

THARA VARMA SREEKANT

Versatile Kathakali Artiste

- Lakshmi V

Thara Varma Sreekant is an artiste who has carved a niche for herself in the art of kathakali. Hers is a perfect blend of rasa and bhava that has been captured and projected in her dance.

Born into the renowned Poonjar Royal Family, Thara Varma Sreekant took her first lessons in classical dance by the age of 4. She started learning the nuances of Kathakali by the age of 7 under Nelliyyodu Vasudevan Namboothiri. By the age of 10 Thara ascended the stage for her Arangettam alongside names such as Late Kottakal Shivarmanashan, Late Kalamandalam Shankaran Ebranthiri (Music), Late Kalamandalam Venmani Haridas (Music), Late Kalamandalam Keshavan (Chenda) and Kalamandalam Shankara Warriar (Maddalam). Her dedication to the art was encouraged by



The young Thara Varma

the Late Kerala Varma Raja, Poonjar Palace.

Thara Varma has a decade of training under the tutelage of masters like Late Padmasree

Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair Ashaan,

Nelliyyodu Vasudevan Namboodiri and FACT Padmanabhan Ashaan and R L V Damodara Pisharadi.

In an illustrious career spanning four decades, she has shared stages with the biggest names in

Kathakali such as Late Padmasree Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair Ashan, Late Kottakal Shivarman Ashaan, Padmasree Kalamandalam Gopi Ashan, Late Kalamandalam Shankaran



Embranthiri, Late Kalamandalam Keshavan, Late Kalamandalam Hyderali, Late Kalamandalam Venmani Haridas, Kalamandalam Nelliyothu Vasudevan Namboothiri and FACT Padmanabhan etc.

She has portrayed pacha kathi characters and sthree veshams donned roles of Ravana, Duryodhana, Nala, Karna, Bheema, Kunti, and Damayanti etc. Besides enactments, Thara has also helped promote the art through workshops and cultural programs.

She has spearheaded over 150 live performances and cultural shows all over the country and held workshops at Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology University (CEPT), Ahmedabad, Pondicherry French Consulate, Secunderabad Malayali Association and Malayali Samajams in Mumbai. She was

the first to organize a Kathakali recital in Thane, which saw participation by Padmasree Kalamandalam Gopi, Late Kottakal Shivarman and Late Kalamandalam Hydrali.

Mahila Navarasa Award by Jwala Publications in 2011, three time winner of the K.K. Raja Smaraka Kathakali Competition held in Thripunithura (1981, 1982, 1983) organized by the Thripunithura Kathakali Kendram, and the Kerala Youth Festival for Kathakali (1975).

Thara also has to her credit the dance ensemble, 'Sketches of Kerala' which she choreographed and directed. It brought together the many art forms such as Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, and other classical dance and rural folk forms of the Dravidian culture for the first time for a non Malayalee audience.

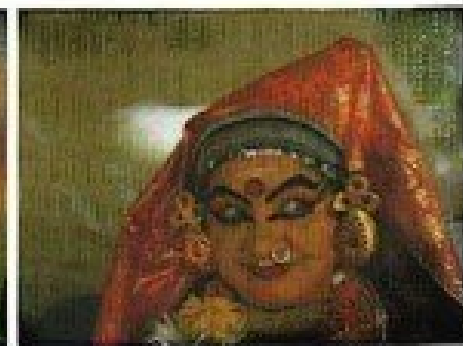


Thara Varma receiving the 2011 Jwala Award. Sreekanth Nair on Thara's right.

Awards and Recognitions

A senior member at the Thripunithura Kathakali Kendram Ladies Troupe, Thara Varma has been the recipient of numerous accolades such as the Mumbai

The most recent was her contribution and participating in the largest ever Kaikottikali where more than 2,600 women came together as a part of the Mumbai Pooram Festival to enter the Guinness Book of World Records.



Thara Varma in various Kathakali characters



Thara Varma with the Guinness World Record certificate for participation in the Mahakshikottikali held in Dombivli



Felicitations by Justice Smt. Janki Amma on the occasion of 100th Stage performance of Thripunithura Vanitha Kathakali Troup

Contribution to the art

Currently, Thara Varma heads the Sarga Kalakshetra, a sister concern of Stage India Academy, and is also the Director of Stage India Academy, a body that promotes art and talent among those who lack the opportunity. She works relentlessly in keeping alive and nurturing the ethnic art of Kathakali. Through her indelible contribution to the pursuit of the exquisite dance drama, Thara Varma has chosen to define herself.

Family

Thara's father is the late Varanakode Subramania Nambudiri and her mother belonged to Poonjar, being Shreemathy Thamburatti at the Poonjar Palace. She has an elder sister and elder brother working in banks in Kerala, and a younger brother in Bangkok, and a

younger sister settled in Kerala.

Her husband Sreekant Nair is South Indian Cell Head, Siva Sena. He hails from Thiruvananthapuram, and is a businessman, politician and artiste who plays the edakka, acts on the stage and is Chairman



of Stage India. Her elder son Rakesh is working with a leading advertising company in Mumbai while the younger one is working with a private company in

Kozhencherry, Emakulam.

Thara Varma Sreekant feels that all samajams want to include Kathakali in their celebrations showcasing the art as the brand of Kerala. But when it comes to funding for a Kathakali performance, the organisers are reluctant to shell out money. This saddens her a lot. There are instances when she has had to spend from her own pocket to pay the artistes she has brought from Kerala but she does it due to her passion for this art. Organisers have no hesitancy to spend for bringing film stars and other artistes from Kerala and bear their expenses but rarely for Kathakali. Thara wants the current generation to appreciate and promote this ancient art. Her organisation always tries to extend a helping hand to the deserving Kathakali artistes. ■

