

Felicitations to Padmabhushan Alarmel Valli

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(At the Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Natya Kala Conference on 14th Dec. 2004)

From 1966, in the Tamil month of Chittirai, when Alarmel Valli entered the stage to present her Arangetram, She danced, and danced and continues to dance. There is no not a single country where her anklets have not sounded the jingling sound of Bharathanatyam, where her dancing feet have not stamped the glory of Indian jatis, where her agile limbs have not encompassed the space with beautiful patterns of nritta, where her audience have not experienced the immeasurable aesthetic joy by her enthralling bhavas and there is no media that has not lavished praises on her as a world class creative artist. And rightly did our daily the Hindu captured her true form as "The world is her stage".

Valli's achievement can never be more fittingly celebrated and honoured than this function this morning. While the conferment of the Padmabhushan title by the Government of India represents love, affection and appreciation of our entire nation, Valli's achievement, the honour of Chevalier on her represents the tribute paid by the whole world on Valli for her exquisite art and what is more both the honours have come during the same year.

Tell me friends is there any other institution that is better suited to celebrate this unique achievement than the Krishna Gana Sabha. I congratulate the Krishna Gana Sabha and its energetic Secretary Yagnaraman for continuing to be in the forefront of all such events. It is a great pleasure and privilege to be associated with this function. In honouring Valli, I feel I am being honoured and all those assembled here feel that they are being honoured. Valli, as a child of this soil, we are all proud of you, your achievements and your contribution.

If I have only to recall the countries visited by Valli it is very simple. I need to say only "All Countries in the World", in the East and the West. She has danced in the all well known countries like Italy, Greece, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Russia, Netherlands, Yugoslavia, UK, USA, Canada, Australia, Tasmania, Mexico, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and so on. Valli has danced in all the leading theatres of all these countries; at Basel International festival in Switzerland the Hammoniel festival in Hamburg Germany, the Teatro Olympico in Rome, the Avignon International festival in France, the Barcelona International festival in Greece, Sama Art festival in the Queen Elizabeth Hall London, the

Bergen International festival in Norway, and the Theatre de le Ville in Paris. In all these countries Valli has danced not only in one city but in several cities of each country, and not once but many times.

I would also like to bring to your notice, by citing a few examples, how the press welcomed her performance. Twenty-Five years ago the Egyptian Paper Al Akhbar wrote "The Dance enchantress a legend from India expressed Lyric form". Asian Times from UK also wrote 25 years ago "Dance of Love and Devotion Alarmel Valli has performed in most of the cultural capitals of the world and is one of the finest dancers of Bharatanatyam today". Note some of our Indian Headlines. "Angel dancing", "Evergreen Valli pay homage to Sangam Poetry", "Mesmorizing Power of Alarmel Valli", "Venetian crowd held in complete thrall", "Making nature the landscape of her mind" and so on. These reflect the responses she created by her performances at various places at different times.

It is also necessary to know some reviews from world connoisseurs to have a feel of Valli's contribution.

Mehdat Assam from Cairo wrote :

"A living legend from Age-old India.... Valli has swayed in dream, like a fantasy and moved about in the transparent waters of the ethereal world. At one time, she was a poem whose line flowed on, as delicately as the soft breeze, at another, she was a vigorous winding passion, soon to return to her quiet tenderness. The movements of her body spoke louder than her words. Human feelings of all kinds crystallized in the bends and curves of her body in the spark of her eyes and in the movements of her hands. Whether her feet tripped and in what manner her body swayed, her fingers lock and unlock themselves to convey meanings of love, jealousy, acceptance, resistance desertion... while she moved in delicacy and precession as would a wild deer.

I have seen choicest of world classical dance. I watched American Bellerina, Isodora Duncan, the Russian Anna Pavlova and American Martha Graham but I profess that Bharathanatyam given by Alarmel Valli in Cairo was something totally different, different in its profound depths and exquisite execution. I saw in Valli India's true spirit, her history, immortal legends, her religion and philosophies. I saw remarkable capability I have never seen before. She presented India's rich and heritage which lived on through thousands of years unchanged to be carried to us in its genuineness and purity, in its eminence and creativity. The review written in 1980 seems to sum up Valli's Achievement and contribution.

Sir Peter Wakefield, Chairman of Asia House wrote on seeing Valli's performance I wish to tell how thrilled we were with Valli's super performance. This reaction has been expressed by all the guests upon the Prince of Wales table and others I have spoken to. For myself I have never enjoyed a dance performance more.. every movement was full of grace and a joy to watch.

Joachin Schmid from Germany on seeing Valli's dance at the Old Opera Frankfurt, wrote a long beautiful review but I shall cite only a small part that reads "Valli has been always remained faithful to the majestic Pandanallur form of Bharathanatyam. She does not simplify forms, rather she elevates them to the very pinnacle of aesthetic and technical refinement. Her personal charm permeates the traditional form, without affecting the basic religious character of the dance. In Valli's dance the Indian Deities who one has to be basically imagined as dancing beings, float visibly on stage. Her twists and small leaps are perfect and controlled as the gestures of her hands or the small movements of her eyes and eyebrows".

Finally why not we look to our own reviews; our Subbudu mama the greatest of our dance connoisseurs has to say about Valli.

"Valli's vivacity is something to be marveled at. So is the manner in which she choreographs graceful adavus to match the most intricate jathis. Fleet footed and gazell eyed she occupied the entire stage in her animations, keeping pirouetting like a deer".

To end this citation let me give a very fine opinion from an American spectator Mich Greenberg; he witnessed Valli's dance at New York and wrote "From here I drove to Washington DC to see her again. I would fly to Los Angeles for her program tomorrow, and then to wherever else she goes next".

That is how the audience the world over have felt experiencing Valli's dance.

What is the secret of Valli's success? Her pleasing qualities, vinaya, dedication and constant practise.

There is more that deserve mention. That is Valli's mother who is behind all her success.

Valli all of us delight in your dance, experience the aesthetic beauty of your nritta and look forward to seeing more of your dance. I congratulate you for all your success, on my behalf, on behalf of all those assembled here, these galaxy of most accomplished dancers here, on behalf of the whole Nation and the whole world. May you live long with all prosperity and fame ever dancing.