



dravidian art in ceylon

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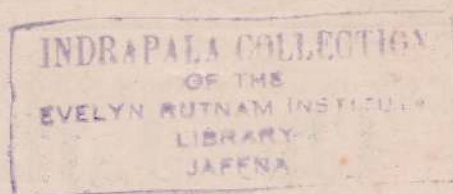
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The Cover Design and Explanatory Note

By

S. SANMUGANATHAN

THE central enshrined figure is Sarasvathy, the Goddess that presides over all arts. She is worshipped by all ; young and old, rich and poor, men and women, and by the weak and the powerful. Prior to embarking on anything new whether it be peace or whether it be war SHE is offered joss sticks and cosmetics, tools and implements, school books and manuscripts, paints and brushes, drums and stringed instruments, ploughs and sickles, fruits and flowers, cereals and sweets, looms and lathes, guns and swords, cart and car and in fact anything that is used by man to help him earn his livelihood. She is the simple monumental conception of the ideal for humanity throughout the ages, of doing one's duty and playing one's part in the propagation of the content of BEAUTY.

In the illustration she carries in the rear right hand an ola manuscript, the symbol of knowledge and learning, in the rear left hand the "rudraksha" garland the all-knowing and all-pervading yogic symbol ; seated on a white lotus signifying purity of thought and action. The peacock as a companion stands for beauty of form and elegance.

The Mudras or Hastas or Gestures that surround the figure are symbols that are used in almost every walk of life whether it be religious worship or in the art of the dance or gestures of emphasis that accompanies everyday speech an undying heritage coming down through the ages without a break.

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Welcome

WE welcome His Excellency the Governor-General into the realm of Tamil drama and music. From the time of his arrival in Ceylon, His Excellency has evinced great interest in the national Music and Dance and has given the lead to their development and preservation. On one occasion, His Excellency stated that by preserving them, the country preserves the very foundations of its culture in which are enshrined the traditions and religions of the people.

An attempt to put on the stage today in His Excellency's presence some items featuring Tamil classical and Folk Dances is both in appreciation of the urge which His Excellency has given to the people to develop their own Arts and as an incentive to the schools in Ceylon to take seriously to the study of music and dance as part of the education of the children, as they play an important part in the guidance of emotion and in the development of the mind and body. The ideal of education is the full development of the human personality, and musical education helps largely the moulding of character which is the very foundation of life.

Music is a vital factor in the lives of human beings. It is a good tonic for the brain-worker. It cools the heated brains. It has a soothing influence on the nervous system. In short, it is a panacea for many ills. Recently music has assumed a new role in the care and treatment of patients and its comprehensive use is found in Neuro-Psychiatric hospitals in the United States.

An appreciative European author on the music of Orient and Occident states that music is the oldest of the Arts in the Orient and it is the youngest of the Arts of the Occident. The Vedas of India are the oldest writings extant. One of the books of the Vedas is devoted to the exposition of the subject of music, thereby showing that even in those remote ages, it was an Art of long and high development. The same author observes that India was the one country in the world where music in its connection with and expression of life should be so aware of its spiritual service.

The dance of the ancient Tamils went hand in hand with their music. It is an Art which had been highly developed as early as 2,000 years ago or perhaps earlier. Bharata Natya Sastra by Bharata Muni is stated to be the earliest extant treatise. It has been followed by other writers in the subsequent centuries. Silappadi-karam in Tamil of the second century A.D. contains copious descriptions of the dance wealth of South India. The recent discoveries from the excavations at Mohan-ja-Daro in India give a clue to the probable existence of highly cultivated dance as early as four thousand years ago. Among the many forms so evolved, four are now considered to be the most important, viz. Bharata Natya chiefly of Tamil land, Kathakali of Malabar, Kathak of North India and Manipuri of Assam.

Music and dance have always played a prominent part in the cultural life of India and they have always been treasured as the richest cultural heritage of India. With the efflux of time music and dance have declined from the ethical position they once held, and today in a mixed society and civilisation, they have degenerated to mere worldly pleasure giving arts. It is the duty of the State and society to recover and place them in their old pedestal of spiritual environment. In a world of misery and competition, music cultivated on an international basis should minimise crimes and increase the happiness of the people; for, no art stirs emotion so deeply as music and develops the milky qualities of human kindness and sympathy.

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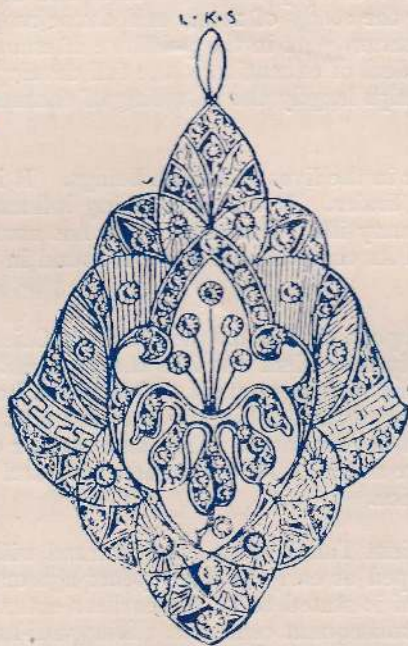
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Introducing The Jaffna School of Dancing

BY
ALAGU SUBRAMANIAM

THE Jaffna School of Dancing stands at the junction of three roads. First Cross Streets leads to the Jaffna Lagoon noted for presenting a most glorious sunset ; the second takes you to the Grand Bazaar whose shops display pictures of dancing gods and goddesses ; the third links up the railway station, the gateway to the outside world. And so the pupils of the school dance at the centre of a little universe, like Lord Siva at Tillai, the heart of a greater universe.

The Dance of Siva is the greatest of all dances. It is a cosmic dance of creation, preservation and destruction. Similarly the dance of the students of the Jaffna School is a dance of resurrection and recreation for they are reviving the ancient art of their people and recreating it for modern presentation.

The school undertakes to instruct its pupils in all the four classical modes of dancing existing in India. Gopinath, in the words of Rabindranath Tagore, "is a real artist and I am sure there are not many who could rightfully take their stand by his side either in India or abroad." He is a visiting examiner of the school and nobody can question the authenticity of his knowledge of the art.

The school's instructors, Chellappan, Suppiah and Bhavani were all trained by Sri Gopinath himself and have been lent to the school with his blessings.

It is the fond wish of the founder, well-wishers and of Gopinath, that the Jaffna School should become an All-Ceylon Centre for an art which was first revealed by Lord Brahma Himself to the Rishis of India and later expounded by them in the Bharata Natya Shastra. This wish should soon become a reality, for the school which was started only a year ago is already a success and has set up branches outside the town : at Ramanathan College, Uduvil Girls' College, and Nallore.

It will interest our public to know that women of fashionable society have in recent years taken to Bharata Natyam and other Oriental dancing as a social accomplishment.

Ram Gopal, referred to in England as India's greatest dancer and on the European Continent as the Indian Nijinsky, was highly impressed with the standard of dancing in the school. The pupils performed in his honour when he inspected the school during his Ceylon tour.

This introduction will be incomplete if no mention is made of the work of V. R. Rasanayagam, director and founder of the institution. Rasanayagam is an amateur actor of considerable ability and has been in the forefront of the cultural activities of his people for several years. He is both artist and director, producer and composer, impressario and inventor. One wishes him and his Kala Mandalam all success.

Progra

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------------------------------|
| 1. ORCHESTRA | ... | ... | ... | ... | UDUVIL GIRLS' COLLEGE |
| 2. POOJA DANCE | ... | ... | ... | ... | RAMANATHAN COLLEGE |
| 3. BHARATA NATYAM | ... | ... | ... | ... | THE SCHOOL OF DANCING,
JAFFNA |

(a) Alarippu.

(b) Jethiswaram—Anandabahiravai

(c) Patham—Natanam Adinar—Vasantha.

(a) **Alarippu.**—This dance is in the nature of an invocation, where the Artistes execute numerous neck, eye and hand movements, with quick rhythmic steps and has no particular meaning other than the exposition of exquisite dance forms and gestures.

(b) **Jethiswaram.**—Is a combination of time and sound effects in one aspect and the pleasing play of the eyes, neck movements, and spreading out of the hands and the beautiful rhythmic and fanciful patterns woven with the hands and feet from the simple to the complicated.

(c) **Patham.**—Is an interpretation of a song "NATANAM ADINAR."

So, Lord Siva danced in Kailas.
He asked the Rishis to assemble at Tillai
on the month of Thai to witness his
wondrous dance.

As he danced Adi Sesha who holds the
earth, swayed in fear and shook the
earth.

The waters of Ganga River gushed forth.
The Devas eulogized the Lord;
Krishna sang in joy.

Ornamented with hooded serpents the
hair of Siva swayed as he danced.

And his dance brought salvation to the
world.

ramme :

4. KATHAKALI—KAMBODHI VARNAM ... THE SCHOOL OF DANCING,
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This is the most interesting and difficult item in
“ Kathakali.”

It is a combination of Nirtha and Abhinaya
(dance movements depicting the meaning
of the song). The background music is set to
words, and this is depicted by gestures ac-
companied by a crescendo of quick and fast
changing feet patterns.

5. GOPIS DANCE ... THE SCHOOL OF DANCING,
JAFFNA

In this dance the Gopis, devotees of the Lord
Krishna, dance out of love and joy to a tune
produced on Krishna's flute.

The movements being only rhythmic and of
dance forms, and Lord Krishna in return
for their devotion makes them all feel that
he is dancing with every one of them.

6. ABHINAYAM ... JAFFNA COLLEGE

FOLK DANCES

7. HARVEST DANCE ... THE SCHOOL OF DANCING,
JAFFNA

This dance depicts the Peasants, Cultivators,
men and women working together to reap the
paddy, collect it into bundles, thresh it, and
bag the corn. The satisfaction at the suc-
cessful end of their toils, make them dance
with joy. They carry the heavy bags of corn
on their heads and depart to their homes.

8. KARAGAM DANCE ... ALAVEDDI SCHOOL

9. KAVADI DANCE ... SEENANKALLADY SCHOOL,
ALAVEDDI

10. WELL-DIGGERS DANCE ... AMERICAN MISSION
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This depicts a group of people digging and re-
moving the earth to make a well and they
help in singing to prevent their feeling the
weariness. The moment they strike water,
they dance with joy and complete their work.

11. BOAT SONGS ... ST. JAMES SCHOOL,
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Dravidian Art through the Ages

By

S. SANMUGANATHAN

(Conservation Assistant to the Archaeological Commissioner).

ART is the mirror of life. You may take a journey into the dim horizon of human emotions and examine throughout the corridors of time, you are struck by the basic unity expressed by men's hopes, fears, desires, aspirations, joys, horrors and beliefs. These they have left in the form of art and artifacts. Parallel with their evolution men have established contact with the Beautiful. From generation to generation they have wrought with pain and understanding colourful records of their way of life. These records are his artistic visions depicting if you analyse, three significant forms or three significant phases comprising CREATIVE URGE AND EMOTION, THE INWARD COUNTERPART THAT TAKES OUTWARD FORM and THE MENTAL IMAGE. These three qualities are those that help us to dissect and understand art whatever may be the period or place of origin.

Now, if we attempt to trace the course of the art of the Dravidian-language-speaking peoples it is obvious from its very origin it has always been a living tradition. It is fundamentally woven into the fabric of everyday life. The patrons have always been the Princes and people alike. Even before the entry of the Aryan-speaking peoples into India the relicts of artifacts at Mohenjo-Daro and alike sites show the attainment of a high degree of perfection in earthenware, metal work, architecture and in all religious, household and social art.

Though the peaceful penetration of the Aryan culture pushed further and further the older settlers into the peninsular South India, and into Baluchistan, Himalayas and the Vindhya hilly tracts the older art continued to survive. The presence of Brahui, a Dravidic dialect in Baluchistan and the presence of Nambudri "brahmins" in the Himalayas point to the fact that the entire continent of India had been under Dravidian occupation; as anthropologists rightly observe the sweepings of the plains are seen in the hills. During historic times the Chera, Chola and Pandya, the three great kingdoms in South India have played an important role in the welding together of a geographical unit and held back the successive invaders until the British came on the scene.

The architecture of the Pallavas together with those of the three historical styles referred to above have set a landmark in the evolution of architecture and plastic arts in the mainland of India. The Pallava period is noted for its classic and simple style in the now famous excavated and structural cave temples of South India. The pillared halls and the gopuras literally covered with filigree-like carvings are a significant contribution to the art of India. The paintings of Sittanavasal in Pudukkottai state and those of Padmanabhapuram in the Western Coast are but connecting links of mural art of North India and that of Ceylon.

The highlight in Ceylon is seen in the craft of metal work. The bronzes of the Saiva cult at Polonnaruwa are now world renowned as masterpieces of casting. Metal work in Dravidian culture has never lost its place as a household art. However poor each little hut and homestead may be each unit had carried over its own brass, copper and bronze utensils of everyday use kept polished gleaming like gold. There is no religious or social function in which this art does not play its role.

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Castings, carving and alike techniques in the hands of the Dravidian metal worker have always behaved almost like the soft material of soap or wax. The wares are noted for the intricate and exquisite workmanship. With a discovery of India by the West and the establishment of factories at commercial centres by the East India Company successors to John Company known popularly then as Compagnie Jehan made such wares popular to the West.

But no art succeeded equally well as the hand printed and hand woven textiles of South India in the European market. Masulipatam now reduced to an insignificant village was a great centre for the manufacture and export of these textiles. They are the proud possessions of ancient families in Europe and are handed today from generation to generation. The Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum owns a splendid collection of these examples exported in the early days of the East India Company. So much so it should be remembered the Lancashire mills were not only influenced but also fully copied this age-long art.

Ancestor worship and religious cults that go down in the common term called Hinduism are in fact occasions where annually exhibitions of the treasured forms of art are practised. The 'Kolam' is an art kept alive by the untutored and educated without exception. No celebrations or festivals of note take place without the drawing of these patterns with ground rice flour. These designs are almost subconsciously handed over through successive generations in the form of a feminine art. Alongside, the use of saffron as a disinfectant and as a cosmetic to enhance the golden hues of the human flesh is still a current habit among maidens and married women. It may be observed that this saffron played an important part in the old Thesavalamai. The make-up of eyes and the eyebrows is also an ancient heritage.

Music and the art of the dance had received systemisation in the early years of the Christian era. The mudras, the hastas, gestures and the art of symbolism had reached the zenith of perfection. The tradition so established had led to this art being called the language without words. This medium of art has still a greater contact with humanity from the very earliest times. The themes employed are inexhaustible. Myths, legends and religion were taught to the untutored people through this art. It was inevitable owing to the social conditions of the people of the East that mime was cleverly woven into descriptive songs to render the dances intelligible to one and all. Owing to its popular appeal the group and solo items last throughout the night. Favourite themes are still incidents from the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the exploits of Krishna.

Thus it can be seen the art of the Dravidians have always been a living tradition and can never be called a dead art at any period. Though there are periods of perfection and decline there has never been complete erasure and it can be so seen in the arts that continued in spite of various forms of fusion to survive among the Tamil-speaking peoples of Ceylon.

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Meesai Ulla....."
3. "Nantha Gopalanodu
Naan Aaduvane....."

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