

Lata Surendra

## The Quest for Perfection

*A dance performer, teacher and choreographer of repute, Lata Surendra's performances covering over three decades, have been met with wide acclaim in India and abroad. A stickler for perfection, she does not compromise with the art and the intricate tradition it envelops.*

**D**ancer Lata Surendra's 'Anjali Bharata Natyam Research Trust' has brought to the forefront several talented youngsters in the field of Bharata Natyam who have been recipients of scholarships, awards, recipients of the Singar Mani and are graded artists of DD Mumbai. Her student list includes several celebrities including Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. Lata has presented over seventy-five productions that have regaled audiences in all the major festivals associated with dance. Her dance ballets encapsulate a vast spectrum of themes dealing with the compositions of the saints of the Bhakti cult and the Vaishnava Sampradaya, the great Indian epics, the works of poets in various languages, contemporary themes dealing with environment, woman of substance, global warming etc. She has presented unique themes like Sleeping Beauty, Birth of Jesus, Dnyaneshwari, Shivaputra Samhaji Raje for DD Mumbai and at Purander Fort Pune, commemorating the 350th



Lata Surendra- the dancer

birth anniversary of the Maratha king Sambaji Raje. Lata has used this medium of dance as a didactic medium to unfold unique themes such as *Ek Shaam gandhi ke naam*, *Manini*-the woman of substance, *Ritu Samhara*, *St Francis & The Canticle of the Creatures*, *Darkness to light*, *Mahavira*, *Hariharam vande*, etc. She has presented over 25 productions for the *Janmashtami* celebrations of ISKCON. She also presents regular programmes for charitable organizations like *Deeds*, *Prerna*, the Rotary and the Lions Club etc. In addition to teaching in the city proper for over 22 years, she is for the past 19 years teaching several under-privileged children in the western suburbs of Mumbai.

### Awards and Accolades

Lata is a recipient of the Sahitya Shiromani Nelluvai Award for Bharata Natyam and the Award for excellence in Bharata Natyam from the Mohini Attam Nritya Kalakshetra. She was felicitated by Nateshwar Natya Kala Mandir (Mumbai) with the title 'Bharata kala Nipuna'. She was also felicitated by the Rotary Club (Thane) and Vasai Prabhodhini Trust, for her contributions to the Art form.

She has specially choreographed *varnams* to suit little children. Her desire is to inculcate into her children, the love

and reverence, she herself holds and cherishes for this rich art form of Bharata Natyam.

Lata is a regular recipient of the Grants accorded by the Ministry of Human Resources, (Dept of Culture, New Delhi). They have entailed her to conduct workshops, Lecture demonstrations, Seminars and unique presentations with the fusion of various classical styles of dance. She is also in the panel of CCRTC (Centre for cultural resources and training-HRD, New Delhi) and a member of the International Dance Council affiliated with UNESCO. Her articles on Dance have been published in various dance magazines and journals and her Book 'in Transit' is today a part of the UNESCO Dance Library.

### Childhood

Lata was born and brought up in Mumbai. She spent her childhood in Shivaji Park, Dadar. Her father is the late K S Parameshwar or Churakulam Chetan as he was fondly known to Malayalees in Mumbai during those days. He was a businessman from Haripad who came to Mumbai in 1930, and bought his tea consignments from Churakulam Tea estate. Lata learnt Malayalam and was initiated into the richness of Malayalam literature, largely because of her father's influence. Her





Lata Surendra taking the Master Class at Malaga, Spain for the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Congress Dance Council, UNESCO.

mother, A Thankamma, now 86, hails from Pullangadi, ('the jetty after Champakulam' she says,) lives in Dadar and is a life member of the Mahila Samajam. Lata says that it was her father's love of the language and her mother's involvement with the Samajam that attracted her to the world of arts. Onam and other celebrations at the Mahila Samajam were platforms where she performed and honed her dancing talent.

### Initiation into Bharata Natyam

Lata started learning Bharata Natyam under Kalaimamani Guru Shri Mani of Kalasadan. She did her arangettam at the age of seven at Podar College in Matunga. She studied under Guru Krishnankutty and Guru Kuttykrishnan, and later Kalaimamani Guru T S Kadirvelu Pillai. Lata was Kadirvelu's disciple for 22 years

Commemorating 30 years of her career as a dance teacher, she presented

a dance programme *Vandanam* as a tribute to her Guru Kathirvelu in 2005.

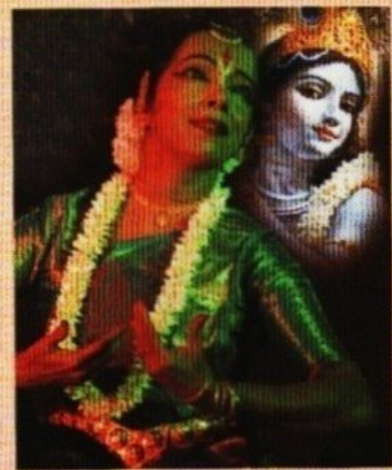
Through the well known Malayalam stage veteran Nanappan, Lata became aware of the magic of words, and the technique of stagecraft.

Another great influence on her life has been dancer from Shanti Niketan, Guru Bankim Sinha whose skillfully choreographed energizing folkdances brought the flavours of regions on to the stage and helped her understand the subtle nuances of choreography. "The transition from student to a teacher came in early with folk forms serving as the base for me to back all my solo classical recitals," she says.

Lata studied at the Convent Girls' High School in Dadar run by the Fransiscan Hospitalier sisters. She presented a ballet encapsulating their lives at their centenary year celebrations in Mumbai and the sisters sponsored her to perform the ballet in Portugal and Spain.

She completed her Masters in Literature and Aesthetics and Diploma in

"Dance is a prayer, a prayer of the individual soul, elucidating the quintessence of the joy of reaching out to the Universal soul. It elevates life from the mundane levels of survival to the sublime. In order to be receptive to it, the audience has to be aware of the symmetry embracing the dance idiom, the absorbing syntax and the subtle nuances enframing and embellishing it, for it is the bond between the Rasikas and the dancers that has kept this tradition alive through the times. Through the assimilating of the pain that comes with perfection, the dancer sieves an order out of all chaotic interjections in life around and weaves a cosmos amidst a chaos, breaking barriers of caste, creed and religion and urging mankind to partake of the pristine stream of life flowing by us, around us and within us."



Advertising and Public Relations. She was working with the Canara Bank for 16 years, all the while pursuing and honing her dancing talents and choreographing and presenting dance shows.

Lata married Suri Menon, an Aircraft Leasing and Charter Consultant, a native of Thrissur and a resident of Khar who worked as CEO of LSM Air Charter in Australia. He returned to India on account of his father's illness and they met and married. They have a son Madhusudan S Menon who is pursuing his second year architecture in Mumbai. Madhusudan is a grade Eight Musician (Electronic Key-Board) of the TRINITY College, London. He has won the National level prize for painting organized by Camlin. He has also been featured by DD Mumbai in presenting Christmas Carols for Christmas and also renders instrumental support for some of Lata's ballets.



Lata presenting a paper at the 28th World Congress UNESCO Argentina on Environmental Awareness through Bharatanatyam