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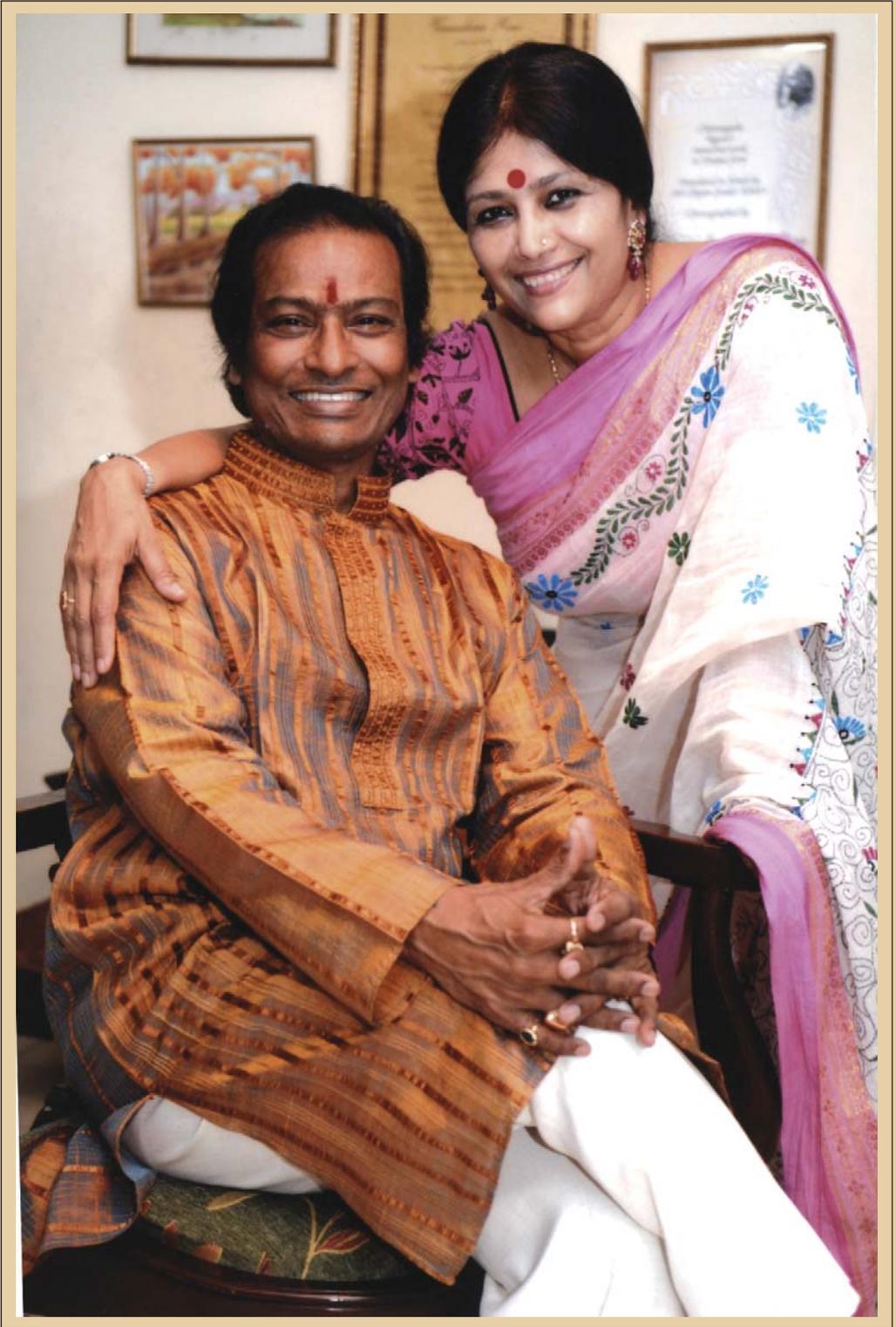
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July-September 2019

# Nartanam

*A Quarterly Journal of Indian Dance*



*Jaya Rama Rao  
Vanashree Rao*



*Vanashree and Jaya Rama Rao*

# *Nartanam*

*A Quarterly Journal of Indian Dance*

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*Nartanam*, founded by Kuchipudi Kala Kendra, Mumbai, now owned and published by Sahrdaya Arts Trust, Hyderabad, is a quarterly which provides a forum for scholarly dialogue on a broad range of topics concerning Indian dance. Its concerns are theoretical as well as performative. Textual studies, dance criticism, intellectual and interpretative history of Indian dance traditions are its focus. It publishes performance reviews and covers all major events in the field of dance in India and notes and comments on dance studies and performances abroad.

The opinions expressed in the articles and the reviews are the writers' own and do not reflect the opinions of the editorial committee. The editors and publishers of *Nartanam* do their best to verify the information published but do not take responsibility for the absolute accuracy of the information.

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Email: [editornartanam@gmail.com](mailto:editornartanam@gmail.com), [sahrdayaarts@gmail.com](mailto:sahrdayaarts@gmail.com)

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# NARTANAM

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AVINASH PASRICHA

INNI SINGH

PARTHIV

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KRISHNA CHAKRAVORTY

SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI ARCHIVES, NEW DELHI

## EDITORIAL

We are pleased to present this special issue on the renowned Kuchipudi gurus and exponents Jaya Rama Rao and Vanashree Rao, the first in the series of dance duos. The couple uphold all the old world charm and humility befitting great artists. Unassuming and straight in their interview and precise in sending the information that we sought, they proved to be a pleasure to document.

After a minor struggle with our very existence this year, we have picked ourselves up from the financial shambles and are ready to wield the pen for a couple of years more. With this issue we transition from documenting the first generation of dancers and gurus of independent India to the second. We continue with many constraints but there has never been an obstacle big enough to stop us from our pursuit of giving the reader the very best on dance. Over the years, gurus, practitioners, academics, students and other readers of dance have all expressed their gratitude for bringing out this visionary journal conceived by our late founders, G. M. Sarma and M. N. Sarma. It seems like yesterday when I was learning the ropes of dance writing, editing and publishing under their tutelage. Fresh in my memory is the occasional impasse created by being at loggerheads with each other on some or the other aspect of *Nartanam's* content or its presentation or even the number of pages, with G. M. Sarma (our Founder-Publisher) reminding us of the cost of printing even one extra page. My enthusiasm for *Nartanam* to be as elaborate in content as possible was painful to the publisher. Weilding the mantle now, I appreciate the burden of the increasing cost of running a print journal. However, the delight of having a rich issue in hand which adds to our treasure trove is parallel to none.

We are proud to present in this issue a collection of articles on the folk dances of Assam written by the experts of the land. Our team member Mallika Kandali, a respected dancer and scholar of Sattriya, has been devoted to the compilation of these articles.

**Madhavi Puranam**

## A Remembrance



Edward Oakley who passed on aged 78 on 8 July 2019 headed Obeetee, India's leading carpet and rug company. He was a patron of *Nartanam*. His family established the carpet business more than a century ago, in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh. Obeetee, so named after the three traders who set it up, Oakley, Bowden and Taylor, was the country's leading exporter of rugs and carpets.

Born in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, Edward was the son of Elaine and Wilfred Oakley. He was educated at Rossall school in Lancashire, after which he qualified as a chartered accountant. Aged 23, he returned to the family business in Mirzapur. In 2012 he retired and moved to Noida and pursued his passion for collecting modern Indian art.

Rudra Chatterjee of Obeetee says of Edward, "The many people of the Obeetee parivar who's lives were transformed because of our association with him are in grief. In his life Edward created our institution - he instilled in each of us the sense of belonging to this company, honed our professionalism, put integrity first and outcomes later. All of you who have known Edward know how exceptional he was. An argument with Edward wasn't for the faint hearted - he spoke with wit, wisdom and was not shy of offending, and would himself look forward to a spirited conversation. Evenings with Edward were always memorable. His warmth and affection was mostly reserved for the most vulnerable - weavers, staff, day-workers looked to him, and by extension look to the parivar in Obeetee - as guardians. Edward has nurtured Obeetee to where we are today. Obeetee completes hundred years as a company, and his spirit and memory will continue to guide us for years to come."



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Publishers, *Nartanam*



## Jaya Rama Rao and Vanashree Rao

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LEELA VENKATARAMAN

It was thirty four years ago in 1986, when the India Festival was being held in Russia that I first came into contact with the then young dancing Kuchipudi couple Vanashree Rao and Jaya Rama Rao. I had heard some of my friends refer to Rama Rao as the earliest traditional Kuchipudi Guru in Delhi who had graduated (1962-1967) from Siddhendra Kalakshetram situated in the village of Kuchipudi – the Mecca of the dance form so to speak, its official recognition after being set up in a proper building coming in the late fifties through the unstinted efforts of Banda Kanakalingeswar Rao, though right from the forties youngsters were being trained in the village



Jaya Rama Rao

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LEELA VANKATARAMAN is a Delhi based dance historian, author and commentator on the dance scene of India for over five decades. Her incisive writings on various aspects of dance have earned her wide readership. She is a regular contributor to *Nartanam*, *Sruti*, *Narthaki.com* and has contributed to journals like *TDR* and *Pulse*. She has participated in seminars and symposiums on dance worldwide and is the author of several books. The renowned critic is a recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award.

# Folk culture of Dimasa Kacharis of Assam

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DHARMESWAR DUARAH

Since ancient times Dimasa Kacharis have been living in Assam. The word 'Dimasa' can be broken into: *di* = water, *ma* = huge or large, *sa* = children. That is children of large water-body (or river). They call themselves the children of the large river or the Brahmaputra or the people inhabiting the Brahmaputra valley. The meaning of the word Dimapur can likewise be understood as *di* = water, *ma* = large or huge, *pur* = city, that is they are the inhabitants of the city of Dimapur which they established as their capital in the Dhansiri valley. It is to be noted that before the Ahoms descended on Assam in the early part of the thirteenth century, the landmass on the south bank of the Brahmaputra river, right from Dikhow river to the Kolong river was under the Kachari kingdom.

Prominent among the earliest indigenous tribes of Assam, Dimasa Kacharis belong to the Assam-Burman sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Tibeto-Burmans migrated from the south of China through the rivers Brahmaputra, Irawadi, Mekong, etc., to settle in Assam, Burma (Myanmar) and Indochina, comprising today's Thailand, Malayasia, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, etc.

Dimasa Kacharis are courageous, honest and straightforward. They have a good power-packed physique. A Dimasa family is formed under a male head. It includes the wife of the head, their children and the unmarried brother and sisters of the family head. After marriage, a girl goes to her husband's house from her home. Likewise, after marriage the boys separate from their parents to establish their own households and start a family. The husband generally has the larger say in the household affairs than the wife. Familial expenses from the earnings are

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DHARMESWAR DUARAH is an expert who has extensively studied the Dimasa Kacharis of Assam.

# Folk Dances of Goalpara

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SWAPNANIL BARUA

Goalpara, which was the westernmost district of Assam, is a melting pot of cultures. The old district has now been divided into several new districts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Bongaigao, South Salmara, Kokrajhar and Chirang. While the first three have a mixed population of Assamese, Koch Rajbongshis, immigrant and indigenous Muslims, South Salmara is predominantly Muslim, while Chirang and Kokrajhar have a dominant Bodo presence, with a sizeable Adivasis, immigrant Muslim and Nepali population also present. Thus there are people of all communities and religions, who have made their home there and this has added a multi-hued flavor to their culture, with marked cross-cultural influences. In these districts, we find a common cultural affinity in spite of the presence of tribals, non-tribals, Hindus, Muslims, Christians; who live together, have their cultural differences, but are now trying to work out their own cultural influences as an extension of the assertion of political spaces and areas of influence.

Renewed interest in their own cultures has prompted the communities to delve and develop their folk repertoire, be it in song or dances. The state as a whole is now getting to see and hear more of this treasure trove, through the medium of folk fairs and culture fests as also television and print media. The culture of the area has also been influenced by its proximity to Bangladesh, Cooch Behar of West Bengal and Bhutan. Politically too, the area has been in and out of Assam since historical past, which also has led to the dominant cultures of Assam and Bengal making its presence felt in the local culture. The proximity to the jungles of Bhutan has created a unique livelihood of elephant trapping in the region and along with the buffalo herders; has given rise to a sub-culture of its own, which transcends religion, ethnicity, creating its own songs and music, pining and pathos,

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SWAPNANIL BARUA is a former IAS officer, cultural activist and organizer, play writer, author, art critic and orator. He is based in Guwahati, Assam.

# The Rhythms of Darrang

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LOPA DAS

The sociology of the performing arts has gained increasing importance in recent years, revealing a variety of theoretical views. For some, music, dance and theatre have inherent meanings, while others hold that these are socially constructed. These forms are regarded as collaboratively produced in specific socio-economic contexts, even as they become manifestations of a culture's established values. These in turn become the data for political economies of performance.

From a kinesthetic perspective, rhythm is core to human evolution. Evolutionary scientists hold that our ancestors began to mimic bodily representations in a prelinguistic gestural society, whereby aesthetic control over their motor functions led to the development of rhythm. This capacity has remained with us even as we have language today. Now we harness that capacity in cultural forms like music and dance, even in sports. Whether in folk or classical forms, rhythm is an indispensable part of dance. Indeed, it is the dynamics of dance which are fundamental to its grammar. Earlier, in prehistoric times, cultural expressions may have included clapping, foot-tapping and the use of the humble stick to maintain rhythm. Along with these characteristics, we also find the simulation of the movement of various birds and animals in dance forms.

Percussion instruments soon became the mainstay for the maintenance of rhythm common to most dance forms over the world. We readily give in to the appeal of rhythm, notwithstanding which part of the world a dance form may belong to. These instruments have also performed a variety of socio-cultural purposes which we may trace back to the symbolic heralding of chieftains and kings; as auspicious signs during warfare, processions, predictions, signals of danger, and to ward off

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LOPA DAS is an exponent of the Likiri/Api Ojapali of the Byas and Suknanni forms. She is a practising ophthalmologist in Guwahati, Assam.

# Dances of Tea Tribes

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RUPLEKHA BORBORA DAS

Assam is a beautiful land where different tribes of plains and hills reside together with amity and harmony. Each of them has its own cultural heritage. The tea garden labourers who were primarily brought to Assam from different parts of India by British rulers for working in tea gardens have their own cultural and religious identity. They practice different kinds of worship and have their own cultural identity. They have different types of dances as discussed below.

## JHUMOIR DANCE

Jhumoir dance is one of the most popular dances of the tea garden community. It is an indispensable part of Karam Puja performed on the *ekadashi tithi* of the month of Bhadra. Though this dance is primarily performed by women dancers, men take part in it with accompanying musical instruments.

The young ladies perform this dance in a row by holding on to each others' waist. The first lady of the row is called *Agalidnandee*. The female dancers repeat the last two lines of the song sung by the male leading vocalist while performing this dance.

Jhumoir dance is performed continuously from the evening to the next morning. As the dance progresses, the rhythm of *Madal* takes separate terms; the rhythm and expression of the song also changes step by step. The starting song of the Jhumoir dance is called *Jhingafuliya* song. *Jhingaful* is a *Jikaphool* (a kind of vegetable-flower). The *Jikaphool* (Sin Qua) is very beautiful to look at and it blooms for a short period.

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RUPLEKHA BORBORA DAS is a Sattriya Dancer. She has obtained a Ph.D in Sattriya dance and is an Assistant Professor, Department of Performing Arts, Dibrugarh University, Assam.

## *Abhinaya Chandrika* – Moonbeam of Acting

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ILEANA CITARISTI

In spite of all the controversies about authenticity of manuscripts and differences of opinions, the treatise on Odissi dance or Udra Gandharva attributed to Maheswar Mohapatra, a poet at the court of Anangabhima Deva (17 century) *Abhinaya Chandrika* is an important text which deserves to be studied by all practitioners of the present form of Odissi dance.

The three printed versions at our disposal although based on different manuscripts and having some discrepancies in terms of omissions of some verses or transcriptions of others, give us a fairly reliable and comprehensive version of the text.

The first printed version was published in August 1967 by Pandit Sadashiv Rath Sharma through the Raghunandan Library in Puri. This version is said to be based on two found manuscripts, one collected from Pandit Harihar Mishra of Dharakote in Ganjam and the other (illustrated) from Kunjabihari Mohanty of Kodala. The text includes all the three Khanda or sections, Nritya Khanda, Bhava Khanda and Chanda Khanda.

The second printed version is the one published by Kalavikash Kendra, Cuttack in 1999, translated and edited by Dhrendra Nath Pattnaik. The manuscript on which this version is based seems to be the one which was exhibited in the National Museum at Delhi in 1964. It includes only the Nrutya Khanda (284 verses).

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ILEANA CITARISTI, an Italian by birth, holds a PhD in Psychoanalysis and Eastern Mythology. Having worked in the traditional and experimental theatre in Europe, Ileana moved to India in 1979. She trained in Odissi under Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and in Chhau under Guru Hari Nayak. A renowned dancer, choreographer, guru, and scholar, Ileana has authored books on martial practices of Odisha, and Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra among others. She has many awards and honours to her credit including the Padma Shri. She lives in Bhubaneswar and teaches at her institute, Art Vision. She is the guest editor of the special issue of Nartanam Vol XVIII no 3 on Jayantika.

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