

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

It is with mixed feelings of pride and humbleness that I have accepted the high honor bestowed upon me by the Music Academy of Madras in asking me to preside over their forty-seventh annual conference. My pride is in our South Indian traditions of music and dance and in my family's special heritage within these traditions; my humility stems from my awareness of my role as an individual artist within these great traditions, and from my debt of gratitude to all of those who have helped me in my life-long dedication to the twin arts of music and dance—my family, my gurus, my friends and critics, and the public that has come to pay homage to these arts, to appreciate and understand them, not only throughout India, but in recent years through other parts of the world. I have been asked to preside over a meeting of musicians because of my music, and I feel that by so doing I endorse and acknowledge the paramount importance of music in South Indian dance. Bharata Natyam, in its highest moments, may be considered the embodiment of sound in visual form, a ceremony, and an act of devotion. For more than two thousand years the shastras have confirmed that an individual dedicated to the dance must be equally dedicated to music—must receive thorough training in both of the arts, as well as in all possible aspects of human life, traditionally classified as the sixty-four arts. Through this intensive education, the artist should be imbued with a deep understanding of the sources from which they stem. I am speaking of spirit and emotion, of bhakti and rasa.

To create the most perfect realization of rasa in performance, all elements must be in balance. Although the tala provides a wonderfully strong backbone, it is undoubtedly raga bhava which evokes this rasa in all of its varying shades and infinite variety. Too often the stress on tala in the music for Bharata Natyam may lead to neglect of the quality of raga bhava, and thus rob the performance of its proper depth of expression. We should never forget that in deriving *bhava—raga—tala* from the syllables of *bharata* in Bharata Natyam, there is an underlying concept of the equality of these three elements. All too often the element of raga is overlooked to the point that the opportunity for full expression of bhava is seriously hampered. (I will not even speak of those painful examples where tala itself is equally neglected.) In demonstrating the art of Bharata Natyam abroad, I have made a special point of showing audiences how delicately linked is the realization of movement to raga expression in abhinaya, including

the subtle expression of gamakas, intonation of sruti, and the unfolding of improvisation in niraval. In the same way that we look for perfect blending of raga and tala, of raga and bhava in abhinaya, so also is it essential that raga and sahitya be perfectly matched and in accordance with the necessities of expression in the dance. It is for this reason that I do not advocate the use of most kirtanas as vehicles for Bharata Natyam, although the idea is becoming fashionable in some circles at present. The scope of sahitya is often too limited and specific to allow for full development of abhinaya, as is often the scope of the raga bhava. Songs to be used for dance expression must be carefully chosen, and one need only think of the almost unlimited scope of many of the padams and pada varnams to sense the great difference between them and most devotional songs or concert pieces. For example, the word *chirrunavu* in the well-known tana varnam in Bhairavi is so stretched out in the music as to afford an opportunity for the dancer herself to be laughed at if she attempts to show "laughter" at such inordinate length. In other parts of that varnam the words and ideas come along too fast and furiously for there to be time to cope with them adequately in terms of abhinaya. It seems clear that the aspiring dancer must receive training in the art of music as fully as in the elements of dance, if she is to understand these things and to do justice to the grand concept of the art as it has been developed by our ancestors over thousands of years.

It was my good fortune to have been born into a family in which the traditions of music and dance have been the focus of life for generations. Although it is known to many that my great-great-grandmother Kamakshiammal danced in the court of Trivandrum, it is important to point out that my great-grandmother Sundarammal was a musician, as was my grandmother Dhanammal and my mother Jayammal. In fact, most of the artists of recent generations have been musicians rather than dancers. Among those remembered are several violinists, and performers of vina, flute, ghatam, and mridangam, as well as many singers. I feel proud to come from a family that has produced musicians of the greatness of a Vina Dhanam or a Jayammal, the quality of whose music is still remembered by many here; and I also feel proud to have with me today my brothers Ranganathan and Viswanathan and my daughter Lakshmi, who are helping to carry the luster of our family tradition throughout the world.

Within the family, it was Vina Dhanam who outlined to me the repertoire of padas and presented their scope. She was trained in the schools of both Dikshitar and Syama Shastri and is responsible for the family's interest in these particular branches of music. My interpretation of the padas, then, depends on Dhanammal's interpretation of all of her music, and not just the padas. She has set an ideal of richness and subtlety of emotional expression that shines like a lamp before those who have heard and appreciated her music.

It was my mother, Jayammal, who had me trained as a dancer, in spite of strong family opposition. Not only were those the days of the Devadasi bill, but there was also a strong family stress on the importance of music. It was, in fact, a great musician from outside the family, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Ayyangar, who firmly supported Jayammal in her decision. Although Jayammal decided not to send me to school, she saw to it that I received all necessary training for the dance. It was she who selected Kandappa as guru, and after severe and rigorous dance training from him from early morning, she would make me sit next to her in the evening and would train me in music. Kandappa was also a fine musician, and every adavu of his dance compositions was fitted perfectly to the svaras. Jayammal taught the close relationship of abhinaya to raga contour, and would say "your head, your whole body, must move with the sangati, with the gamaka, and not just with the tala."

Kandappa was my first and only guru. He conveyed to me the legacy of the Tanjore quartet, and he brought his own exquisite sense of balance in standardizing the Bharata Natyam repertoire and recital program as we know it today. The initial inspiration within me to take up dancing came, however, from seeing a performance of Gauri Ammal when I was very young. If this woman had not brought the dance to such a stage of development, the combination of music and dance that I have attempted to realize would not have been possible. She is gone, she is missed, and I feel that a share of the honour in my being elected President of the Music Academy should rightfully go to her.

I have tried to keep myself open to learning from anyone of artistic integrity and to add to and embellish the thorough training I received from my family and my guru. From ladies traditionally trained in Devadasi families I learned many things and received special help in languages, including Telugu, Sanskrit, and Tamil. One of them taught me to do an entire song with just my face—first with the music, and then in silence, I would have to go through the entire emotional range of the sahitya, using only facial expression, without the aid of hands or arms.

Up to a certain stage in my early career, Chinnaya Naidu suggested to me the ways to develop improvisation, in padas as well as in other forms. He used to test me by singing short phrases with very little in the way of cues, and then ask me to state which nayiki was appropriate.

When I was already in my thirties, Vedanta Lakshminarayana Shastri opened great new vistas for me, especially in varnam improvisation. He once said, "If I had had a singer like your mother, with her music, I could have taken my art throughout the world." He felt that no one understood the value of what he did, and told me I "had better learn it." He spent many hours with me in my house, although he was very orthodox and did not even take water. The first question he asked, the day he first came, was, "Can you write the horoscope for the varnam?" What he meant was a systematic

classification of all aspects of each varnam, as a way of understanding it thoroughly. This remarkable man shared his immense knowledge with me generously and without holding back. In a very real sense he gave me the confidence to attempt those things that I am doing today.

During my lifetime I have seen the art of Bharata Natyam rescued from ignominy and restored to a position of respect and worldwide interest. Those who supported me in the past often had to justify and support the whole cause of dance. I mention Rasikamani T. K. Chidambarananda Mudaliar, who arranged concerts to which he brought people who had opposed Bharata Natyam, in order that they might see for themselves the greatness of our heritage. He attacked prejudice in speeches and in writing, as did Kalki, writing in *Ananda Viketan*. Tiruchi V. Kalyana Sundara Mudaliar, the great Tamil scholar, once arranged my concert at a wedding. Among the invited guests were T. K. Chidambara Mudaliar and Kalki, both of whom had been opposed to Bharata Natyam and were surprised to see that it was being presented at a wedding. They were converted by the performance; they realized the sophistication and integrity of the art form, and that it could be performed tastefully on a high level, providing a legitimate artistic and even spiritual experience if approached in the proper way. In the nineteen-thirties there were many difficulties and obstacles to overcome. Subramania Chettiar and his brother Ramaniah Chettiar arranged concerts and provided moral support in every way, and Uday Shankar introduced my art in the North of India. I am especially grateful to Dr. V. Raghavan and the Music Academy of Madras, which has supported me for more than forty years, has given me the opportunity to present my performance to a large general public, and has provided a place for a school in which to train young dancers in the discipline of the art. Let me also not forget Kuppuswami Mudaliar, who was my mridangam accompanist from the very beginning, and whose tasteful drumming has contributed so much to the musical performance. Among early foreign supporters was the Dutch writer Beryl de Zoete. There are many others who have contributed to the interest in Bharata Natyam in India, as well as in other parts of the world, and, as a dancer who has lived during this time of re-affirmation of an art to which I have dedicated my life, I wish to thank them with all my heart.

In recent years it has been my good fortune to visit other parts of Asia, Europe, and the United States, to perform and even to teach. I feel that only by adopting a broad outlook toward the many forms of music and dance that the human race has thus far evolved can we hope to understand the true position of Karnatak music and dance, and to see clearly in the face of many potentially disruptive forces in our cultural life its true genius, its unique artistic and spiritual achievement. I have had the opportunity to see the close relationship between music and dance all over the world, and to appreciate

the myriad forms that have developed. I have come to realize that the arts of South India now have an international and world-wide importance. We must resist the temptation to mix them in inappropriate ways with other styles. We must study and experience them profoundly so that we are in contact with their deepest roots and meaning. I feel grateful to have lived in such a time as this, and to have been able to show to my compatriots, as well as to people throughout the world, the essential greatness of our South Indian traditions of music and dance.

I have indicated the great debt I owe to Jayammal and Kandappa Pillai, my family, my teachers, and to the Music Academy of Madras. My final namaskaram is reserved for all of you assembled here, my audience, my friends and supporters—those who have come today for the first time, those who have followed my performances over the years, those who have come from near and far, young and old, rich and poor—I thank you humbly for your respect and enthusiasm. Without your growing awareness of its greatness, the tradition of Bharata Natyam might already have died. Because of you I stand here today to preside over this great convocation of musicians and dancers. I know that in your hearts and minds rests the future of our art.