

Ms Narthaki Nataraj

A Transgender Miracle from Chennai, India



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Love and Devotion

Indian mystics, musicians and dancers have a rich tradition of being in "Love" with God. So even when they dance or sing before the Lord in temples, there is a lot of romantic overtones in the style, lyrics and story. It is often said that the union of Man and God is similar to the Union between the Ying and Yang (Feminine and Masculine) aspects of creation.

In ancient Tamil Literature (dating as far back as 3000 BC), the Human aspect within us ("Jeevathma") is projected as the Female Lover" and the "Divine Aspect" (Paramathma) within us is projected as the "Male Lover".

A Musician or Dancer while performing at his or her best, achieves perfect union between the human and divine aspects within. When this happens, not only the artist, even the audience go through an elevating emotional-spiritual-divine experience.

Thus the original purpose of Dance and Music that originated in many parts of ancient India was not entertainment but a means of communion with the Divine, i.e. to experience Love.

Even contemporary "Bharatanatyam" owes its origin to the dances that were performed in the temples of Tanjore, the capital of many ancient Tamil Kingdoms. The original Tanjore Style is also known as "Nayaki Bhava" tradition. ("Nayaki" means Female Lover and "Bhava" means Emotions.) Today there are very few direct descendants of this tradition. Ms Narthaki is one of them.



Merging Genders



Genders merge not only in the artistic - spiritual world, but also sometimes in the physical world. People of the Third Gender, particularly in India, have always believed that God has specially created them with a Divine intention. Even today, the "Half-Man-Half-Woman" form is considered sacred and worshipped as "Arthanareeshwarar".



So when a person of the third gender, passionately plunges herself in to a life long journey of reaching the divine through dance, the result is miraculous beauty; a visual treat that pierces through all barriers of culture, language and religion.

Where the dancer and the dance disappear, the viewer too disappears, and what remains is pure experience.



From Struggle to Success



Ms Narthaki was born in to the third gender, in Madurai, one of the oldest cities of Tamil civilization. Unfortunately modern society did not appreciate her unique God given identity. She was subject to Social isolation, ridicule and poverty. However her determination and passion for dance brought her to Mr K.P. Kittappa Pillai of Tanjore, who agreed to take her in as a full time residential student.

Mr Kittappa Pillai was a great master and an authentic source of "Tanjore Nayaki Bhava tradition". He was a direct descendant of "Tanjore Quartet Brothers" - renowned musicians and dance masters who lived in the 17th century. Mr Kittappa Pillai was a treasure house of knowledge and experience preserved and passed down by his ancestors over 6 generations.

Ms Narthaki stayed with him for 15 years (till he died in 1999), learnt everything she could and practiced rigorously under his supervision. She also worked as his assistant in the Tanjore Tamil University.

The Tanjore Style that Ms Narthaki excelled in, is not only unique and rare, but is also difficult and demanding. To support her in her research and teaching, she was bestowed with a fellowship from the Sangeet Natak Akademi - Govt of India. She has also been placed at "Top Grade" status by an independent National level jury, a rare milestone only a handful have achieved.

Ms Narthaki has won many awards and performed in prestigious organizations and festivals. She will be visiting USA for the 3rd consecutive year in 2006 and is in the process of finalizing her tour plans for UK and Europe.

Traditional AND Contemporary



It may sound contradictory but Ms Narthaki is able to cut across barriers and emotionally touch people from different cultures and languages, precisely because she maintains without distortion the pristine purity of her tradition as it was originally created many centuries ago.

Western audiences often tell her that there are no words to explain what they experienced. It is not surprising because the objective is not to analyze and understand, but to experience a transcendental realm beyond language. In that sense Narthaki goes beyond entertainment and fulfills the innermost need of people living in today's modern world.

Ms Narthaki excels in choreographing contemporary themes like "Emancipation of Women", "Women's Rights" etc, by integrating some powerful elements of her traditional school.

The Demo Video CD enclosed contains one such story of "Ambai" who rose against the injustice done to her by a patriarchal society. (Ambai is a character in the Indian Epic Mahabharata. A short summary of her story is available in the annexure.)

Ms Narthaki also creates customized programs on contemporary themes suggested by her organizers. She will present them in her own unique style.

