Threads of the One Living Prakriti

Harmonizing Natya and Ayur Shastra

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There are evenings in the cultural life of a city when the proscenium ceases to be mere architecture and transforms into a sanctum of kinetic healing, where breath meets scripture and movement becomes medicine. Curated by renowned Bharatanatyam exponent, teacher, choreographer, writer, and researcher Dr. Lata Surendra at Mumbai's NCPA on November 18, *The Living Prakriti: Where Body Meets Text – Harmonizing Natya and Ayur Shastra in the Golden Age* was one such rare, luminous confluence. Anchored in the timeless wisdom of Ayurveda—where the human form is revered not as an instrument of spectacle, but as Prakriti, a living ecosystem governed by Prana, the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), and 107 vital Marma junctions—the curation celebrated artists who have crossed seventy winters as living palm-leaf manuscripts. Through their unhurried mastery, the biological transitions of age became cosmic transformations, proving that when the soul absorbs tradition, dance becomes nature itself.

The Living Prakriti as Sacred Lineage opened the evening through Manipuri doyenne Padmashri Darshana Jhaveri, a living icon trained since childhood under Guru Bipin Singh. What a graceful reaching out it was - Swaraprabandha, rooted in classical Sankirtan and Rasleela traditions, she began in the serene stillness of Pung Raga and Rag Alap. As her body traced the unbroken figure-eight and serpentine geometries of the Naga Bandha, choreography became internal alchemy—soothing restless Vata, cooling fiery Pitta, and stirring stagnant Kapha until the entire recital dissolved into Atmasamarpan, a total surrender at the feet of Radha and Krishna. As Lata mentioned - 'She is the priceless pendant of Mumbai's Queen's necklace- the pride of Mumbai!'

The Living Prakriti as Luminous Stillness unfolded next in the meditative architecture of Kathak Abhinaya with Veteran Padmashri Sunayana Hazarilal, the venerable vanguard of the Benares Janakiprasad Gharana. Seated in poised radiance, she demonstrated that a true luminary needs no acrobatic flourish to command space. Supported with intuitive grace by Pandit Kalinath Mishra and her accompanying melodious vocalist Shri Somnath Misra, she awakened Apanga Marma through micro-movements of the eyes, anchored facial poise in

Sthapani, and regulated breath through Phana and Hridaya—transforming the fiery intensity of Pitta into serene Sattvika calm. Reimagining Surpanakha not as a fierce Rakshasi but as a nuanced Adhama Nayika, every glance became lived scripture.

The Living Prakriti as Kinetic Awakening found voice in Padma Shri Shovana Narayan, who journeyed with aplonb across the pulse of Tamas, Rajas, and Sattva. Suspending the thunder of her ghungroos so the quiet pause between two breaths could speak, she built from inner stillness into an exhilarating surge of uthaan, thaat ang, and the dynamic rhythms of Harihara and jhoolna parans. Moving seamlessly with a pre-recorded score rich in evocative musicality, her concluding abhinaya on Maithili Sharan Gupt's *Yashodhara* was carried by the deeply stirring vocals of Pt. Madho Prasad. As those haunting melodies and resonant verses filled the hall, physical virtuosity melted into contemplation, transforming personal sorrow into radiant self-realization.

The Living Prakriti as Seamless Synthesis shone through the scholarly picture of feminine elegance Dr. Sucheta Bhide-Chapekar, who, approaching seventy-eight and trained under Acharya Parvati Kumar and Guru Kittappa Pillai, offered an archive of lived heritage through her pioneering Nrityaganga idiom. In three compact yet boundless compositions, she wove Muthuswami Dikshitar's Sanskrit Kriti in Raga Kumudakriya (Rupak tala) on the oneness of Purusha and Prakriti, King Shahaji Bhosle's 17th-century Marathi Padam depicting a playful young Parvati and Ardhanarishwara, and Dr. Prabha Atre's Hindi Bandish in Raga Sohoni ("Aavo Pyare Nandlal") brimming with Vatsalya Bhava. Echoing Sant Dnyaneshwar's universal Pasaydan prayer, her artistry gathered performer and spectator into a single harmonious breath.

The Living Prakriti as Sacred Scholarship anchored the evening's intellectual spine through Dr. Uma Rele—distinguished Bharatanatyam exponent, researcher, and Principal of Mumbai's iconic Nalanda Nritya Kala Mahavidyalaya, carrying forward the visionary legacy of Padma Bhushan Dr. Kanak Rele. Unpacking the Natyashastra and Nayika aesthetics, her enlightening discourse was seamlessly complemented by her daughter Vaidehi Rele, a seasoned dancer herself, whose embodied demonstration illustrated how vital neurocentres are mapped and awakened through the precise physical alignment of classical grammar—revealing Indian dance not merely as codified technique, but as an ancient, living science of human emotion and somatic harmony capable of anchoring and healing the fractured modern spirit. Dr Uma Rele coloured the living Prakriti on the day despite a serious head injury proving that the ultimate 108th marma mindless was truly consciousness itself!

The Living Prakriti as Embodied Devotion came alive as curator Dr. Lata Surendra stepped onto the stage in a power-packed performance where Geeta, Vadya, and Nritya merged as holistic Sangeetam in cathartic folds. In the mirror of Ayurveda, this sacred triad becomes the ultimate chikitsa—where Geeta (melody) harmonized Prana and transmuted emotional Pitta, Vadya (rhythm) disciplined kinetic Vata to awaken vital Marma centres, and Nritya (movement) anchored Kapha into Sthira, purging stagnant emotional residue (Shodhana) until body, breath, and cosmos reached Sattvika equilibrium. Celebrating the body as a living archive of Guru-Shishya lineage through the centerpiece Varnam—where pure rhythmic brilliance (Nritta) met the deepest human yearning (Abhinaya)—Dr. Surendra presented "Mohamana En Meethu Nee Inda Velayil", composed by the legendary Ponniah Pillai of the Tanjore Quartet in the timeless, soul-stirring Raga Bhairavi as an intimate, aching plea to Lord Thyagaraja of Tiruvarur. It was a command performance from the veteran at 72 with no compromise whatsoever invoking the cosmic churn of Samudra Manthan, where Lord Shiva swallows the lethal Halahala poison to save creation. The seasoned artist did full justice to the intricate cross-rhythms in the demanding jathis set by her legendary Guru, Vidwan Kalaimamani Shri T. S. Kadirvelu Pillai. As she put it -

> *'Those complex rhythmic architectures are not just mathematical feats; they are embodied medicine for me'*

Elevated by the deft, crisp nattuvangam of the Maestro's son and mentor in his own right, Shri Kaliswaran K., the brilliant Mridanganadam of Mumbai K. Dakshinamurthy, the flowing notes of Violin by Shri Krishna Natarajan and that experienced mellifluous vocalist Shri NN Siva Prasad whose sensitive phrasing mirrored every nuance of the dancer's mirrored yearning exploring the lyrics with maturity —proving how deeply an awareness of dance in the musician and music in the dancer enriches a reaching out—her Nayika carried a bold, luminous surrender, celebrating a Lord who absorbed the world's poison and a Shakti who claimed her rightful place in the cosmos.

The Living Prakriti as Sculptural Will emerged through veteran Jhelum Paranjape, devoted disciple of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and founder of Smitalay. Mirroring the Ayurvedic equilibrium where grounded Chauka (Sthira) anchors the fluid breath of Tribhanga (Prana), the tres imaginative experienced Odissi Exponent and Guru exquisitely portrayed the confronting of Yama by Savitri portraying unwavering feminine Shakti confronting death itself until devotion and intellect triumphed as an invincible life-force. One wishes to see such living Orakritis more often in a scenario where dance seeks to impress more than express!

The Living Prakriti as Cosmic Duality resonated in the presentation of Natya Acharya Dr. Jeyanthy Yogharajah, who channeled the primordial union of Shiva and Shakti through her self-penned, composed, and choreographed Shiva Keerthanam in Raga Pantuvarali and Adi Tala. Contrasting Lord Shiva's transformative Tandava with Goddess Parvati's life-giving grace, her performance became a quiet hymn of spiritual renewal and cosmic balance.

The Living Prakriti as Elemental Ritual breathed through Chithra Sukumaran, who stepped onto the stage as a vessel of Kerala's sacred heritage—weaving Kavalam Narayana Panicker's visionary Niram, the Pulluvar community's Sarpam Pattu, and five-hued Naga Kalam sacred grove traditions into Mohiniyattam. Translating the Panchamahabhutas and their doshas through undulating Andolita and Ati Bhanga sways and serpentine Naga Bandha footwork, her mature dancing body awakened the Sushumna Nadi, regulated Prana and Vyana Vayu, and soothed the nervous system into a living prayer.

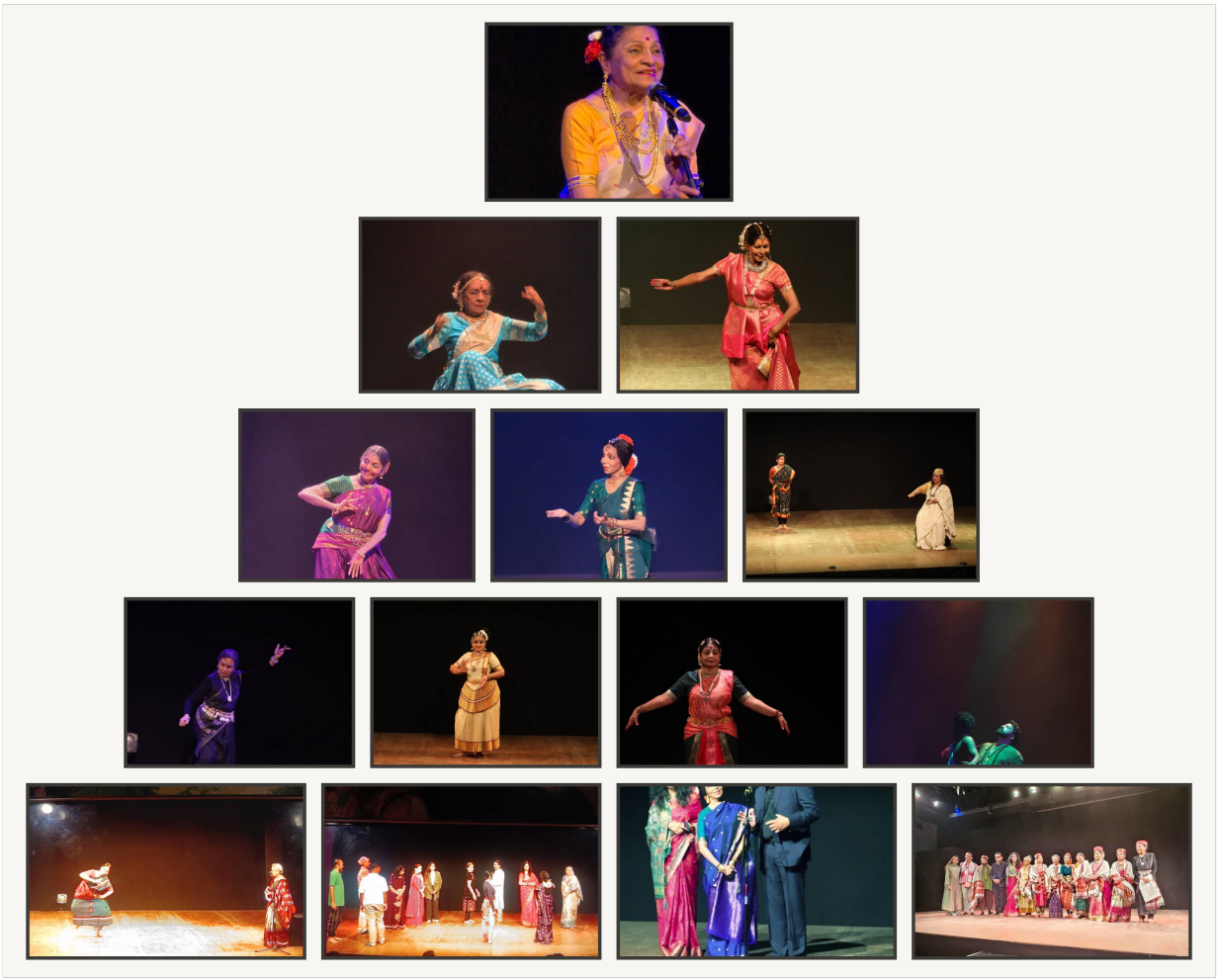
The Living Prakriti as Timeless Continuity was illuminated by Dr. Rajyalakshmi Seth, whose journey from medical aspirations to kinetic medicine lent rare intellectual rigor to her discourse on Kuchipudi. She illuminated how this ancient temple dance-drama breathes, adapts, and heals across centuries without ever surrendering its spiritual soul.

The Living Prakriti as Somatic Healing grounded the gathering in contemporary therapeutic science through retired TISS professor and Indian Dance Movement Therapy pioneer Dr. Lata Narayan. Exploring how Somatic Movement Therapy maps internal neurocentres, rewires neural pathways, and releases stored trauma, she bridged modern psychology with the self-healing wisdom of Ayurshastra and the Natyashastra.

The Living Prakriti as Unbound Instinct brought the evening into the evolving pulse of the present through contemporary dance maestro, film choreographer, Middlesex University alumnus, UNESCO CID member, and Dancity founder Dr. Sreejith T. R. Stripping away rigid convention, he synthesized global somatic innovation with Kerala's indigenous Kalaripayattu and the elemental force of the Panchamahabhutas—revealing how gravity, breath, momentum, and organic awareness restore internal equilibrium.

In its entirety, *The Living Prakriti* stood as an unforgettable testament to Dr. Lata Surendra's curatorial vision—reminding every witness that when age, scholarship, somatic awareness, and devotion converge, the dancing body ceases to perform nature and becomes Prakriti itself. As Dr. Surendra summed up the spirit of the evening in her stirring concluding reflection:

> *"True well-being is never a solitary performance; it is a living ecosystem in concert. Tonight, every artist who breathed life into ancient lineage, every technician who sculpted light and sound into sanctuary, every hand that nourished us through sacred sustenance, this hallowed stage at the NCPA that held our collective stillness, and every heart in the audience that received it—all became threads of one shared Prakriti. When body, craft, nourishment, and space align in collaborative grace, art ceases to be something we merely witness; it becomes the somatic and ecological harmony we live."*



Glimpses from The Living Prakriti at NCPA, Mumbai