

CHAPTER V

**Some Famous
Nāṅgiar's in Kerala Stage**



Kalamandalam Girija



She was born in 1958, at Kadavallloor in Trissur District. Joined Kerala Kalamandalam in 1971 to learn Kutiyattam. Girija is the first Kutiyattam artist who is not a Nangiar. She is the disciple of the famous Sri. Painkulam Ramacakyar. Her other mentors are Prof. Unnikrishnan Elayathu and Smt. Kunjipillakutty Nangiaramma. Being the receipt of Diploma from Kalamandalam in 1975 and Post Diploma in 1977, she persued her higher studies there itself with the scholarship of the Central Board of Culture. In 1971, she made her debut as the heroine of *Subhadradhananjaya* and later on she performed various stages here and abroad, the feminine characters of Kutiyattam and Nangiarkuttu. In 1977 she received the Margi Medal and in 2001 – Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy Award. From 1981 onwards she has been working as a teacher at Kerala Kalamandalam. She has composed a new composition 'Karnnajananam' in the form of Nangiarkuttu. An interview with her is given below:

1. You are the first non-Nangyar to practice Kutiyattam. Could you please explain the circumstances that led you to learn Kutiyattam?

I joined Kalamandalam in 1971. Earlier I had no idea about Kuttu Kutiyattam and Cakyar. Even though Kutiyattam department started functioning at Kalamandalam from 1965 onwards no one was there to learn the female roles. When I came for the Interview, my Guru Sri. Painkulam Rama Cakyar insisted me to learn Kutiyattam.

2. How was it - the learning of Kutiyattam at Kalamandalam?

It was held behind the tea shop of Sri. Raman Nair at Cheruthuruthi. Two small rooms. One room was occupied for Asan and two three students and in the other one for Sri Narayanan Nambiar the tutor of Mizhavu and his disciples. I was asked to sit on the side and he gave me training in eye gestures and symbols. Then I was given training in Mudras and Slokas. The study time was from 8.30 – 11.30 in the morning and 6.00 – 7.15 on the evening. After a year the venu was shifted to Vallathol Nagar.

3. Explain *Asan's* method of teaching?

Asan recognized and encouraged the talents of the students. He was so particularly interested in his student's routine chores and even in the food habits. He gives due importance even to

silly affairs. He was so meticulous that he noticed even a minor fault, rectified it and at times got angry with them. Once during the recitation of *Mattavilasam*, instead of '*Pasparsa*' I pronounced it as '*Prasparsa*'. He asked me many times the way I pronounced it. Everytime I replied as '*Prasparsa*'. I learned and recited that word like that. Actually, it was wrong. He lost his temper and murmured. I cried a lot. After some time, he came to my side and told that it was wrong i.e. it is not *prasparsa* but *pasparsa*. Later on he himself wrote slokas and gave me. He carefully taught how the Beetles drink Honey. He will not be satisfied until everything has been done perfectly.

4. It is Sri.Painkulam Ramacakyar, who modified Kutiyattam and led the torch of Renaissance. While doing this did he seek the opinion of his disciples? How do you evaluate this change?

He was an affectionate and loveable teacher. But during composing he did not seek the opinion of his students, the students knew that they were not matured enough for that. He beautified the feminine roles. The minor changes throughout in Mudras and costumes really enhanced the enjoyment of Kutiyattam a new oral rendering was formed in Kalamandalam. Rythemic changes in Mudra made the scenes vibrant and lively.

5. Did you ever get a chance to perform on stage during your studying days.

In 1971 I joined Kalamandalam and the same year itself I did my debut as the heroine of *Subhadradhananjayam*. That year itself *Sakuntalam* was performed at Thiruvananthapuram. After 1974, I performed Nagananda's Act I and Act III. During 1976 - 78 *Svapnavasavadatta* was performed. The most captivating *Bhagavadanjukam* was performed in 1976. After learning every drama on use to rehearsal on the stage.

6. What is your opinion about new changes?

New mode of composing may not last long. The old one's are the best. Since the fund is flowing each and everyone is doing some sort of changes. Myself, too has done one work *Karnajananam* as *Nangiarkuttu*.



Kalamandalam Sailaja



She was born in 1961, at Kottanellurin Trissur District. She started learning dance under Paravoor Surendran. In 1974 she joined Kerala Kalamandalam to learn Kutiyattam. Smt. Sailaja who was totally ignorant of Kutiyattam, was initiated into this field by Sri. Painkulam Ramacakyar. The same year itself she did her debut as Malayavati - the heroine of Naganandam Act III which was composed by *Asan*. In 1978 she got the diploma and in 1980 Post graduate diploma. Later on with the scholarship granted by central Board of Cultural studies she pursued her higher studies for two years at Kalamandalam. Both inside and outside Kerala and also abroad she has performed kutiyattam and Nangiarkuttu. From 1982 onwards she joined Kerala Kalamandalam as Kutiyattam teacher. Smt. Sailaja resides near Kalamandalam and is the recipient of following awards – Margi Medal, Kaladarpanam's 'Kalajyothi'

Momento, Kaladampathi Momento etc. An interview with Sailajateacher is as follows:-

1. As a very popular artist in the field of Kutiyattam, could you please share with us the circumstances that lead you to Kutiyattam and your early experiences in this area?

Even though I was not born in a family with artistic inclination, I started learning dance from my childhood itself. Sri Paravoor Surendran Master was my guru. When Kerala Kalamandalam invited application from students who wanted to learn dance, I applied for it. I attended the interview along with my father and Surendran master. There, as if destined by God, I met Sri. Painkulam Rama Cakyar. His inspiring words, "My dear child, you must learn Kutiyattam, you will prosper in that field" prompted me to learn Kutiyattam. My father also supported this. He opined that Kutiyattam has spiritual charm. You can also pursue dance practice along with this. In spite of my ignorance about this art -form I joined Kalamandalam, as per the instruction of *Cakyarasan* to learn Kutiyattam.

At Kalamandalam, as senior students of Kutiyattam, I met Ramacakyar, Sivan Nambutiri, Girija and Narayanan. Esvaranunni is for studying Mizhavu. May be because I am youngest in the group Asan had special affection towards me. After a period of six months, I did my debut as Malayavati of Nagananda third act, which was newly composed by Asan.

2. You were the pet of Sri. Painkulam Rama Cakyar. Could you please tell us about him and also the methodology he adopted?

He was an affectionate and loving master. He only taught us and never punished us. When I joined there at the age of thirteen, he is about sixty-five years old. His age did not permit him to show vigorous movements, jumps etc. He used to sit down and gave only oral lessons. At that time, Girija was a fourth year student. He used to ask Girija to show whatever needs for the lessons. Thus it was Girijachechi who taught me the jumping actions and the initial steps of Kutiyattam. He is very punctual and visits Kalari without fail and was very strict. Asan brought in a systematic Kalari tradition to Kutiyattam. The *Aharyasobha* of Kutiyattam is a contribution of *Asan*. He composed and choreographed many new stories. Importance roles were assigned to his disciples and the least significant ones were played by *Asan*. I played the heroine part in all the stories composed by him. Caste was not a barrier for *Asan* to teach Kutiyattam. He was so magnanimous, that he was ready to teach any one from any caste. I was the first one to learn Kutiyattam From Nair Community. I am much obliged to *Cakyarasan*, for he transformed a girl named Sailaja into a famous Kutiyattam artist. Next to my parents I owe a lot to *Asan*.

3. Can you compare the earlier method of Kutiyattam learning and the learning methods at institutions like Kalamandalam?

Earlier, each family taught Kutiyattam to be performed as a ceremonial ritual in their temples. There was no systematic and disciplined methodology as such. Kutiyattam was essentially confined to the temples as a traditional ritual. With the advent of Kalamandalam a centre for Kutiyattam, came into existence with a new syllabus. Since here is Mizhavu Kalari, it is possible that the training of Kutiyattam was done accompanied by Mizhavu. In families, only when the character comes for stage performance accompanies the Mizhavu. First eye Sadhakam, body Sadhakam, Navarasas, Mudras, reciting slokas aloud by bending forwards the hands and shaking the joints of the hands is part of the learning process. It is only at Kalamandalam such a systematic study takes place.

4. Can you explain the teaching – learning process at Kalamandalam. What similarities and differences are there in the earlier and present methods?

To be precise, it is not so strict as the earlier days. When we were students our sole aim was only to 'learn an art'. But now, when they come to learn, they enquire about the job prospects. Both the parents and the students are concerned about it. The present generation gives more importance to syllabus and all they want is to acquire a degree. Another

special feature is, when we were students feminine and masculine roles were taught by Painkulam Ramacakyarasan. At present separate *Kalari* and separate teachers are there to teach masculine and feminine roles. We learnt everything in the same *Kalari*. We were taught the masculine roles also. We were asked to stand behind them and do it. It has helped us a lot while doing Nangiarkuttu. *Kailasodharanam*, *Padappurappadu*, etc were done by men. Women characters need not do this. If you join in the seventh standard you can complete M.A before leaving Kalamandalam as a result a lot of students are there at Kalamandalam. Since Boarding and lodging is free students are easily attracted. As this demands individual attention to each learner, it is difficult of teach them together. Formerly only three – four students were there.

5. Nangiarkuttu was not so popular when you were a student? Have Asan taught you Nangyarkuttu completely?

Though he has not taught us Nangiarkuttu completely, certain parts have been taught by him. Nangiarkuttu had no authorized text. *Asan's* own manuscript formed the basis that book is still with Girijachechi. Later Nambiar *Asan* published it as a book. We are taught *Kailasodharanam* etc. along with masculine characters. All these are necessary when you learn Nangiarkuttu.

6. It was during *Asan's* time, that feminine characters got more importance and also the changes in *Aharya* took place. Could you please explain this?

Of course, it was he who gave new life and refined feminine characters who were till then had only minor roles. For including many feminine characters he wrote *Attaparakaram*. Thus he created many new roles and characters. For example Sita of Surpanakhanka, Tara of Balivadham, Vijaya of Thoranayudham. I was lucky enough to perform such characters for the first time. Besides he choreographed Sakuntalam, Naganandam, Kalyanasaugandhikam, Svapnavasavadattam, Mayasitangam, Bhaghavadajjukiyam, Jadayuvadham giving due importance to feminine characters. During *Asan's* time feminine character became popular. Particularly in Kutiyattam, the female character's *Aharya* glory increased and the entire credit goes to *Asan*. *Asan* along with Govindanasan - H.O.D of chutti designed new ornaments and jewelleryes and made beautiful costumes for feminine roles. Those who have seen the earlier style of female character could only realize the difference. Myself and Girijachechi also added some beautification to what *Asan* has done. Pleated white sari was worn by the artists. A sari was folded in such a way into two pieces. One big and the other small and pleats were attached to it. Dhoti which was worn simply, we stitched pleats to it. Now every body accepts this.

7. All the feminine characters, whether the heroine or anti-heroine have the same costume. Do you think of re-moulding it?

Feminine characters do not need any more changes. When two female characters appear on the stage some minor changes can be done just to differentiate between heroine and maid. A change in the pattern of the crown is under concern – for you will be easily able to differentiate between the feminine characters of Nangiarkuttu and Kutiyattam.

8. What all feminine characters of Kutiyattam you teach? Which is your favorite one?

All the possible feminine roles are taught. Subhadra of Subhadradhanajayam, Padmavati, Sakuntala, Lalita of Surpanakhankam, Sita Tara of Balivadham, Vasandasena, Vijaya, Paribhrtika are taught. I love Lalita's role very much because it demands bhavas like erotic, shy, gloom, melody, sorrow and anger. Lalita is one of the important female character in Kutiyattam.

9. Earlier, characters like Sita and Tara etc were not performed on the stage? When Asan brought them to the stage did it get any benefit?

A lot of benefit was there. It is good that one more feminine character was on stage. For Sita, lot of *Churnikas* is there.

Though there is nothing special to do it enhanced the beauty of dramatic presentation.

10. Which role do you prefer, Is it to perform Nangiarkuttu or to perform feminine character in Kutiyattam? Which one have you performed most?

I love to perform Nangiarkuttu. No other art form provides a lot of freedom of movement like Kutiyattam. We can add or cut off the unnecessary elements from it. But in the case of Kutiyattam, its rules and regulations are strict and we have to abide by it i.e., they are confined to their Churnika's and act methodology likewise the masculine roles in Nangiarkuttu – Kamsa, Jarasandha, Putana can be enacted one after the other I have staged *Putanamoksam* in a lot of stages.

11. What is your opinion about the new compositions? Have you composed anything new?

They are good. But for some reason the new composition do not get enough stages. The enactment of these compositions get restricted in two or three stages. Whereas, the old compositions still get a lot of stages. My opinion is that even if it is an old composition, we should cut short the performances according to the taste of today's audience. *Parvatiparinayam*, is my new compositions.



Margi Sati



Margi Sati was born in 1965, as the daughter of Poothillath Subramanyan Embranthiri and Parvati Antharjanam of Cheruthuruthi village in Trissur district. She joined Kerala kalamandalam in 1977 to learn Kutiyattam. She is a disciple of the versatile teachers Sri Painkulam Ramacakyar, Sri Amannur Madhavacakyar and Sri Mani Madhavacakyar. Her further mentors are Sri P.K. Narayanan Nambiar, Kalamandalam Sivan Nambutiri and Kalamandalam Ramacakayar. After her eight years studies in Kerala Kalamandalam she joined in Margi - a resource centre for Kutiyattam- at Thiruvananthapuram in 1988. She has been performing a lot of stages in India and abroad. She has composed a new story based on Ramayana as *Sriramacaritam* Nangiarkuttu. She also composed another one based on *Cilappatikaram* as *Kannakicaritam*. Now she is working as a teacher in Kerala Kalamandalam. An interview with her is as follows:-

1. Could you please tell us about the circumstances that led you to this Kutiyattam field?

My house was so close to Kalamandalam and my father was a Sanskrit scholar, who had special affinity towards different art forms of Kerala. It is under his persuasion that I joined Kalamandalam. It is my father who initiated into the study of Kutiyattam.

2. What about your education?

I did the basic course of four years and then the post graduation of two years. My further education was on the scholarship granted by the Cultural Department of the Central Government. Thus I studied for eight long years in Kalamandalam.

3. Would you please tell about your teachers?

I began my studies in Kutiyattam under the guidance of the versatile teacher of Kerala Kalamandalam Shri. Painkulam Ramacakyar. I also practised under Ammannur Madhava Cakyar, Mani Madhava Cakyar, Pani Vadatilakan Shri. P.K.Narayanan Nambiar, Kalamandalam Sivan Nambutiri and Kalamandalam Rama cakyar. I consider it as a great fortune of mine to get a chance to practise under the then famous Shri. Painkulam Ramacakyar, Shri. Mani Madhavacakyar and Shri Ammannur Madhavacakyar, the most famous among those who live at present.

4. Your teachers belong to three different families. But, don't they differ in style?

Though their styles are different, I didn't find it difficult to study since all the three had the same base.

5. It was Painkulam Ramacakyar who tried a lot to revive Kutiyattam. For this purpose he has composed varied dramas. How was your performance there?

I did not get many chances to perform on stage while I was in Kalamandalam. I got only very few chances to perform though I studied there for eight long years. When *Asan* compiled "*Bhagavadanjukam*", I got only a minor role in that. That was the end of my performance at Kalamandalam in those days.

6. You did studies at Kalamandalam. Then how can you got the name 'Margi Sati'?

After my studies at Kalamandalam, I got married and moved to Trivandrum. During this period I came to know that there were chances for a permanent feminine artist in Kutiyattam at Margi. Hence, in 1988 I joined there as an artist. It was there I flourished as a well-known Kutiyattam artist. When I joined at Margi, I performed as a Kutiyattam artist at Delhi and various other places as Kalamandalam Sati. Since Margi was famous as a Kutiyattam - Kathakali Institute at Trivandrum, when I

performed there as a new artist, I was introduced as Sati from Margi and as a prodigy of Kalamandalam. Since I had my footings in Margi, people endowed me with the name Margi Sati. I have never insisted that I should be addressed as Margi Sati or to attach Kalamandalam as a prefix to my name. I performed more at Margi than at Kalamandalam. So people started calling me Margi Sati. As I got immense stage acquaintance at Margi, I did not reject that Title 'Margi'. Not only that, it is also a matter of my existence. How can I ever forget Kalamandalam? The systematic method of teaching learning process of here, has molded me as the real artist.

7. Can you state the reasons for having got many opportunities for performance at Margi?

Margi is the famous institution which propogates Kutiyattam & Kathakali performances. From 1991 Margi has been getting the Kendra Sangeetha Nataka Academy aid. With this found Margi has been conducting a program per week. Through this, there were more opportunities for ample stage performances and doing new roles.

8. Other than the feminine roles in Kutiyattam, have you ever learned Nangiarkuttu?

No. Only feminine roles were taught there. Nangyarkuttu was totally vague then. In those days it was not so popular. So it

was not practiced then. It was during my Kalamandalam days, Mizhavu tutor Sri. P.K. Narayanan Nambiar published a book "*Sreekrsnacaritam Nangiarammakuttu*". In this book a photograph of mine was included depicting new feminine roles. I kept the book with me as it contained my photo. It is only after reaching Trivandrum that I realised what Nangiarkuttu is, and that the same book contained the story of Nangiarkuttu.

9. Later, how did you perform Nangiarkuttu? Could you explain the performance of *Sreekrsnacaritam Nangiarkuttu*?

Since, the base of Nangiarkuttu and Kutiyattam is the same, there is not much difficulty in performing it. At Margi, I performed *Sreekrsnacaritam* in part by part. My doubts were cleared by Sri. Ammannur Madhava Cakyar Asan who was the visiting professor in Margi at that time. Under the guidance of the guru at Margi, I performed *Sreekrsnacaritam* entirely. Even though Nambiar's book was the foundation, I performed it by re-writing stories of *Sreekrsnacaritam* giving importance to acting. Thus I could perform the entire Nangiarkuttu by enacting it in 40-41 parts of one or two hours duration.

10. Till recently, only *Sreekrsnacaritam* was there in Nangiarkuttu. But, now *Sriramacaritam* Nangyarkuttu has been included in this category. Can you please describe the circumstances which led you to write this?

By giving importance to acting I divided the stories of Srikrna into smaller segments and enacted in Margi. Since I wrote it myself and did the acting I am able to write an *Attaprakaram*. It was at that time I got a fellowship of Central Government. As a part of it I had to do one work. In Kutiyattam, Ramayana stories are frequently used. So a new idea struck me, why not the story of Ramayana retold as Nangiarkuttu from Sita's angle. Thus, like the *Sreekrnacaritam* I wrote *Sriramacaritam* Nangiarkuttu as Nirvahana of Sita with base as *Uttararamcaritam*. I read different publications of Ramayana and selected verses. As an artist, I enacted these verses in my mind and added it into the *Sriramacaritam Nangiarkuttu* then I went to Sri Nambiarasan who published *Sreekrnacaritam* and gave him this work for his advice. He read the work and recommended to publish it.

11. Even though more stories in Kutiyattam are based on Ramayana, the character of Sita is relegated to the background. Why then you choose such a character for Nangiarkuttu? And also used *Uttararamacaritam* for its base?

Right. Eventhough Ramayana stories are commonly used in Kutiyattam, the character of Sita has never seen the lime light. It was at Kalamandalam that the character of Sita was first enacted. Later, at Margi, I enacted *Ascaryacudamani* entirely on the stage. Thus I got an opportunity to portray the varied

expressions of the character of Sita. I was able to act out the roles of Sita giving them due importance in all the scenes from *vanavasa* to *Ravanavadham* and this inspired to present Sita as the central character in Nangiarkuttu. *Sriramacaritam* Nangiarkuttu opens with Sita who is sitting in the Hermitage of Sage Valmiki when she was deserted by Rama. Since it opens with *Uttararamacaritam*, it is quite possible to depict the entire Ramayana story as the Nirvahana of Sita.

12. Have you enacted the entire *Sriramacaritam* on stage? How did you feel when you staged while Ramayana story as Nangiarkuttu?

No, I haven't yet finished doing *Sriramacaritam Nangiarkuttu* on stage as a whole. Twenty to Twentyone days had already passed when I reached upto the scene of *Vichinnabhisekam*. It is only a quarter of the whole book. "Sriramacaritam is done as different blocks of one and a half or two hours of duration like *Yagaraksa*, *Sitasvayamvaram*, *Tatakavadham*, *Parasuramajayam* etc. A lot of eventful stories remain to be done. It will take atleast 60 days to finish off the whole in my scheme. I can be sure of it only when I do it. At Margi it would have been possible to perform atleast once in a month. Here, in Kalamandalam, chances for such things are rare. Moreover, the prospect of presenting the entire Ramayana by a woman character alone is really a new experience. We would be able to go through varied dramatic episodes. There are

ample opportunities to perform in it for an artist of real caliber. This is what I had in mind.

13. Have you written any other work other than *Sriramacaritam*?

Yes. In the style of *Nangiarkuttu* I wrote '*Kannakicaritam*' on the base of the Tamil epics, *Cilappatikaram*. Since it does not have a text in Sanskrit, I could not do it as a proper *Nangiarkuttu* in its order like *Purappadu*, *Nirvahanam* etc.

14. You said that you did *Kannakicaritam* in a different mode. Could you explain on how you presented it on stage?

I have written it as the story of Kannaki from *Cilappatikaram* as we do *Putanamoksam* in *Srikrishnacaritam* or *Sitasvayamvaram* in *Sriramacaritam*. I enacted it on different stages in the name '*Kannakicaritam*'. It got appreciation from all these places. It was a great success. It's presentation is like narrating the story of the married life between *Kannaki* and *Kovilan*.

15. Still there are a lot of Sanskrit drama's that has not yet been rendered in Kutiyattam? Why then you choose the Tamil poem *Cilappatikaram*?

There is no specific reason for this. When I enacted *Sriramacaritam Nangiarkuttu*, One suggestion came from the viewers to try the story of *Cilappatikaram* also. But I did not

know Tamil. So I read the translation. Then I understood that as a story, it has ample scope for enacting dramatic episodes. Moreover, it had references to Kutiyattam and the *Cakyars* who had done Kutiyattam and also it mentions about *Mizhavu* the accompanying instrument in Kutiyattam. Even though I have heard it earlier, I became certain of the existence of Kutiyattam prior to *Cilappatikaram* when I read that *Mizhavu* was played at the performance of Madhavi. Therefore I decided that *Cilappatikaram* should be brought on stage, how difficult it is. It does not have a Sanskrit text. So it is very difficult to get the *slokas*. Since I felt it as a good story, first I wrote the portions for enactment. Then I began contemplating on the stuff with which I could fill the space of *slokas*. My uncle Nellyod Vasudevan Nambutiri, is a Kathakali artist. I went to him and asked him to help me in writing the *slokas*. Thus, with his help I wrote *slokas* and staged it on varied places.

16. Is it the feminine role in Kutiyattam or Nangiarkuttu you prefer to enact most? Which one you have performed most?

On the stage, I have performed Nangiarkuttu many times. At Margi, there is little scope for feminine characters in Kutiyattam. I could perform roles giving importance to Sita. But more than that, I was able to perform Nangiarkuttu. Almost all the parts of *Sreekrasnacaritam* has been enacted many times. I have repeatedly performed *Kamsavadham*, *Putanamoksam*,

Krsnaleela. I could not even guess how many times I have performed *Krsnaleela*. Apart from the performance at Margi, I could do many performances within the state, out of state and even abroad. Thus, I have done Nangiarkuttu quite often. I like the feminine characters also in Kutiyattam. But, we don't get the freedom of performance in Kutiyattam as in Nangiarkuttu. There are several collective characters (*Kuttuvesam*) in Kutiyattam. So we could only perform one part in harmony with their performance. Nangiarkuttu is different. We alone will be there on the stage. Since the whole story is within our mind, we can enact on the stage in full freedom, often changing the expressions to enact either as male, female or child. I often feel that I succeed in performing Nangiarkuttu more than Kutiyattam. Though that is my experience, it may not be the same for all.

17. Your Guru Painkulam Ramacakayarasan is a person who has tried hard for the upliftment of Kutiyattam. Are you following his path since you are his disciple? How will Asan view this?

Asan opted to teach Kutiyattam to other castes since he did not want to see kutiyattam to be ruined. He had to face a lot of criticisms then. He foresaw the death of this particular artform. Since it is a very old art form, the outside world will never come to know about it if it was confined within Kuttambalam. It is only because of Cakyarasan and Kalamandalam that UNESCO gave the recognition to Kutiyattam. My first foreign

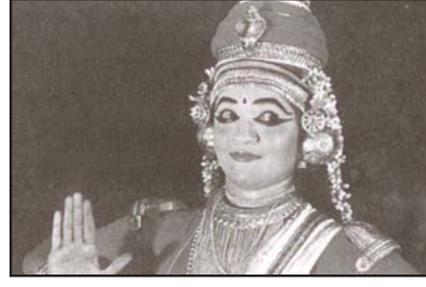
trip was from Kalamandalam. I am sure that my guru will be showering his blessings from above when I wrote my new story. Asan had always yearned for the changes in the artform on pace with the world. The permanent (dress code) *Aharyam* of feminine characters in Kutiyattam was given by Asan and Kalamandalam.

18. Could you speak on your students?

More than the natives, I have foreigners as my students. My gurukulam is at Trivandrum. My own daughter Revathi is my student who has done her '*Arangettam*' after practicing under me. She is doing her plus two course and she also do programmes in between. Though others have learned Kutiyattam under me, I came down to Kalamandalam even before their *Arangettam*. Some of my students have done their *Arangettam* in Nangiarkuttu.



USHA NANGIAR



Was born in 1969 – as the daughter of late illustrious Mizhavu player Chathukudam Krishnan Nambiar and Saraswathi Nangiar of Kumaranelloor Ezhumadom. Usha Nangiar got married to the famous Mizhavu player Sri V.K.K. Hariharan. In 1979, December, at Painkulam Kudalapurth temple, belonging to the Mana, under the guidance of Painkulam Ramacakyar for three four days she made her debut as the heroine of Subhadradhananjayam. Afterwards, at the age of eleven i.e. in 1980 she joined Ammannur Chachucakyar Smaraka Gurukulam as the first girl student. All through the prolonged 17 years of her learning, Ammannur Madhavacakyar was her foremost Guru. Ammannur Kuttan Cakyar also taught her kutiyattam. A degree holder in statistics, she dedicated her life for Kutiyattam and also worked to popularise the art form. For this she conducted many workshops and lecture demonstrations

based on Kutiyattam. She has also presented many papers in different seminars like 'the feminine characters in Kutiyattam, Kalyanasaugandhikam Attaprakaram', 'The role of women in Kutiyattam', Kuttu and Kutiyattam, the role of Nangiar in Kutiyattam the growth of Kutiyattam – inside and outside Kuttambalam, etc. For the degree students, M.G University has prescribed the article titled " *Guru Ammannurite Abinaya prapanyam*" through Chinthapadam publication.

For three years she worked for *Adisakti* at Pondichery under the leadership of Veenapani Chaula. There she did the stage performance of ' *Gandharvaprastham Agni Ahuti*'. After her education, she taught at Ammannur Chachucakyar Smaraka gurukulam for seven years. From 1997 onwards she is teaching at Kalady Sree Sankaracharya Sanskrit University.

After a long gap, she donned the role of Malayavati's *Kettinazhal*, the heroine of Nagananda. She has made a lot of innovations and composed many new items on the stage. Through the portrayal of subhadhra of Vth act of Subhadradhananjayam also the famous of " *Karthayani Purappad*", the Purappad and

Nirvahana of Mandodari of Ashokavanikankam, Menaka and Remba of Tapati-samvaranam and also the portrayal of Draupadi of Venisamharam, she brought in permanent footing for feminine characters in Kutiyattam. Being the part and parcel of I.C.C.R., she has done Nangiarkuttu Kutiyattam Documentation. Smt. Usha has published a book "*Abhinetri*" giving due importance to courageous feminine roles in Kutiyattam. An Interview with her is as follows:-

1. Your own contributions in the field of Kutiyattam have made you so famous. Could you please share with us your learning process and your first performance.

I did my first performance without learning Kutiyattam in a classical way. When I performed *Subhadradhananjayam* Kutiyattam at Painkulam Mana, I did the role of Subhadra. The performance which lasted only for five minutes on the stage, within the practice of three – four days under Ramacakyar. Only after ten years i.e. in 1980 I joined Gurukulam at Irijalakuda, I learned Kutiyattam the way it required. Gurukulam got registered only in 1982 even though we were from 1980 onwards. According to the tradition, every women of Nambiar family should perform Nangiarkuttu to become a Nangiar. Till the last generation all the women of Nambiar family performed Nangiarkuttu.

2. Actually it is Nangiarkuttu's Purappad that is meant for Nangiar women's debut. But most of them done different roles for their debut. What is the reason for this deviation?

Both Nangiar Kuttu and Kutiyattam was meant as a ceremonial art in temples for Nambiar family. For some families would not have Nangiarkuttu ritual in temples. So instead of learning the Nangiarkuttu's Purappad, certain feminine roles in Kutiyattam were learned for their *Arangettam*.

3. How did you manage both schooling and Kutiyattam learning? What was the methodology at Gurukulam?

I was able to manage both schooling and Kutiyattam learning since it was at Irinjalakuda. On every holiday and as per the demand in the evenings after five o'clock I practiced Kutiyattam. After securing my degree in statistics, I devoted my whole time at gurukulam learning Kutiyattam. For men and women the actions of Kutiyattam are the same. Standing erect on the *nila* position, reciting verses, twisting the wrist is practiced early morning. Later the actions in were taught.

3. How do you evaluate the learning of classical art forms like Kutiyattam?

In classical art's *sadhakam* of every body parts is given prime importance. What is special about these art forms is that they follow strict systems and customs. Though there is only little to learn what is more difficult is, to bring it to our conscious mind. Classical art forms are rich and abundant in gestures and actions. Once you get hold of the structure, an average artist can easily handle this art form.

4. To learn Kutiyattam, Attaprakaram is now available. Still, there is a dearth of excellent artists in this field. What can be the reason for this?

Following Attaprakaram systematically and punctually, an average artist can survive in this field. And if you want to exceed, you have to prepare and work hard mentally. You have to imbibe according to your imagination and there are so many other things you learn through posterity. Maybe because of this, Kutiyattam artists are fewer in number. As for kutiyattam and such other related art forms, both the stage (Arangu) and back stage (Kalari) are entirely different. Kalari is always a place for practice. After the learning at kalari, the real hardwork begins. According to me, stage is actually a phase of our heart. Kutiyattam and Kathakali is a medium through which the artist conveys a message to the audience.

5. Could you please explain the role of women in Kutiyattam?

The role of women is not confined to the stage alone, they are also entrusted with the task of capturing rhythm, reciting *Nirvahanaslokas* and *Akkitta* etc. As per the traditional texts, there is no entry for men without women. The actress should be accompanied by the actor. Earlier, in *Cakyarkuttu* also after playing *Mizhavu* and before the entry of *Cakyar*, the *Nangiar* used to enter the stage and captured rhythm. Once the *Cakyar* enters, there is nothing for the *Nangiar* to do. But the *Nangiar* has to sit there till the end of the *Kuttu*. Now-a-days women participants in *Prabandhakuttu* is not compulsory. From the time immemorial along with men, women also entered the stage, the one and the unique art form is *Kutiyattam*.

6. A tendency to avoid women from this art form was in vogue? What can be the reason for this?

If you categorise the history of *Kutiyattam* into three phases you will notice that it was during the middle phase that the importance of feminine roles were eliminated into insignificance. According to the oral tradition, the primitive form of *Kutiyattam* is about 2000 years old. But evidences show that it is only Hundred or Two hundred years old. In the *Unnineelisesandesam* of 13th century, there is the reference of a *Nangiar* who enacted as *Tapati*. So it is very obvious that in those days, *Tapatisamvaram kutiyattam* was performed by a

Nangiar. But it may not be in the present form as what we see today. In Kerala, Kuttambalam came into existence only in the 14th century. Prior to this, Kutiyattam was performed outside Kuttambalam. The form of Kutiyattam that we all know was strictly confined to the four walls of the temples. It was only recently, that it came to be performed outside the temples. So we can conjure that, feminine roles acquired importance only when it was performed outside the temple. When it entered the premises of the temple a lot of changes took place. Women characters lost their importance, later, when it came to be performed outside the temple, woman gained prominence. Now a days compared to Kutiyattam, it is Nangiarkuttu that is in more demand. Besides, when they come to book the programme, they are very particular about Kutiyattam having feminine importance.

7. What is really dealt in *Unnineelisandesam*? Is it the history of Kutiyattam unrevealed through it?

The incident is described in detail in unineelisandesham is: The Nangiar who enacted the role of Tapatilooked forward at Unnineeli's lover saying something in Prakrit. Unnineeli suspected with this task, got up and left the place. After that she quarrelled with her lover quoting this incident. This to be precise, was Nangiar's look that made Tapatil to suspect her lover. So you can guess how much is the depth and meaning of Nangiar's gaze. Neither the scholars nor the actors are aware

of the significance of eye gestures. They never spoke of the possibility and beauty of eye. All are concerned about the history of Kutiyattam. In my opinion, *Unnineelisesandesam* deals with the charisma of eye gestures rather than the history of Kutiyattam.

8. Usha chechi, you have put a lot of effort to popularise Kutiyattam through lecture demonstrations etc. As a result, feminine roles have also increased. What is the driving force behind this?

While I was a student in Gurukulam lot of opportunities were there for staging the programme. But, most of them were outside Kerala. I performed *Balivadhama*, *Toranayudham*, *Surpanakankam*, *Dhananjayam* etc. Feminine roles had only very little importance in these dramas. Eventhough the roles were minor, I got a chance to act along with senior artist like *Asan*. Thus I got acquainted a chance to converse with them, at times for demonstration and to witness their performance. A sense of disappointment and sorrow haunted me for I could not act like them being a woman. A strict law existed that woman cannot done masculine roles. Then I went in quest of an alternative for this. Moreover, I wanted to propagate Kutiyattam throughout Kerala. For this I held lecture demonstrations, symposium etc. My college education helped me a lot for this. Through the lecture demonstration class I was able to shed my sorrow of not being able to perform masculine roles.

9. Where did you conduct the first lecture - demonstration? Please explain your experience?

The first lecture – demonstration was held at Calicut University. Three of us went from Irinjalakuda – myself, one of my classmate and Hari. I was a bit scared since I was of reserved nature. What all things I want to say I wrote it in a paper and took it with me. During the lecture, I sat down with the paper in front of me. I got up only when I need to demonstrate. During this demonstration, a man asked a doubt about one chari in masculine role. I replied that it was meant for masculine roles only. That evening Hari rectified the shortcomings and weaknesses of my demonstration class. Moreover he advised me to prepare well before going to a demonstration class and also told me that we should never say ‘I don’t know’ when somebody asks any doubt about the topic. Later, *Asan* reared me the entire *Nangiarkuttu* and after this he had also taught me the masculine roles. This has helped me a lot in performing *Nangiarkuttu*.

10. ‘*Pancakanyakasis* uncommon in Kutiyattam’. Hearing of this is the reason for the dwindling of feminine roles. But, with the advent of Sita and Draupadi, a change has happened in this field. Since you have done studies in this field, what is your opinion about this?

There is no definite answer for this. *Pancakanyakas* signifies the manifestations of sanctity and holiness, such is their quality, that it is not possible to perform such characters on the stage. Besides, Sita is *ayonija*. As per the tradition, it was said that such characters are difficult for stage performance. Thus in Kutiyattam female characters lost their significance; they became very meagre. But Painkulam Ramacakyar's efforts bore fruit when he brought in Sita and Tara on the stage and performed them along with male characters.

Later, during my lecture demonstrations I enquired about the real status of *pancakanyakas*. I found that the very concept of the person being *ayonija* is itself wrong. *Ayonija*'s like Mandodari, Menaka, Rembha etc have their due place in Kutiyattam stage performance. In *Ramayanamkramadipika*—ie very important for a *cakyar*—there is a very detail description of Mandodari's Purappad. It strictly advocates that Mandodari should enact from a particular verse. Only after this part, Ravana's Purappad begins. In addition to this, in the first Taliyola of Ramayana Kramadipika, Renuveration for the Nangiar doing the role of Mandodari is also clearly specified. This points to the fact, that one among the *pancakanyakas* Manodari, was brought to the limelight. In Sita's case, we can see Surpanakha as mayasita and during the coronation ceremony as original Sita. Tara is one such character that comes in the coronation drama. In the *Kramadipika* it is, said that of

Abhisekanataka female roles are not performed. It may be because of this drama's heroic aspects. It only said that it is not performed but it never restrained the enactment of female characters. This is also included in the *Pancakanyakas*. *Painkulam Ramacakyar* brought in Sita and Tara on to the stage.

11. *Pancakanyakas* clearly avoids important female characters like Sita, Draupati etc. But in your compositions the main Character is Mandodari and Draupadi. What is the reason for this selection?

Kutiyattam basically deals with the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharatha. Since female roles are not rendered, their importance too, declined. On the stage, male characters were abundant. So I thought of enquiring about the possibility of female character's that is how I found out the possibility of Mandodari, Subhadra and Karthayani exodus. Instead of probing the reason for their diminishing nature, I made attempts to safe guard their existence. Thus, I could enumerate the possibilities of feminine characters in Kutiyattam and found out how I could sustain the conduct of their existence. This is a stepping stone in this field. Instead of relegating the five damsels to the background, I intended to imbibe the essence of the character and present them on stage.

12. You have chosen such characters those have special qualities. Could you please explain this?

What I did first was Subhadra's Nirvahanam, which was dealt with in the fifth act of *Subhadhra dhananjayam*. The original format of this, I got from the collection of Sri. Ravunni Nambiar. For the stage presentation I modified it and wrote an *Attaparakaram*. This, I did as per the request of Diana Daurhauty, adding the element of exodus. I first performed at Trissur and then at Kochi. Later I staged the Nirvahana of Mandodari, entrance of Karthayani, Menaka, Remaba etc. Then I did Draupadi's Nirvahanam, based on *Venisamharam* Drama.

13. You got only the ideas of Madodari's Nirvahana. Then how did you manage to transform it into a play?

Yes, I composed a new *Attaparakaram* for this. In *Kramadipika* what is actually dealt is Madodari's Nirvahana to be acted from the description of the origin of universe till the birth of Akshayakumara. I searched for the missing slokas that be in-between this, later I consulted Vasudevan master of Srikrishna college and he wrote the necessary slokas for this purpose. Thus I composed Mandodari's Nirvahanam as follows-One day's Purappad, three days Nirvahana.

14. How did you perform Karthayani?

The Vth act of *Subhadradhananjayam* deals with the entry of this Goddess. It is stated that the *Bhagavati* should speak only Sanskrit. Though I got *Kramadipika* for this, I had to prepare *the Attaparakaram*. After tying *Pani*, *Bhagavati* is lead to the back stage from the temple from there she enter the stage. *Bhagavati* holding the '*Kottuvilakku*' performs on the stage. In *Nangiarkuttu* I have adorned the role of *Vishnu* and *Bhagavati*. But to be right from the beginning is possible only in this. To present *Karthayani Purappad*, it requires a total of seven people including 5 women characters.

15. Something new and genuine is *Draupadi*. What is the impulse behind selecting such a strong character?

Draupadi is a very strong character, besides she is one among the *Pancakanyakas*. What usually happens in the life of an ordinary women, also eclipsed in the the life of *Draupadi*. Instead of merely narrating the story of *Drapadi* as '*Draupadicaritam*' I thought of incorporating it with some drama. And also it will have a basis. Thus I composed and included *Draupadi's Nirvahana* in the base of *Venisamharam*. What I really did was, to present such a large canvas of story, through the meduim of *Kutiyattam* which is a very controlled and restricted art form. I divided the whole story into three parts and composed it for presenting in three days. I could not

compose a systematic Attaprakaram, because through Draupadi we had to convey a lot of things to the world. The first part deals with Draupadi's *Svayamvaram*. *Pancali Svayamvaram* is described in detail in kuttu. Therefore I start with by explaining, Arjuna's marriage with Draupadi, and thereafter, the five brothers together going to see their mother Kunti. The mental condition of Draupadi on hearing Kunti's words for five sons to share whatever they got and after that Draupadi's vow that she will marry all them are enacted in detail. Unlike any other artform, in Kutiyattam we have wide scope in depicting the differences in characters of each brother and the *bhavas* of Draupadi along with them. Draupadi can took of five brothers in five different ways.

16. The book named '*Abhinetri*' is an investigation on the famous female characters of Kutiyattam. What do you say about it?

It was the investigation about the eminent female characters in Kutiyattam that led me to compose the characters like Subhadra and Draupadi. These are presented on the stage without excluding the classical quality or the common style of Kutiyattam. But when I felt that all these would lose their importance in the onslaughts of time, I thought of recording it in the written form. The activists of the Mumbai keli cultural association contributed towards the implementation of it.

17. Usha chechi is the first person to enact on stage *Sreekrasnacaritam* Nangiarkuttu after bearing it as a whole. How was it presented earlier? Can you compare it with the presentations of the present age?

Earlier Nangiarkuttu was presented as the ceremonial kuttu of temples. Then the duration of the performance was twelve days. Today it has decreased to seven days. When it was presented in twelve days, it was presented on the stage like this-on 1st day, 'Purappadu' of the character and 2nd day onwards Nirvahanam. That is, the 217 slokas of *Sreekrasnacaritam* was presented continuously within eleven days. If the *Adiyantirakuttu* is related to Astamirohini, then the presentation will be on the second day till *Krishnavataram* must be presented. Earlier, only mudras would have been shown, excluding detailed enactment. Otherwise, the presentation of this would be at least thirty-thirtytwo days. When it was performed in twelve days as a ritual, there was yet another possibility. It was possible there to revise all the emotions and traditions, technical aspects, stobas and mudras that come in Nangiarkuttu every year. Thus it was never forgotten. But today it is given importance as a *kazhcakuttu* (visual kuttu). Now it is performed by selecting portions like Putanamoksam, Kamsavadham etc which are of one and a half an hour duration. So there are only eighteen sections to be performed in detail.

18. Lalitha, Mundodari, Subhadra etc of Kutiyattam have Nirvahanam. They are known with the name of Kutiyattam enacted, whereas, *Sreekrnacaritam* is the Nirvahana of Kalpalatika and this alone is known as Nangiarkuttu.

Kutiyattam has a common structure, Nirvahanas are a part of it. The description of the bygone story of the character or his master is the method of Nirvahana.

In the IInd act of Subadradhananjayam, Kalpalatika, the maid of Subhadra is in search of the lost 'Gathrika' at the order of Subadra and having failed to find it, she prepares to come back. Srikrishna's thoughts that go through Kalpalatika's mind at this juncture is the basis for Nangiarkuttu. But this Nirvahana of Kalpalatika is not unusually performed at the IInd act of Subadradhananjayam. In it, the drama begins with the entry of the hero. Moreover, this *Arungutali* sloka of Arjuna's purappadu is different one. The *Aranguthali* sloka of Nangiarkuttu is not following any regulations and it is a hymn that is chanted commonly. The common characteristics of a Nirvahana are not present in the Nirvahana of Kalpalatika. Kalpalatika is not narrating her story or the story of her mistress. On the other hand she is telling the story of Srikrishna. When analysed in this manner, it will be understood that Nangiarkuttu is combined in later periods in order to get as much importance as Kutiyattam. I have heard that, earlier, Nangiar's used to perform the 'dasamam' story as 'cutalakuttu'. It must be this performance, which was combined with the drama of Subadradhananjayam as Nangiarkuttu.



Kapila Venu



She was born in 1982 as the daughter of Shri. Venu G, the Director of the Natana Kairali (Kutiyatta Kalakendra) and a famous Kutiyattam dancer and Smt. Nirmala Panicker who has proved her proficiency in Mohiniyattam. Kapila was a student and then a teacher of *Ammannur Chachu Cakyar Smaraka Gurukulam*. Ammannur Madhavan Cakyar, Kuttan Cakyar, G. Venu, and Ushanangiar were her teachers. She marked her *Arangettam* in 1994. She does her performance in Kutiyattam and Nangiarkuttu on varied stages here as well as abroad. The recipient 'Promisary Artist Award' by the Bombay based 'Keli' she is an active member of many workshops and theatre. Moreover, she has learnt Mohiniyattam from her mother and she is well known in India and Abroad as a Kutiyattam artist.

The following is an interview with this young artist who is very meticulous in arranging and performing new composition of Kutiyattam.

1. Apart from Kutiyattam, you are well versed in Mohiniyattam which one do you like most which has more scope for performance?

I have learnt Mohiniyattam and also performed it. But now I concentrate more on Kutiyattam. It has got more scope as a performing art.

2. Smt Kapila, you have learnt Nangiarkuttu and you have included new stories in Nangiarkuttu and performed it. Even though you are not Nangiar, what is your approach towards it? What is your concept of Nangiarkuttu?

The way in which I perceive Nangiarkuttu, and the way a Nangiar approach Nangiarkuttu is entirely different. I am concerned about presenting Nangiarkuttu in the contemporary style where as a Nangiar will surely give importance to its ritualistic aspect. Every artist's History, Tradition and Physical Stature are totally different and so is their performance. That is good. Then only it will have a variety.

3. Is the entire version of Nangiarkuttu performed? What are the important roles you have done there?

No, Nangiarkuttu as a whole, not yet performed. The audience prefer *Putanamoksam* and things of that Sort. *Kamsavadham* and *Govardhanodharanam* and also some parts of *Saundaryalahari Geethagovindam* are also performed.

4. Wasn't '*Saundaryalahari*' composed in the style of Nangiarkuttu? Who composed it? Can you explain how was it composed.

My father Sri. G. Venu composed it for Nangiarkuttu. One of his greatest desires was to enact *Saundaryalahari* in the visual media. Thus he took first thirty slokas of *Saundaryalahari* and he included *Kumarasambavam* and wrote the *Attaprakaram* for it. It is composed as an isolated story rather than connecting it with any drama. The stories till the marriage of Siva and Parvati are presented in this. Whoever enacts on the stage can come up with a role of her choice. That is the peculiarity of *Saundaryalahari*.

4. What is the context behind composing Gitagovindam? How is it composed?

Gitagovindam was composed for a special purpose. An exhibition was conducted in North India on Pahadupicutres based on *Dasavataram*.

They requested to present *Dasavadaram based on Gitagovindam* as Nangiarkutthu. It is composed as if it is enacted by Patmavati, wife of Jayadevan, by singing "I worship Allmighty with the sloka written by my husband." It is presented as one sloka of one and a half an hour duration in which the avataras of Narasimha and Kurma are depicted in

two sections. The same sloga is enacted in two styles. Thus there is scope for enacting ten *avataras* in it.

5. Do you like to enact the feminine roles of Kutiyattam or Nangiarkuttu?

Both are different experiences. In Nangiarkuttu, the whole responsibility is upon us. We have the freedom and the authority. Therefore, we can handle it in any style. But, feminine characters are to be done along with other characters of the drama. I have found it difficult to work along with them. Because it is difficult to balance our style with others. So, I have found Nangiarkuttu to be easier.

6. You have performed in various Western Countries like Japan, Europe, America etc. What was the response there?

The people of Western countries are traditional in their belief. Since they lost their traditional art form, they have an intense attachment towards classical artforms. They pay for the tickets when they come to see our programmes. There we perform by telling the story in a style that is intelligible to them. The parts which are difficult to understand will be shown in the written form so that they could understand them. There are quite lot of people there whose lives have changed viewing this and enjoying our artforms.

7. Aren't *Sakuntalam* and *Vikramorvasiyam* composed here in Natama Kairali itself? How do you evaluate the feminine characters like Sakuntala and Urvasi?

Sakuntala is a character who goes through all the situations. The enactment of such a character is a very good experience. But, I feel that I need still long period and yet more experience in order to know the character of Sakuntala completely. It has not yet reached its perfection. It is still growing. In the case of Urvasi, it is the story of an actress. She is the elder mother of all actresses. 'Urvasi' is composed by giving importance to the actress Urvasi. While performing *Lakshmi Svayamvaram* in the *Devasabha* Urvasi, out of extreme love utters the name of Pururavas instead of Vishnu and thus get cursed and expelled from *Devasabha*. Her mental reactions at the time are portrayed here.

8. You said that the actress in Urvasi is given importance in *Vikramorvasiyam*. Then how do you perform *Vikramorvasiyam* onstage?

The entire story of *Vikramorvasiyam* is not performed on stage. It is composed as three parts - first is the entrance of Sutradhara, then the story of Urvasi told by Pururavas and lastly Urvasi narrating her own story. Here, the importance is on depicting the three acting parts rather than the story.

9. Did you have any experience, which should be treasured in the memory while you did new compositions?

I had a very good experience when I performed *Saundaryalahari*. I have said that the scenes depicting the marriage of Siva and Parvati, Parvati serving Siva, Kamadanam etc. are portrayed through *Saundryalahari*. I often do the performance without even thinking what the story is. Thus various stages had past. Then the marriage of a friend of mine was taking place in Rajasthan and I was asked to perform it on the wedding day. When I went there I got the written copy of a work done by her mother. She was a psychologist specialised in the topic 'Marriage.' She has also written a book on 'The concept of Indian Marriages, Parvati and Paramasiva'. The frailties of Parvati, then the burning and quenching of her lust - only after these could she enter into the marital ceremony. Only then I understood that I am performing a story that is relevant at present. Thus I understood the real meaning of "*Saundaryalahari*". I am now able to perform that story with my mind.

10. How do you feel when you analyse the new characters like Sita?

I haven't seen a time without the characters like Sita. 'Sita' had been on the stage from the time I started my studies. The characters like Sita are good for a person who is a beginner on

the stage. I don't know whether the drama or the actress would benefit anything from enacting a character which were not taken to the stage before. But, I can't accept the characters like Vidusakan and Subhadra in Dhananjayam who raise before me a moral problem.

11. What do you have to say as a teacher of *Gurukula*?

My opinion is that I haven't grown to the level of a teacher. I am studying still. It is one duty to impart what we know to the juniors of *Gurukula*. Now I am thinking of how can I make this artform more popular. The generation of today think that 'We won't understand Sanskrit'. I think that such a thought process of the youngsters should be changed and should make it clear that Kutiyattam can be understood by anyone even without the knowledge of Sanskrit.



Margi Usha



Born in 1966, at Cheruthuruthy in Trissur district. In 1983, she joined Kerala Kalamandalam and did her diploma and post diploma and continued her studies there itself with the aid of the scholarship. She is the favorite disciple of Moozhikula Kochukuttan Chakyar, Narayanan Nambiar, Kalamandalam Ramacakyar, Kalamandalam Sivan Nambutiri, Kalamandalam Girija and Sailaja. In 1984 she did her debut at Aluva Siva Temple adorning the role of Atta of Bhagavadajjukam. In 1991 she joined Margi Kutiyattam group and is at present performing Nangiarkuttu and Kutiyattam. An exponent of all feminine role of Kutiyattam and Nangiarkuttu Usha perform both here and abroad.

For example, when performing *Asokavanikankam* Kutiyattam the order is like this-first is the Purappadu Nirvahanam of Mandodari, then Ravana's purappadu nirvahana and then udyanapravesam (garden entry). Likewise, at the beginning of every kutiyattam, a summary of that particular part is said and also an Asanganthali sloka is chanted. The sloka written in tune with all these rules and regulations is recited at the opening of each every act.



Indu G. Nair



Born in Edappally (1977). Indu G. Nair, a proficient artist in Mohiniyattam and other dance forms, started learning Kutiyattam at the age of eighteen. Her marital relation with Margi Madhu who is a well-known Kutiyattam artist initiated her into Kutiyattam. Under the guidance of Moozhikkulam Kochukuttan Cakyar, Margi Madhu and Usha Nangiar she practiced Nangiarkuttu and Kutiyattam. In 1999 she made her debut at International Centre, Tripunithura. Henceforth, she performs on varied stages women characters of Nangiarkuttu and Kutiyattam. Though she has made excellent portrayal of characters like Sita and Vijaya in Sanskrit dramas, she marvels performing Nangiarkuttu the most. In her opinion, the women characters of Kutiyattam do not get due recognition. There is no possibility for creative performance since Kutiyattam is strictly adherent to the rules of drama. But in the case of

Nangiarkuttu the story can be expanded or shortened as per one's discretion. Compared to Kutiyattam, Nangiarkuttu is more flexible in technical aspects. Nangiarkuttu is comparatively simple compared to the techniques and depth of Kutiyattam. So, rather than Kutiyattam, it is easy to compose new pieces of Nangiarkuttu. Since it is possible to perform the whole story within the time span of one and a half or two hours, Nangiarkuttu has made an entry into the hearts of the audience. The fact that the Academic fund has been generous enough in aiding women – oriented studies, the popularity of Nangiarkuttu has gained a new momentum. The availability of *Attaprakaram* and *Kramadipika* pertaining to the performance of Karthyayani, Mandodari and Tara highlights how they dominated the stages in the bygone days. Elimination of women was due to social restrictions, lack of able Nangiar artists and the difficulty of women artists in accompanying the troupe for many days.



Aparna Nangiar



Born in 1984 at Irijnalakuda in Trissur district as the daughter of Kuttan Cakyar. In 1991- she joined as a student at Ammannur Chachucakyar Smaraka Gurukulam. Besides being the disciple of Madhava Cakyar, she has learnt Kutiyattam under the guidance of Kuttan Cakyar and Usha Nangiar. After her debut at Vadakkumnadha Temple in 1992 she is still conducting *Atiyantirakuttu* at Vadakkumnadha Temple. A B.Com Degree holder, she is still performing Nangiarkuttu and Kutiyattam both abroad and in various other stage.

These are some prominent artists in Kerala stage and some others in this field are Kalamandalam Prasanna, Sofi, Krishnendu, Sindu and T.R. Saritha. Now-a-days, there are more girls coming forward to learn Kutiyattam and Nangiarkuttu and surely they build up a new generation of Kutiyattam artists.