

SADAS

Members of the Music Academy, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Now that the forty-seventh annual conference of the Music Academy is drawing to a close, I should like to thank the committee once more for electing me to the presidency of the 1973 session. I wish also thank all of the musicians, dancers, and nattuvanars for their participation and to say that I feel that I share this honour with each and all of you.

In my opening address I spoke mainly of the past—of the roots of our traditions of music and dance, and of my own past as an individual artist, of my family, my teachers, and my struggle to present to the public the pristine beauty of the art of Bharata Natyam as it had been handed down in spite of many difficulties and obstructions. I spoke also of the supreme importance of music in the art of dance, and emphasized the necessity for every dancer to be as thoroughly trained as possible in music.

Today I should like to **speak of the future**, to elaborate further on the training of dancers, and to try to express my feelings about the ultimate source of a dancer's inspiration and creativity.

Let me begin with an appeal addressed to dance teachers, to dancers, and especially to the parents of young dance students. Today there is the feeling that one can study the dance a little, make a debut, and mark it up as another accomplishment. Such an attitude may cause irreparable harm to an art that demands true professionalism. Parents, especially, should cooperate and not press the nattuvanars for a speedy arangetram. In my opinion, students must study intensely for at least three years before coming to the stage. The arangetram ceremony marks a beginning, not an end. Students must understand that the most meaningful part of their training and experience comes after the arangetram; they should be encouraged to continue their study of dance and to bring it to some degree of maturity. Let them shun the false glitter of indiscriminating public acclaim. India needs dancers capable of dedicating themselves to the highest ideals of the art, who will learn it for its own sake and not as a passport to public attention. In the education of any artist there must be many periods of discouragement, but with perseverance and concentration such experiences can serve to sharpen the discriminative and critical faculties, to heighten sensitivity to that which is deepest and closest to the most profound truths of art.

In recent years I have devoted a portion of each year to teaching in the United States. In view of the preceding remarks about the necessity for thorough training of dancers, one may well ask what might be accomplished by trying to impart to foreigners an art so uniquely Indian in its cultural background—and to impart it, indeed, on a part-time basis. There are those who think that all foreign students learn Bharata Natyam only as a novelty. But—although there are occasional examples of superficiality there as well as here—I have found that the great majority of foreign students have true reverence for the art, they approach it with enthusiasm and work hard and persistently to master it. They are eager to learn, if only a few steps, and they accept whatever is presented, in the ways I present it, with perfect humility. This seriousness of approach does not indicate that they are studying as a pastime or novelty, and it might well serve as a model for some of our Indian students, who sometimes seem to forget that there is more to Bharata Natyam than a beautiful dance sari and the applause of friends and relatives.

Because I teach them intensively for only two or three months each year, the course of study for American students has to be modified, and becomes a more gradual process than it is in India. During the times I am not there they practice under the guidance of my student, Mrs. Luise Scripps, so that the complete training is gradually accomplished. In the third year I begin to teach them varnam and tillana. I have not yet started padas.

The roots of Bharata Natyam penetrate deeply into our South Indian culture, but we must acknowledge the fact that we cannot impose a geographical limitation on an art so broadly based on universal truths of the body and spirit. It is no more surprising in 1973 to find a school of Bharata Natyam in San Francisco than to find one in Bombay, Delhi, or Calcutta. I should like to take this opportunity to thank the American Society for Eastern Arts, its patrons, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Scripps, and its director, Mr. Robert Brown, for the support they have given me in the United States to help stabilize and spread the knowledge of my art throughout the world. Just as Dr. Raghavan and the Music Academy pioneered in Madras to help establish a teaching institution for Bharata Natyam, so also has the American Society for Eastern Arts helped to bring to international attention the importance of this great South Indian art. By firmly establishing teaching institutions, both bodies have, in my opinion, taken the most important steps toward assuring that Bharata Natyam should remain alive for future generations, free of the excesses of contemporary cinema-influenced taste and a mass public not yet educated to the subtleties of a complex and rich tradition.

I would like to close with a few thoughts on the central position of proper attitude of bhakti in the performance of Bharata Natyam—or, for that matter, in any of the Indian arts. Music and dance

are the two main forms of dedication to God. There are many ways in life in which we can realize the presence of God, but it has always been acknowledged in India that the quickest and perhaps surest ways are through the paths of music and dance. The path of music is akin to nadopasana, but if the dancer knows both music and dance she is able to dedicate her whole body and mind, her very self, to the Lord. Therefore, dance has been one of the most important forms of ritual in the past. In performing puja, the priest offers many things—flowers, milk, garlands, and sandal-paste—but always also vadya and natya. The dance performance, then, should be approached in the same spirit of devotion and dedication, since it is, in fact, a ceremony.

**yoga mante sadyama yocinci yucite
pavana yogalaku paramananda saukyamu**

*Yoga is not easy to practice, if one really thinks about it.
It is meant only for the most advanced souls in a state of constant bliss.*

When yoga is so difficult to realize, then at least for an ordinary human being like myself, this music and dance help me to some extent and at certain moments to experience very intensely the constant presence of God. For a few hours on the stage one can be in that state of constant bliss and complete happiness. Perhaps it is only in the combination of sangita and natya, of music and dance, that this particular spiritual state is possible.

I would like to end by expressing in my own way my thanks to my family, to all of those who have taught me, encouraged and supported me over the years, and especially to those friends who are gathered here today.