

Audience impact: 8200

1000 – Art festival
 1200 - Dhruvad Festival
 400 – Vastra Smaranam
 400 - Celebrating Thailand
 1500 - CERC exhibition
 3000 – Performance exam
 300 - ICCR- Khazakasthan
 400 - Vahanas

ACTIVITIES FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2017**KALAKSHETRA FOUNDATION, CHENNAI****A) Rukmini Devi College of fine arts****1. Lectures and Workshops****2.**

Lectures/topic	Held on	Conducted by
“KANNU SADAKAM” (Kathakali Eye exercise)	from 03.03.2017 to 10.03.2017	Sri Sadanam Balakrishnan
Raku Firing workshop	from 27 th to 29 th March, 2017	Sri Arun Mukhuty ceramic artist from Delhi

3. Mentorship Scheme.

The 13 music mentors who together delivered a total of 32 hours of mentorship are:

Music Mentors		
B.Kannan	Sangeeta Shivakumar	Rama Ravi
Bushany Kalyanaraman	Suganda Kalamegam	R.S.Jayalakshmi
Charumathy Ramachandran	Sundaresan	S.Rajeswari
Embar Kannan	Sunder Rajan	Vasuda Keshav
	Tiruchur Narendran	

4. Vanamahotsavam: Nurturing life 4 March 7am – 10am

Encouraging social responsibility, Kalakshetra Foundation invited their students, staff, alumni and the morning walkers to celebrate a morning of tree planting

B) Crafts Education and Research Centre**Showroom Sales**

Kalamkari	Rs. 1,31,055
Weaving	Rs. 1,02,496
TOTAL	<u>Rs. 2,33,551</u>

Other revenue:

Visitors fees is Rs. 18,200

H.P. Course fees: Rs.1000

Job Order fees: Rs.7,875



CERC workshops:

Preservation and revival of dyeing arts and lost tradition is the focus of the skill development workshops conducted at the Craft Education and Research Centre, weaving and Kalamkari unit at Kalakshetra Foundation.

1. Natural dyes for cotton by Mr. Saleem (Natural Dye expert, Hyderabad) for women from the Bhavani Chethna Sangham, Timbaktu March 6 - 10
2. Traditional weaving techniques workshop by Mr. Harekrishna (graph making expert & trainer, Kanchipuram) for CERC weavers. February 17 to March 22.

Revival of Rukmini Devi's sarees

In a process to recall the aesthetics of Kalakshetra sarees, 15 Kalakshetra sarees have been revived by the Weaving Department at CERC. Sharing of these evergreen classics will be launched with an inaugural performance by Justin on March 7 which will be followed by a 10 day exhibition at the weaving center.

*7 March * 6pm * Performance by
Justin McCarthy and Stella Subbiah
@ Padma Pushkarani*

*15 – 25 March * Exhibition of
revival sarees at CERC Weaving
department*



CERC Hiring:

1. CERC Exhibition hall hired for 9 & 10 March by IIT Madras Workshop.
2. CERC Ground Hired by M/s. Orissa Arts & Crafts from 17 to 26 March.
3. CERC Exhibition Hall hired by M/s. Co-optex, The Tamilnadu Handloom Weavers' Co-operative Society Limited. From 27 to 31 March.

C) Museum

Measured and described 40 accessions (41 objects) of lot 04, photographs of Smt. Rukmini Devi handed over by Smt. Sarada Hoffman. Research was done on some fiction and non-fiction books of Smt. Shanta Rao Collection. Few artefacts from the museum were part of the CERC Kalakshetra saris exhibition. Further, when Sruti publication celebrated an evening in conversation with Kalakshetra alumni, titled, “Our Kalakshetra Days”, Kalakshetra Foundation had organised a panel from the museum to provide the back-drop for the event.

D) Library

Total 632 Books have been segregated and Data Entry done in Software. The Books in the R&D Library are manually checked as per the data available in the database.

E) Theatre

Remembering Rukmini Devi Festival @ Rukmini Arangam

Wednesday 1 March 6 pm Koormavatharam

Thursday 2 March 6pm Vocal Concert by Sri. T.M.Krishna.

This annual festival commemorates Kalakshetra’s founder, Rukmini Devi Arundale.

Dhrupad Festival: 3,4 &5 March, 6.30pm @ Padma Pushkarani

Kalakshetra Foundation in collaboration with Dhrupad Sansthan celebrated “Dhrupad Utsav” in memory of Late Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar & Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar.

Vastra Smaranam: Revival of Rukmini Devi’s sarees

7 March * Performance by Justin McCarthy and Stella Subbiah

As a dance tribute to Rukmini Devi and her saris for the first time a dance performance was organised at Padma Pushkarani.



Performance exams: 20 -28 March

4 yr and Post Diploma dance students performance exams were conducted at Rukmini Arangam.

Celebrating Diplomatic Relationships between Kazakhstan and India
25 March * Rukmini Arangam

Kalakshetra Foundation in collaboration with ICCR, presented, Akamaral Kainazarova, an Alumini of Kalakshetra to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the establishment of Diplomatic relations between India and Kazakhstan and 10th Anniversary of Establishment of Centre for Indian Classical Dances, Almaty.

Vahanas: The Path to Moksha 29 March * 6.30pm * Rukmini Arangam

Based on his book, Temple Vahanas of Tamil Nadu, Pradeep Chakravarthy gave a presentation on Vahanas which was followed by a performance by Kalakshetra Foundation.

E) Repertory Company

Remembering Rukmini Devi Festival @ Rukmini Arangam

Wednesday 1 March 6 pm Koormavatharam

Celebrating 70 years of Diplomatic relationship with Thailand

14 March, 8pm @ Venkatta Subba Rao Concert Hall

Kalakshetra Foundation in collaboration dancers from Thailand celebrate the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relationship between Thailand and India by an evening of dance showcase.

CERC Exhibition inauguration:



Dance and music students of Kalakshetra Foundation performed at the inauguration of the CERC exhibition on 15 March.

**Vahanas: The Path to
Moksha 29 March ***
Rukmini Arangam

Vahanas was a new choreography by Sri. K.P.Rakesh, Kalakshetra faculty, that is based on the mount which carries a Hindu deity. With a focus on mythology and its social reflection, Kalakshetra hopes to further develop this concept into a possible production in the future.



F) Besant Arundale Senior Secondary School

Activities:

3: Tiny toddlers Day was celebrated for the Montessori students.

Mrs. Chandra Chandrasekar of Hindu Senior Secondary School was the Chief Guest.

4: Farmcil, the pencil with seeds was introduced to the staff and students to encourage sensitivity to environment.

15: MR vaccine was administered to students at school as suggested by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare under the Universal Immunization Programme on the same day.

15: Mathematics model making competition at Stella Matutina college of education.

School matters:

From 9 March exams for 10 and 12 standards at Hindu Senior Secondary School.

18 March: Entrance exams for admission to classes III to IX

23 March: Admission results declared.

31 March: Results for Summative Assessment II for classes VI to IX and Evaluation III for classes II to V were declared

H) Besant Theosophical Higher Secondary School

School matters:

XII Public Examination commenced on 2 March and ended on 31 March.

XI Examination commenced on 8 March and went on till 30 March.

Science Practical Examination for IX Std. was conducted on 25 March.

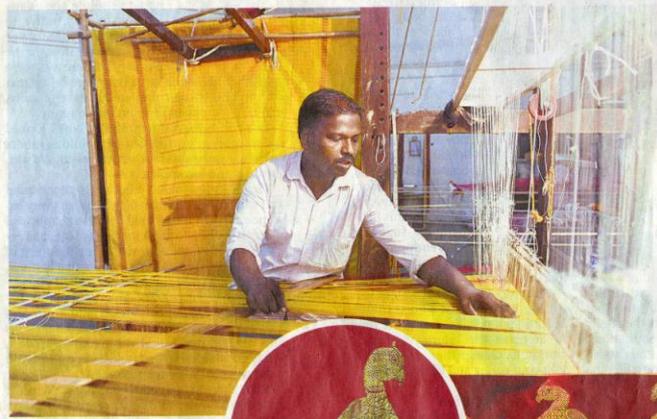
Class work note and project inspection for Class I to IX on 27 March.

Plus Two portions started for Plus One students on 31 March and will continue till 13 April.

Media Coverage

The whole six yards

CERC at Kalakshetra Foundation revives its eponymous silk sari, a fabric weighted by history and tradition in its warp and weft



BY SUBHA J RAO

S. Ulaganathan is bent over a graph sheet, marking dots and crosses. As you watch him work, a bird's neck takes shape. In front of him is a sari with an intricate motif of a parrot. The zari is frayed in parts – the sari is over half-a-century old. It's one of the many that dance doyenne Rukmini Devi Arundale wore, and is among the 15 saris that have been revived by the Craft Education and Research Centre (CERC) at Kalakshetra Foundation, the institution she set up.

It will take Ulaganathan at least three to four days to decipher the details of the design that went into the motif. It's painstaking work, but one that leaves the weavers filled with amazement, for it employs techniques, many long-forgotten.

Did *athai*, as Arundale was fondly called, draw her designs or narrate her requirements orally? How is it that each of the saris

sports motifs that merge beautifully yet stand out individually? How do the myriad designs – one sari has a zari temple border running through the sari, besides 24 deer in flight, across two rows, and four parrots on the pallu – never look over-the-top?

The revival is an attempt to understand her philosophy, says Deepa Ganesh of Kalakshetra's outreach programme. "The journey began when the advisory and executive committees wanted to see how *athai* envisioned the components of a sari. Yes, the colour combination was important, but so were the motifs and the overall look. We wanted to explore and

inspired Revisit, the exhibition curated by Ranvir Shah of Prakriti Foundation, is open to all. @CERC Kalakshetra Foundation, Thiruvannamur Till March 25, 10 am to 5 pm

understand the elements that came together to make it a Kalakshetra and a Rukmini Devi sari."

The committees journeyed within to get everything as close to the original – from the colour to the motifs. S. Ramachandran, manager, CERC, says it sometimes took them a whole day to get one colour right. For instance, even a yellow

Broken threads

In the Tamil film *Kanchivaram* directed by Priyadarshan, Vengadam (played by Prakash Raj) weaves luxurious silk saris for a living. He is heartbroken he can't keep the promise he made to himself about weaving a silk sari for his beloved daughter's wedding.



Heritage loom (Anti-clockwise) S. Ulaganathan works on a yellow-and-magenta silk sari; the vintage parrot motif; and the recreated panel with parrots and deer. SR RAGHUNATHAN

Right now, CERC is not in the process of reproducing or copying the original. What it aspires to do is to understand Arundale's thought process and the value of the detailing that went into it, says Ganesh.

Cotton revival, next

Ramachandran says that the weavers – there are 15 looms on campus now – were put through workshops to learn old techniques and the design process. From 2016, they've been working with silk. And next year, he hopes to begin reviving certain elaborate creations in cotton too.

Meanwhile, the ongoing exhibition at CERC draws a number of people interested in the craft tradition of the institute. Ramachandran says most are amazed seeing looms clacking away in the city. Each of the saris takes anywhere between two and three weeks to create.

Ulaganathan, who hails from Kancheepuram, is at work again, this time looping the silver zari supplied by Tamilnadu Zari Limited, a State Government undertaking. He brings out sealed packs of yarn bearing colour specifications. A yellow yarn has a card with four colour components – the result of hours of testing. A magenta has an equal number of components. There's a lot of math and calculation at work.

What this initiative does is readily make available to weavers what goes into a sari, and make replication relatively easy. It is a documentation of living heritage that was once worn by Arundale.

To know the scope of this revival, you need to look no further than one end of the weaving centre. Pinned to tables are Arundale's saris, some tattered. These were saris that the world would wear over when she wore them. Each of them speaks of possibilities. And, the recreated saris that hang in front of every loom, speak of what happens when that possibility turns into reality.



Pool of memories

The launch of the exhibition was a trip down the ages. Many grew nostalgic, reliving their moments with Arundale, says Ganesh. "These are people who handled her saris, folded them, felt them..."

Ambika Buch, who was in Kalakshetra from when she was five years old, and has been closely associated with *athai*, recalls how her arangetram sari was chosen.

"She chose an *araku* from a sample and a border from another. She wanted the rudraksham motif on either side. And, just like that, a lovely sari was created. *Athai* chose from different patterns, old saris, and her favourite motifs were the rudraksham, *kili* and *yaazhi*. She showed a preference for colour; as far as my memory goes, she used monotonous just twice – a red on red for Sita's *agnipariksha* and an olive green for Sita in Ashokavanam. She had a fondness for yellow, and she loved contrast blouses. She would wear a green for a red-and-mustard sari and pull off the look."

A. Janardhanan, a long-time associate, speaks highly of Arundale's ability to imagine the end product. "She would meet skilled weaving personalities brought in from different villages and discuss colour and design, before the final version was passed on to the weavers. She would visit the weaver's centre and even if she found one yarn out of place, would ask the weavers to start afresh. If it was a sari for which an order had been placed, she would either ask for more time or refund the money."

CK Balagopal, the dancer who made a name for his portrayal of Hanuman, was at CERC with a red-and-mustard checked sari that Arundale had gifted his wife. "I want to get this recreated. The design must live on," he says and speaks about the time they were on a tour of a foreign country. "The hosts refused to let us wash the saris. They learnt to do it by hand." And, her saris fluttered in a clothesline in a land far away from where they were woven.



SHAJU JOHN

Six yards, different drapes

Vastrasmaranam explored the many layers of the sari

The evening could not have been more magical at Kalakshetra. A soft evening breeze, lingering cloud of *sambarani*, Padma Pushkarani (lotus pond) and the scattered granite gazebo amidst the tall trees and lush foliage, made a poetic backdrop for the glorious exploratory style of music and the understated dance visualisation.

The hour-long 'Vastrasmaranam - Weaving Memories' was a precursor to the sari exhibition marking the revival of Rukmini Devi's inspirational Kanjeevarams and her brand of 'Kalakshetra saris.' The dance production conceptualised by Bharatanatyam dancer-teacher and

musician Justin McCarthy envisioned the sari in three ways. The first was from a child's point of view, when the mother's *pallu* becomes the security blanket. The sari took on a different role when a woman in love was yearning to be with her beau and the last was the image of the sari as draped on goddesses and in god images. Justin and his collaborator Bharatanatyam dancer-teacher Stella Subbiah, a Kalakshetra alumnus, presented 'Vastrasmaranam' along with stellar musicians: Sudha Raghuraman (vocal), G. Raghuraman (flute), Ananthanarayanan (veena), Vedakrishna Ram (mridangam) and Hari Padman (nattuvangam).

'Vastrasmaranam' was not a conventional presentation. The location was not a proscenium proper but an approximately 10x10 gazebo alongside the pond steps, the distance between the dancers and the audience too long to discern the nuances and the lighting too broad-based to showcase anything in particular.

But that was the whole point, not to look at the minutiae, but at the big picture. The performance was a meditative, slow unravelling of mood and music, evoking poetic imagery and upholding the highest sense of aesthetics. With the music

largely manodharma-based and the dancers avoiding loud, forceful rhythm, a calm, *chauka kaala* flow was maintained. There were small *nritta* passages, but they did not intrude. It also helped that the dancers did not wear bells.

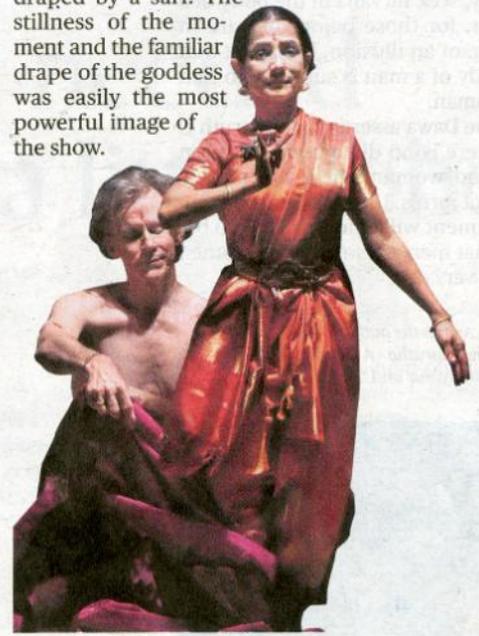
Adavu class

The artistes opened with 'Vagarthaviva,' a prayer to Siva and Parvati from Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa*. The segment with regard to children mimicked an 'adavu class' with the dancers performing the beginners' steps. While the lullaby (Neelambari) and the animal-oriented 'Pachchaikkiliye vaa vaa' (Behag) and 'Thookanankuruvi' (Punnagavarali) songs were neat descriptions, their connection to the sari did not come through.

The heroines in the *Khamas padavarnam*, 'Samiyai azhaithu vaadi' and in 'Payyada' (Nadanamakriya) both are in love but the shades of yearning are miles apart. While the former has a happy, confident heroine telling her friend to bring her man to her, there is desolation and bitterness in the latter. Both were alternated, more cleverly as regards the music than the dance. The instrumental treatment for the *varnam*, was a surprise teaser.

The interesting part of the delineations was that the dancers even while dramatising the same song and moving in similar *chauka kaala* ways, did not have a practised uniformity. They also used levels to good effect - one seated, the other standing. The sari was a natural part of this segment.

The last segment was about saris and the deities, particularly Devi. The lines from *Soundarya Lahiri* described Her from head to toe, the description ending with Stella as the goddess being draped by a sari. The stillness of the moment and the familiar drape of the goddess was easily the most powerful image of the show.



K. V. SRINIVASAN



"The first time I laid my eyes on a sari was at Kalakshetra, in 1979. Smt. Rukmini Devi's design for the heroine Vasanthavalli in *Kutrala Kuravanji*, was a costume with parrot motifs. I was intrigued by it. I have been collecting saris since, as it is a big part of costuming. So when I was commissioned for 'Vastrasmaranam,' I was excited."

- Justin McCarthy



Ashwin Prasad

AN INDO-THAI CULTURAL FUSION



Colours and expressions set the stage on fire when Thai dancers and Kalakshetra students came together to celebrate 70 years of togetherness

Express Features

India and Thailand are two countries whose histories date back to 329 BC, when emperor Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to propagate Dharma and morality. In the modern world, the two countries found themselves establishing cordial diplomatic relations. Celebrating 70 years of political and economic harmony was the Royal Thai Consulate General, in an evening dedicated to Indo-Thai cultural exchange. Starting with an exclusive VIP culinary spread, the evenings soon saw performances celebrating the cultures of both countries. The performers took centre stage, showcasing quintessentially Thai arts like shadow play and traditional folk forms of dance. Bright costumes, colourful makeup and perfect synchronisation made the performances a delight to watch. A separate segment dedicated to regional art forms from various parts of the Kingdom was the biggest draw. A fusion performance by the Thai dancers and students of Kalakshetra, which saw dance forms of both regions come together made for the perfect ending to a culturally charged evening.



Kalakshetra to recreate saris of Rukmini Devi

Published: Mar 17, 2017 07:00 AM by Tuba Raqshan

Kalakshetra to recreate saris of Rukmini Devi

The original Kalakshetra sari, with its distinct green and oil mustard yellow hues, made famous by Rukmini Devi Arundale, the founder of Kalakshetra Foundation (KF), has been lost over time.

Chennai:

Now, the institution has constituted an advisory board, which has sourced master weavers, craftsmen and textile experts to re-visit the traditional version of the sari, using techniques prominent almost a century ago.

Priyadarsini Govind, Director of KF, said that the institution is in the process of documenting its oral history. “Revisiting the Kalakshetra sari followed as a natural choice. From the moment I came into Kalakshetra Foundation as Director, Rukmini Devi’s attention to detail and her aesthetics sense have fascinated me to the point of obsession. With the concurrence of the Governing Board of KF, we constituted the advisory and executive committees for the craft centre to create a blue print for the centre and aid in its implementation,” she said.

“The process started last year with a panel discussion on the sari during the Remembering Rukmini Devi Festival. We then invited some of the senior alumni and weavers for a discussion to go into what constitutes ‘the Kalakshetra Sari’. We have had a series of dyeing workshops, training in weaving techniques etc. for this process. This is an ongoing quest and it is an early but a very important milestone,” added the renowned dancer.

Visualised from memories from a cross section of people at Kalakshetra and in the weaving communities, and resourced by the advisory board, the weavers have worked hard to create the recent set of fifteen saris. These saris are being showcased as a part of an exhibition titled ‘Inspired Revisit’, at the institution’s Craft Education

and Research Centre till March 25. Ranvir Shah, the curator of the exhibition, clearly stated that this is neither a reproduction nor a revival of the Kalakshetra sari.

S Ulaganathan (37), a master craftsman from Kancheepuram, said it took hours of experimentation in the laboratory, to arrive at the perfect ‘mustard yellow’ colour, which is one of the signature features of Kalakshetra saris. “The original saris used a German colour. We experimented in the laboratory to arrive at a dye, that matched the original. Then, we ordered it in bulk and went about the design process. Bamboo reeds were used to build the design. We had to recreate the reed for this procedure. The Korvai, a complex technique, is used to interlace the borders with the body of the sari and is done by two weavers, while the dying process needs two more people,” added the craftsman.





'Vahanas - Our Vehicle to Moksha,' presented by the students of Kalakshetra

Poetry in motion

Outside-the-box choreography captured the beauty of temple processions and the vahanas

BAMA NATRAJ

The decor and ambience of Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra, was just perfect for 'Vahanas - Our Vehicle to Moksha,' presented by the students of Kalakshetra. It was preceded by Pradeep Chakravarthy's talk on the subject supported with slides and short video clips, which gave glimpses of the grandeur of the processions and the nuances of the Vahanas.

The dance presentation, choreographed by K.P. Rakesh, member of faculty, was well researched and beautifully put together.

Interesting concept

Introducing the mounts and the deity through dance was an interesting concept as it gave the viewer time and opportunity to appreciate how the art as a medium showcased the moods and emotions - the equanimity of Ganesha, the playfulness of Mushika, the valour of the warrior God Karthikeya on his graceful peacock, the majesty and power of Siva with the stately devotion of Nandi. The processions that followed were beautiful.

Pradeep Chakravarthy, during his talk, asked the audience to pause and take in the beauty of the pictures relating to the processions. In dance they simply came alive. The brilliant colours, authenticity of the costume, the details of the devadasis' attire in particular, all combined to make it a visual treat.

Introducing the Muslim devotees and the various sub-castes of the Hindu devotees held a mirror to the society of



that period. The Ashwa Vahana of Lord Vishnu connected beautifully to the earlier short video clip in which the bearers of the Vahana seemed to be galloping through the streets around the temple.

The dancers in this section, however, lacked synchronisation and the piece did not have the same impact as the others. The note played by the nagaswara vidwan did not seem to belong to that period. Had we already imbibed those partic-

ular notes in the early nineteenth century? On the whole, the production managed to transport the viewers to a different time zone.

The choreography, while adhering to Kalakshetra's style, was certainly an instance of thinking outside the box. Looks like choreography is indeed Rakesh's forte!

The musicians of Kalakshetra, including the nagaswaram and thavil vidwans, did an admirable job of providing the right musical ambience to the production.

Dr. Prema Rangarajan (centre) and her disciples

INSIDE

Choreographic splendour
A Kalakshetra production on vahanas captured the beauty of temple processions **P3**



Annexure 1: CERC workshop :

Preservation and revival of dyeing arts and lost tradition is the focus of the skill development workshops conducted at the Craft Education and Research Centre, weaving and Kalamkari unit at Kalakshetra Foundation.

Project Summary

This project proposes to skill weavers & dyers in the Kalakshetra style of weaving, dyeing and aesthetics, to meet current market standards in an attempt to revitalize and keep alive these techniques within the new contexts and standards of production and markets. It is also aimed at bringing in recognition for weavers for their skills and validation of their expertise.

Project objective

The project aims at revival of the old techniques of pre loom and weaving of korvai and adai which is now being lost to new production methods of catch cards and jacquards. Through this revival of the Kalakshetra sari, the objective will also to be able to bring recognition and validation of weavers skill and expertise, leading to revitalizing livelihoods.

Why this project is needed:

In the current situation, given the demand for the Kalakshetra sarees, it is proposed to skill weavers in the techniques, with due respect to the heritage, while recognising the new contexts of production that require new standards of production – in dyeing fastness, and new conditions of market, where weaving techniques that use catch card, rather than the traditional korvai, and so on are more popular with weavers.

Skill development in design & techniques of dyeing & weaving of the Kalakshetra Korvai Saris -

*Craft Education and Research Centre (CERC), Kalakshetra Foundation
Funded by TVS Upasana Limited*

Over the years, the Craft Education and Research Centre (CERC) at Kalakshetra has served as an important repository of traditional craft methodology: hosting, training and encouraging artisans in various ways. As part of a project funded by TVS Upasana Limited, the CERC hosted workshops to skill dyers and weavers, from the

CERC as well as elsewhere, in the Kalakshetra style of dyeing, weaving and aesthetics as part of a larger initiative to revive the Kalakshetra sari. These workshops are led by master artisans and trainers with expertise in different traditional techniques.

The following workshops were conducted at the CERC:

1. Chemical dye and colour testing workshop by Mr. Krishnamurthy (Dyeing expert, Retired, Weavers Service Centre) for CERC and other weavers
2. Natural dyes for silk workshop by Ms. Jagada Rajappa (Natural dyeing resource person, Hyderabad) for CERC weavers and dyers
3. Natural dyes for cotton by Mr. Saleem (Natural Dye expert, Hyderabad) for women from the Bhavani Chethna Sangham, Timbaktu
4. Traditional weaving techniques workshop by Mr. Harekrishna (graph making expert & trainer, Kanchipuram) for CERC weavers.

The dyeing workshops have helped weavers, at the CERC and from elsewhere, understand and be part of pre-loom processes that were previously inaccessible to them. As a result of this project, dyers are also now able to dye and test colours in a systematic fashion while the weavers are now able to engage in the pre-loom processes as well. The weaving workshop helped weavers, who are now accustomed to modern catch card and jacquard techniques to learn traditional patterning with adai. These traditional methods are being quickly lost along with their characteristic motifs and patterns. As a result of these workshops, participants are now able to use these techniques to design and weave saris of historical and traditional significance.

This project also contributed to the ongoing revival of the Kalakshetra sari: over the course of this project, weavers at the CERC have re-created 15 saris from Rukmini Devi's collection, which culminated in a 10-day exhibition that was greatly appreciated by artisans and sari lovers alike.

Annexure 2: Exhibition Curatorial Note by Ranvir Shah

In 1936 Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, established the College of Fine Arts, to teach Bharatanatyam. A year later, she set up looms in the Kalakshetra campus to produce saris and fabrics for the students to use for their improved life choice. The Kalakshetra Sari reaffirms the Kalakshetra ethos of arts and culture over time.

Through her lifetime, her engagement with fabrics in the field of Kanchipuram silk as well as cotton saris was a constant. It denoted certain elements of balance, color symmetry and an aesthetic that was as much hers as of those she worked with in this area such as the master-weavers, artists, and women who loved and patronized the Kalakshetra sari. Over the years the Kalakshetra sari has been co-opted and re-interpreted by many different weaving houses, as well as the Government run Co-optex, for their own versions.

The project of re-looking at the old techniques of pre-loom and weaving of korvai and adai which is now being lost to new production methods of catch cards and jacquards was the aim of this project. The objective was to bring recognition and validation as well as skilling a new generation of weavers in the art of the Kalakshetra sari. It proposes for skilled weavers and dyers to work and re-create the original Kalakshetra style of weaving, dyeing, and aesthetics and yet aims to converge with current market realities.

This allows keeping alive this technique within contemporary contexts and standards of production, while promising livelihoods to the weavers.

A few remnants of original sarees passed through time provided the inspiration. Trainers from Kanchipuram as well as resource people from the craft sector such as master craftsperson Velu, dyer Salim, expert trainers Krishnamurthy and Smt. Jagada Rajappa aided this process. Visualized from memories from a cross section of people at Kalakshetra and in the weaving communities, and resourced by the advisory board constituted by the director Priyadarsini Govind to revive the saris, the weavers have worked hard to create the recent set of fifteen saris.

Over time and due to a minimal archival references, we have lost the original Kalakshetra green and yellow of oil mustard which was said to have been special in its colour tones due to the process of dipping in oil. Dye-stuffs available in the 40's versus what is available now, the quality of the yarn, the way it is spun and many other technical details of that past have been lost due to the pressures of our recent commercial times. In this "inspired re-visit" the project is a journey. This is a milestone where we can share the work done over the past one year, but it is only an

early milestone. The hope and wish are that this exhibition will allow for people who have memories, connections, advice to come and engage with the project and the Centre so that all of this can be assimilated in an ongoing process. Three looms were functional when this project was started and now all fifteen of them are in production, making the workshop again a vibrant place producing objects of beauty. Regular workshops have been conducted on vegetable dyeing and designing. We are now again able to take your orders for the designs renewed up until now, in turn, we welcome you to introduce them back into the world of good taste.

Tradition is never a fixed force - it changes and absorbs newer elements as it moves along various timelines. Strangely, though our traditional concept of circular time allows things to be repeated and come full circle.

This is the first attempt. Please leave us your ideas, suggestions, comments and criticism, so that we carry forth on this path better informed and inspired.

In Rukmini Devi's words – "I realize how a small beginning when imbued with devotion, love, and imagination can start a stream of influence".

Today's sari wearers do not have the luxury of hand-washing the saris regularly and wearing them on a daily basis. The realities of the transformed and empowered new Indian Woman, need to converge with this wondrous tradition in a manner that can be celebrated, in viewing these saris once more as an integral part of their lives and not just as a costume of style.

We are deeply grateful to Mrs.Usha Krishna for having understood the relevance of this project and generously supporting it. The team of trainers as well as the CERC staffs lead by Mr. Ramachandran and Foreman Sri. Ulaganathan have been a tremendous source of energy and devotion on this adventure.

Revisiting, re-engaging, re-living – allows one to re-energize and re-look at a traditional aesthetic in a way that we can truly call ours – that of our times and of our reality and finally also of our aesthetic dreams.