

elicitations to Mrs. Kalanidhi Narayanan

—V. A. K. RANGA RAO

By my guru Sri Malladi Ramakrishna astri's blessing, I have the honour of eliciting Mrs. Kalanidhi Narayanan on being conferred the Nrithyachoodamani title by Sri Krishna Gana Sabha. I thank Mr. R. Yagnaraman, its secretary, for hoosing me out of so many dance enthusiasts, savants and connoisseurs at his all.

There are many honours in the country and these honours are not new to Mrs. Kalanidhi Narayanan. But there is something unique about this Nrithyachoodamani award. Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, is actually Sri Krishna Natya Sabha, the only Sabha in the city of Madras, which does spectacular justice to dance. While other Sabhas trace their ancestry, boast about their achievements half a century ago, and talk about the Exalted Art of Dance, R. Yagnaraman and Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, just go about doing something about Dance, today. As Krishna teaches in his Geetha, do your duty and leave the rest to Him.

The eminent place Sri Krishna Gana Sabha has in the hearts of dancers and dance enthusiasts, is purely the outcome of the secretary doing what he thinks is his duty. Naturally, the result of this integrity is the exceptional value the Dance World places on this title. The previous winners' list reads like a roster of glory - Padma Subrahmanyam, Lakshmi Viswanathan, S. Kanaka, the erstwhile Kumari Kamala, Sudharani Raghupathy, C. V. Chandrasekharan, Sobha Naidu, Brjjumaharaj, V. P. Dhananjayan, Krishna-veni Lakshmanan, Sonal Mansingh, Kanak

Rele, Alarmel Valli, Yamini Krishnamoorthy, Singhajit Singh, Chitra Visweswaran, It is hardly necessary that in awards like this, the seniority of the dancers should determine the order. Or practical. For instance, fifteen years ago, Mrs. Kalanidhi Narayanan was just starting on her comeback trail, this time as a teacher.

I have known Kalanidhi Narayanan from the time she started teaching, at Bharathiya Vidya Bhavan. At that time, she was a little tentative in her approach. Incidentally I am her oldest and best disciple, the best here referring to the attitude if not achievement. As a student I found her teaching, even in those early days, something of a revelation. One of the first pieces she taught me was 'Mogudochi pilachedu' a piece I knew from my childhood by my close association with a temple dancer of Sri Venugopala of Bobbili, her name is Sitaram. I thought I knew all that there is to know about this but Mrs. Kalanidhi's teaching made me realise that what I thought I knew, has only a small segment of a beautifully wide vista.

Over the years, she has improved as a dancer, teacher and an evaluator of dance and dance pieces. When she came back to dance, it was with a vengeance, with a pent up force suddenly unleashed. She applied sheer grit to seeing dance, expanding her repertoire, exposing herself to other disciplines. Her open mind contributed a great deal, I am sure, to the well-rounded personality she is today.

She claims a lack of pedantic knowledge. May be it is true but look what some pedants are doing, bringing a bad name to

it, a boring visage to it and look what Kalanidhi Narayanan and her disciples are doing to dance. Creating new vistas or beauty.

She takes help from many sources, in languages, music, literature and specialised learning. But what she finally does is what she believes to be right. This way, she deserves all the accolades and any criticism.

In the early years, attempts were there to faze her into submission to one particular kind of thought, the empty and facile and feeble kind of thought that unthinkingly calls a parakiya padam like 'Mogudochi' a devotional song. Or take her to task for her introduction to her celebrated Kshetrappa programme for telling the truth about Kshetrappa. Or for including 'Kathavai sathadi', in her programme, a song that painted a picture of an avaricious samanya.

She didn't stand up and fight; and risk breaking down of needed relationships. But bent and let the bad flood of invective flow past her. In time, she came to stand on firm ground, with age, experience stripping the masks off the masqueraders to tell her where exactly they stood.

That is why Kalanidhi is respected today as a teacher, friend, guide and performer.

All along, my attitude to her in class was absolute obedience. And outside, a cautious criticism. This caution derived from a knowledge of the meticulous way in which she works. Still, I have my own bones to pick.

Why doesn't she teach male students? Does she think that they are second class citizens in the world of dance? Or is she afraid that the men are so potentially good at dance, that once trained by her individually, they will far outstrip her female

students? At her age and at this age, is it necessary to differentiate between the genders, in the imparting of vidya? In the past centuries, it is argued that women were denied the right to higher branches of learning! Should its converse be practiced today? Why? What purpose does it serve? I wish Sri Krishna, Secretary Supreme of this Sabha of Life, makes her change her mind and give, the benefit of her learning to all without any prejudice and bias.

The fact that she eschews to totally the sound of anklebells from her dancing and teaching, has been another perplexing factor. The best dancers, dancers known for their abhinaya excellence in the middle decades of this century, all of them, without a single exception, used the sound of the bells to enhance the apple of their dance. To bring into the realm of dance, a purely aesthetic exercise. Whether it was a trippy piece like 'Era rara,' or a weepy plaint of a to-be-maligned wife, like 'Eppadi manam thunindado' or a joyous paean to the glory of God, like 'Krishna nee begane baro.'

All great artists have their own idiosyncracies and the habit she has of starting some of the padams, some of the time, with the anupallavi, can be categorised as one. Whether or not she can do justice to such a piece is not the question at all. She might, just possibly might. But what about all her students? What about the hapless audience to whom 'Mogudochi' is announced as a devotional piece and is commenced with the anupallavi to which the mani-hued beauties of Krishna are depicted? What are they to think? How are they to latch on to the correct import of the song before half of it is over!

Now I come to the last point in my short litany. This concerns everybody, not only Mrs. Kalanidhi but all dancers, all

nce teachers, not only Mr. Yagnaraman
id Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, but all
ibhas, all secretaries. Why, it concerns
ery right thinking person, who is
ncerned with the quality of life obtained
the society.

All of you read the papers in the
orning. Are you not appalled by the
ount of violence, the sheer amount of
nseless murder and pointless strife?
hat are you doing about it?

Some years ago when some friends of
ine were doing a piece about the scarcity
water I said social consciousness is
l very fine but please leave Bharata-
tyam out of it. I take back my words.
ery art form, should now involve itself
vitiating this murderous climate. Bharata-
tyam or Bhagavadgeeta, Geetagevindam
Govindanama sankeertanam, should be
ressed to the very needed bridge-
ilding between people, regions, religi-
is, castes and communities.

Gandhiji is reported to have said that
he'd rather see Hinduism dead than see
untouchability alive. I don't say that. I
can't say that. Arts, all fine arts, perfor-
ming arts should live, thrive, and strive to
unite people. When the ancients said
'Sarve janah sukhino bhavantu', I'm sure
they did not mean people of only one
religion. When Vasudhaiva Kutumbam is
proclaimed, it is not limited to people of
one caste. We are human beings first and
last.

I don't tell you how you should go about
doing this. That is left to your individual
genius. Don't ask whether you should do
Bharatantyaam to a Bhangda song, to unite
defferent regions. I am human. I don't
have all the answers. But do something,
in your own art form, in your medium.
And help stop this senseless shedding of
innocent blood.

May Sri Krishna bless all of you, Mrs.
Kalanidhi Narayanan, R. Yagnaraman's
Sri Krishna Gana Sabha. □

