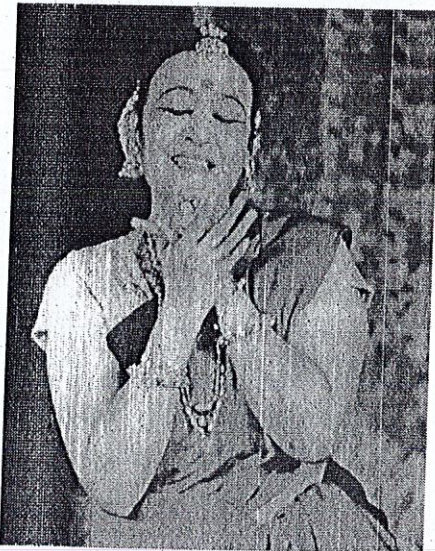


Sujatha Vijayaraghavan



Thanjavur K.P. Kittappa represented by Sudharani Raghupathy and Narthaki Nataraj. Lakshmi Viswanathan gave us insights into Kanjivaram Ellappa and his compositions, and through the film on M.K. Saroja's dance we got a heady whiff of the Kattumannarkoil Muthukumara Pillai legacy. The words precision, charm, grace, fluidity, dignity, beauty... and so on were descriptors of many of the banis.

It seems that the banis with a robust and live presence are those where the dance technique is inherited or passed on, with its oral traditions and repertoire intact and practised over a couple of generations, whether they are direct family or the disciple family. To substantiate this was the Tiruvudaimarudur family led by Guru Kalyanasundaram Pillai. In future decades it is quite possible that they



Sudharani Raghupathy

Narthaki Nataraj



would be recognised as the Mumbai bani, as it is, the Rajarajeswari bani! Guru Kalyanasundaram was quite emphatic that banis should be named after groups or places and not after individuals. But this becomes difficult when you take Padma Subrahmanyam who within a few decades has created her own holistic material – natyam and sangeetam – and sustained it over a couple of generations with its own technique and repertoire; it consolidates a Padma bani quite naturally. In her demonstration, Padma mentioned several teachers she had learnt from, apart from her research based movement. When you look at the outcome, it feels like those were the ingredients and that she created originally, the recipes and the identity of what is finally served.

Whenever presenters talked about past masters, like Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai, Rukmini Devi, Kanjivaram Ellappa, you could see that the aesthetics and the nuances perceived by the masters, including the most recent 'queen of abhinaya' Kalanidhi Narayanan, which was applied in their teaching, contributed to the setting or enhancement of their banis. Guru Herambanathan talked about bani being like a banyan tree putting out its own *kalais* or branches – some of which would become new trees in their time. Kalakshetra clearly took off from the presence of Panadanainallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai, Kattumannarkoil Muthukumara Pillai and Karaikal Dandayudhapani Pillai. In fact the famous *Roopamu joochi* jatis, which any student in every branch of this style learns, are attributed to Dandayudhapani Pillai.

Taking Kalakshetra, again, best known for its standardisation of technique, even within the nritta dimension you can see variations

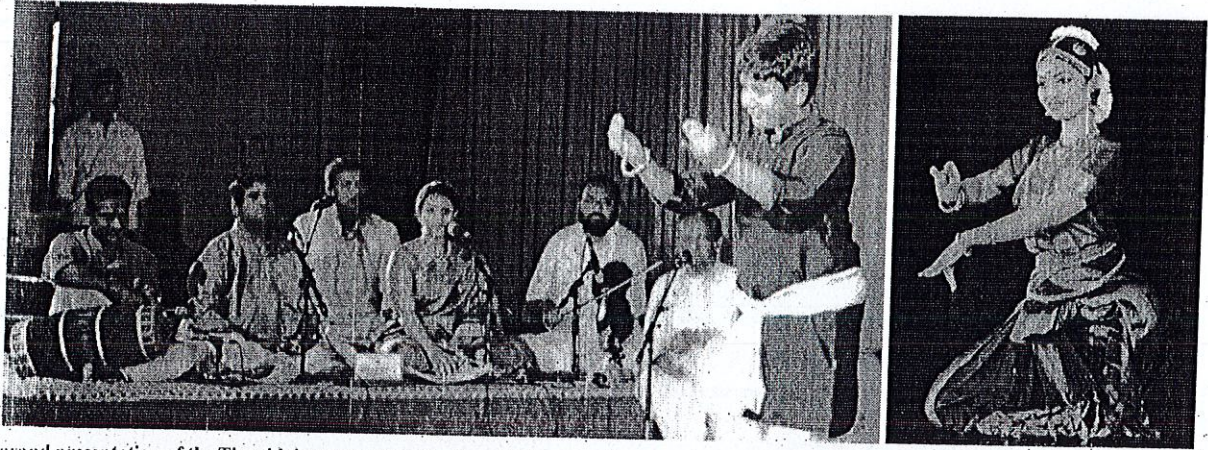


Meenakshi Chitharanjan

Lakshmi Viswanathan



in the delivery of the teetmana adavu *Kitatakatarikitathom* or the basic natyarambha position of the arms. In the demonstration of abhinaya at the conference the group – made up of N.S. Jayalakshmi, Shanta Dhananjayan, Savithri Jagannatha Rao, Kala Ramesh Rao and Ambika Buch – brought out that the aesthetics provided scope for individual expression and creativity, whilst it was more natyadharmi in comparison with other abhinaya presented in the conference. The aesthetics were determined by Rukmini Devi at a time when there was a push to highlight the subtle nuances of Sadir-Bharatanatyam and make it discernible as a dignified classical form which moved away



A grand presentation of the Tiruvidaimarudur bani by Guru Kalyanasundaram and members of his team representing generations of the lineage

from the more direct lokadharmi abhinaya of the period. The dance-drama demonstration, in fact illustrated how Rukmini Devi took movement from other styles. This would have been a very significant move away from bani and Bharatanatyam, although the techniques of Bharatanatyam would continue to be applied in her choreography. In her work you clearly see her own style, regardless of where the original material was sourced.

There are several influences which prevent the descent and spread of the bani in its original form. Firstly, holistic knowledge is rarely shared, or to be fair, different disciples receive different slices of their guru's time or experience based on factors of geography, evolution and the capability of the said disciple. Lifestyles of the proponents only occasionally throw up the ideal disciple who has melody, rhythm, movement and literary capabilities, with a commitment to be with their chosen form, without another 'profession'. If that is the case for individual teaching and learning, in an institutional environment, there are too many inputs from a variety of sources, at different levels. I would argue that institutions are able to favour styles and establish an identity – but does that make them create a bani?

The younger dancers, who spoke in the panel discussions for most part, except for those nurtured in a traditional lineage, seemed to have a less distinct view about bani: aesthetics governed their choices. Covert influences via the web from different sources adds to the repertoire or work of the younger generation, leading to a further diffusing of the bani identity.

The two demonstrations of abhinaya – by Jamuna Krishnan and Bragha Bessell – representing Kalanidhi Narayanan's approach, again asks the question of how this can be a bani, where individualism and a personal approach to literature is developed. It can, if bani relates only to teaching methodology and if the outcome of having a recognisable common identity is not a prerequisite for bani.

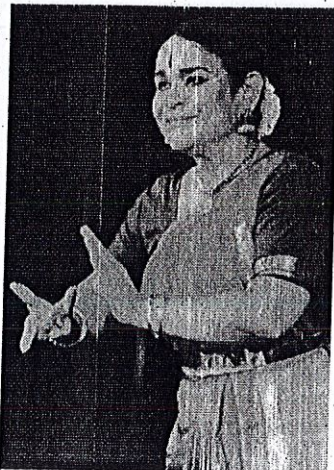
Looking at the Carnatic world, GNB was said to have set a new bani, with his briga oriented and straight-note gamaka approach to ragas. M.L. Vasanthakumari, S. Kalyanuraman, and V. Ramachandran were followers of this bani. Ariyakudi's bani referred to the kutcheri style, apart from techniques of alapana. The Tiger style was distinct in the early 20th century but did not endure

L to R: Ambika Buch, Kala Ramesh Rao, N.S. Jayalakshmi, Savithri Jagannatha Rao and Shanta Dhananjayan





Januina Krishnan



Brahma Bessell



C.V. Chandrasekhar

well beyond his lifetime. His disciple M.D. Ramanathan had a unique style but seldom do you hear about his bani, because bani needs an unbroken lineage and people who carry forward the stylistic exclusivity. History may acknowledge that he was a one-man bani! Many of today's successful practitioners will admit to having more than one influence in their musical training or approach, whilst a few would have pursued their own creativity. The Lalgudi bani is a live, distinct force. There is still the identity of the Dhanammal bani although direct disciples are on the wane. Just like it is common among dancers to learn abhinaya from one teacher and nritta and nritya from another guru, many musicians have just learnt a padam/ javali repertoire from the Dhanammal or Brinda Mukta bani. Practitioners with this approach cannot claim to be within a bani although nothing precludes them from creating their own bani from there onwards.

Veteran Bharatanatyam dancers Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar and V.P. Dhananjayan made points about expanding from a bani. Chandrasekhar said he was open to adapting movements from other styles whenever they appealed to him aesthetically. His stint in the northern states' of

the country gave him ample scope to create new pieces. Dhananjayan said that he was presented with the challenge of creating solo margam pieces for the male dancer as he was among the

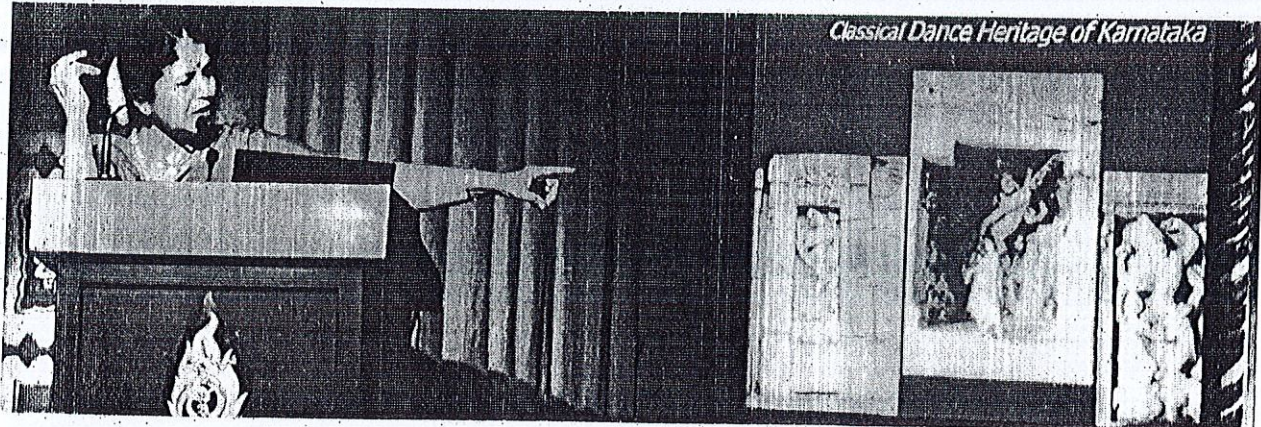
V.P. Dhananjayan

earliest to come out of Kalakshetra to perform at sabhas on a regular basis. Both acknowledged that the methodology developed in Kalakshetra governed their aesthetics.

The demonstration on the Mysore style by Dr. Choodamani Nandagopal, identified that there are four distinct schools where the training methodology and the content of presentation are also distinct, that is, Kolar, Nanjangud, Mysore and Mugur. Royal patronage continued to nurture Bharatanatyam over time in these parts with scholars composing pieces long before those trends in the styles



Choodamani Nandagopal



which came out of Thanjavur. Having said that, Karnataka boasts of many practitioners who are from non Mysore banis, too.

M.K. Saroja said bani is like family. Going back to the term gharana, there is the implication that there was a 'home' base for the techniques and their links within a bani whether it was made up of familial lineage or the shalya parampara. In fact, Guru Kalyanasundaram spoke of relationships between the various banis historically, when gurus moved or marriages took place between scions. Basically, at one time all were connected to Thanjavur.

We missed discussion on the Melattur style and the Dandayudhapani style. It is possible some branches are moving towards becoming relics. Vazhuvoor Senthilkumar, in fact shared some heirloom jatis from his grandfather Ramiah Pillai's treasure as did Swamimalai Suresh, from the S.K. Rajarathnam repertoire.

An attempt to demystify banis

How did the idea of the bani festival emerge?

The seed of the idea was planted by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam. We felt that Kalakshetra, as the premier institution for the arts, should host a seminar highlighting an important part of our cultural history. The aim was to look at different streams of teaching as something that defines bani as more than just style.

Isn't institutional teaching very different from traditional ways of teaching?

Yes, that is why it is important for us to bridge the gap between old and new methods of teaching. It is important to remember where we come from and the values, ethics and philosophy behind these schools of thought. Students of this generation and young teachers have not had the opportunity of interacting with these great gurus. This festival is one way of introducing our history to our students. It makes us reflect on where we have come from.

In what way is Kalakshetra positioned well to host a festival of this nature?

Kalakshetra is not just an institution, but stands as evidence of the past. It came into being at an important time in our political and cultural history – when culture was being redefined and people were taking pride in everything Indian. Rukmini Devi learnt from a traditional nattuvanar but took dance to another stage of evolution by institutionalising it. She redefined the way Bharatanatyam was seen by adding her touch of aesthetics and idea of form – to such an extent that Kalakshetra itself has become a bani. Today, we in Kalakshetra proudly acknowledge our roots and hope to be a platform for similar seminars.

What were the important 'takeaways' from this festival?

I think there is now a better understanding of what 'bani' means. It is a word which we all loosely use without understanding its depth. The one thing that most speakers mentioned was that there is no one word translation for 'bani' as it is loaded with layers of memory. Everyone agreed that bani is a dynamic and flowing tradition that carries within its main river, many other tributaries. It was beautiful to see the identity of each bani emerging.

Were you able to find representation from all the recognised banis?

We were lucky to have presented most of the banis known today. Of course, we could not present a few because of lack of availability or other logistics,

It was of great value to see seasoned artists share their preserves and one would hope that a documentation project would be the next stage to record these banis for posterity.

Priyadarsini Govind, Director of Kalakshetra, is to be congratulated on having brought together many gurus and practitioners who shared their work on a common platform enlightening many.

(The author is the artistic director of Sanskriti UK, a Bharatanatyam dancer, teacher, writer and composer)



but we did have a fair share of representation.

Any plans for similar seminars or festivals in the future?

We were happy with the response to the festival and I feel it is important for Kalakshetra to document history for posterity. We are only carrying on the vision of Rukmini Devi – which was to instil in the young a pride in our cultural heritage and awareness of the beauty of our art forms. It is one of the small contributions we can make to this river of art that flows on.

Priyadarsini Govind
in conversation with
Anjana Anand

The Bani confest

S. Janaki

Bani 2016, organised by the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai, was a commendable initiative to create a space for deliberations on the fascinating concept of bani in Bharatanatyam. The six-day confest, held 11-16 March, in the aesthetic precincts of the Rukmini Arangam, brought under one roof some of the best and foremost practitioners of various banis, scholars, writers, and students of dance. It began on an auspicious note with the lighting of the kuthuvilakku, presided by dignitaries and an impromptu session of abhinaya and patis by Indira Rajan to the vocal accompaniment of Jayakumala Pandian. Although the inaugural session was interesting, it overshot the mark and delayed the proceedings of the day by more than an hour.

Each day had three major sessions in the forenoon. The invocatory dance presentations every morning were a delight as one or more young dancers presented an item or two highlighting the salient features of the bani to which they belonged. This was followed by an 'Insight lecture' presented by legends in the field like Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar, Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam,

Padma Subrahmanyam in *Bhagavad Gita*



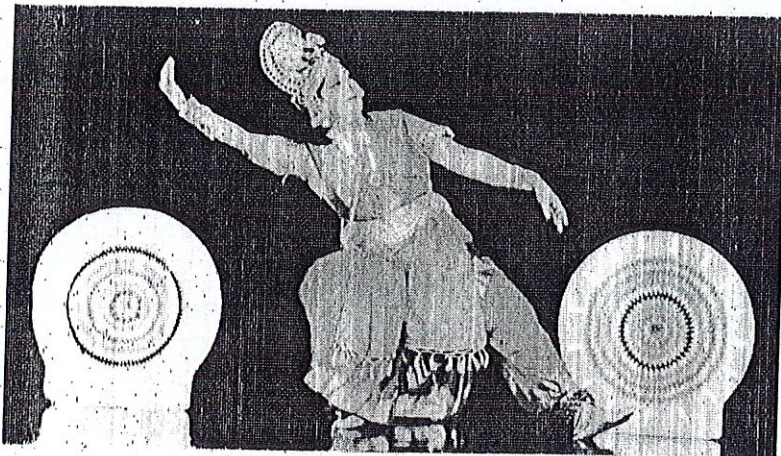
Herambanathan, Jayakumala Pandian, Indira Rajan, Kalyanasundaram Pillai, his wife Mythili and Priyadarisini Govind inaugurating the festival

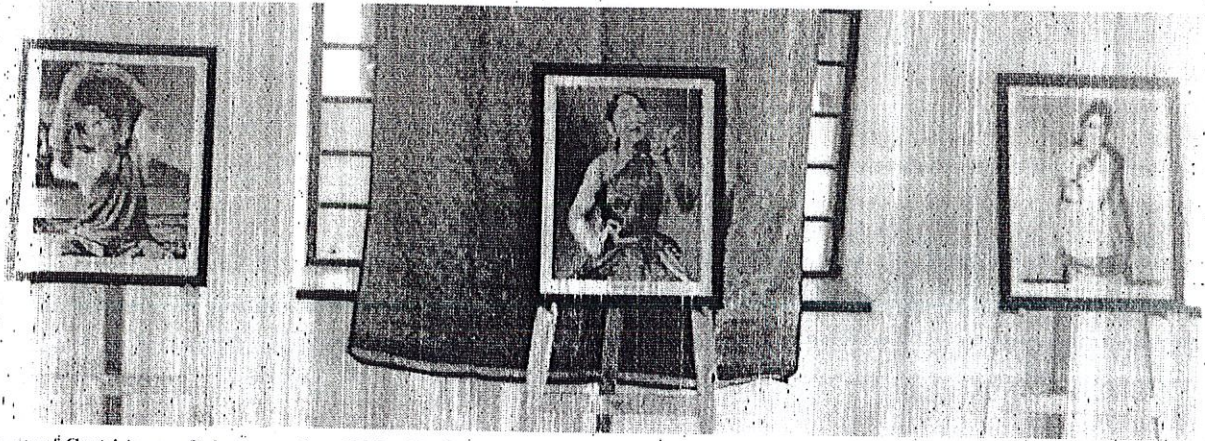
Lakshmi Viswanathan, and V.P. Dhananjayan. Their sessions provided valuable insights into their individual perceptions of bani, as well as the pedagogy, repertoire, and aesthetics of the art they practise and pursue. One morning had scholar Dr. Nagaswamy trace the term 'bani', while another had the younger stars Rama Vaidyanathan and Shobana present their take on Individualism vs. Bani!

The second session on each day was tightly packed with two lecture sessions on traditional banis. The banis covered in detail in this segment across six days were the Vazhuvoor (main presenter Sujatha Vijayaraghavan with Urmila Satyanarayanan, Swamimalai Suresh, and Senthil Kumar), Kandappa T. Balasaraswati (Nandini Ramani), Pandanallur (Meenakshi Chitharanjan), Mysore (Choodamani Nandagopal), Kalakshetra (a prolonged session presented by A. Janardhanan, C.K. Balagopal, and an all-women group comprising N.S. Jayalakshmi, Shanta Dhananjaya, Kala Ramesh Rao, Ambika Buch and Savithri Jagannatha Rao), Tanjavur (a session each by Sudharani Raghupathy and Narthaki Nataraj) and the Tiruvudaimarudur bani (T.K. Kalyanasundaram Pillai). Kattumannarkoil Muthukumara Pillai's bani was introduced in a brief talk by Ashish Mohan Khokar along with a short film on his mother M.K. Saroja

— prime disciple of Muthukumara Pillai. V.A.K. Ranga Rao presented an illustrated talk with film clippings on 'Dance in Films'.

Two sessions were devoted to the abhinaya of guru Kalanidhi Narayanan, presented by her disciples — veteran Jamuna Krishnan and Bragha Bessell. In more cases than one, better planning on the part of the organisers could have given shape to one composite, well coordinated presentation by disciples of the same guru. On the other hand, more time could have been allotted to the presentation of the four streams of the Mysore bani which was compressed





Portraits of Gowri Amma, Balasaraswati and Kalanidhi at the *Sruti* exhibition

into one session. Similarly, a session each could have been devoted to Gowri Amma, K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai and the Melattur bani. With stalwarts who are past seventy – like Vyjayantimala Bali, Padma Subrahmanyam, Sudharani Raghupathy, and some Kalakshetra veterans who learnt abhinaya from Gowri Amma, it was a rare opportunity lost at the bani seminar.

After the presentations by senior practitioners (most of whom exceeded the allotted time) it was a welcome move to involve the younger dancers, teachers, musicians and writers in panel discussions on various aspects of the bani. However, as a result of overall poor time management, the panel discussions had to be curtailed as they began well past lunch-time. As a result, they were mostly viewed on a streaming rather than by a live audience. The evening programme presented by a doyen was a fitting finale to the day's proceedings. Senior exponents who wowed the audience were Rhadha (Vazhuvoor), Padma Subrahmanyam, Ajarmel Valli (Pandanallur), the Kalakshetra veterans, and Vyjayantimala Bali.

The photo exhibition on Bani curated by the *Sruti* Foundation, was a big draw. It was aesthetically showcased in one of the cottages on all the six days. Combining tradition and technology, it had blown up portraits of natyacharyas on display along with LCD monitors with moving slides devoted to different bani-lineages.

Dance writers and critics Leela Venkataraman and S. Janaki presented their concluding remarks on the confest during the valedictory session on the last day.

The confest helped to bring into focus several aspects of the bani. As Guru Kalyanasundaram succinctly put it in his inaugural speech, "Banis were born out of the creative minds of nattuvanars who lived in different villages which gave the bani its name." The corpus of adavus, jatis, a pedagogy, its repertoire, its music, and aesthetics together make a bani which is an organic and dynamic entity enriched by its custodians and practitioners. The festival on banis in Bharatanatyam was a timely event to throw light on its roots, to deliberate, retrospect and document the evolving contours of the art form at a time when it is going global.

Dance students having a discussion at the exhibition on banis curated by The *Sruti* Foundation

