

## The past and the present

**K**alakshetra functioned from 1936 to 1963 in the sylvan surroundings of the Theosophical gardens, Adyar. There was an intimate relationship between the institutions run by the Besant Trust such as the Besant Theosophical High School, Arundale Teachers Training Centre, Montessori School, and Kalakshetra. Students and staff shared a common hostel, a common prayer, and common teachers. Our teachers were elderly, experienced and inspiring; yet they were strict disciplinarians and living examples of simple living and high thinking. There were no time-bound tuitions; living in the campus was by itself a learning experience. There were no distractions and the 'satsangam' made us what we are today. It was truly a 'gurukulam' with a limited number of inmates close to one another, sharing and caring for one another. It was a beautiful and serene environment with enmity towards none. The true art of living was experienced at no cost.

I was in Kalakshetra from 1953 to 1968, the golden period in the history of Kalakshetra, when Rukmini Devi's creativity touched great heights with her monumental productions.

The batch of students during this period literally established the "Kalakshetra style" with the immaculate training given by Sarada Hoffman, a teacher par excellence.

Kalakshetra was shifted to Tiruvanmiyur in 1963. Kunhiraman, Balagopal, Janardhanan, Ramalinga Sastry, Venkatachalapati, Ramankutty and myself were the first immigrants to this new place. Gradually all the sections moved in to be detached from one another.

The training and practice have become more perspiration, lacking inspiration. Much against the ideology of the founder, the great and experienced teachers were retired. This has been detrimental to a valued system of learning.

Unlike our days, students are now only interested in the prescribed course. In the process, a wholesome education is lost while concentrating on a syllabus-oriented training method.



Dhananjayan, Rukmini Devi and Shanta

Kalakshetra then, never allowed students or teachers to work or teach outside for extra money, as it could affect and dilute the total concentration in the institution's work. Now loyalty and priorities have drifted towards commercial goals.

Kalakshetra then paid a paltry sum as salary, but now the staff draw fabulous salaries, which is to be appreciated. Then we were all concentrating on building the institution, but now the situation is reversed, building individuals. Of course this is the way the world moves, and no one can point a finger accusing anyone of personal interest.

Then, the classrooms were all thatched cottages, now they are concrete buildings, understandably. Now there are better living conditions compared to the past, with modern hostel facilities and amenities.

V.P. DHANANJAYAN

### Dreams and disappointments

**T**he Kalakshetra where I grew up in the fifties was in Adyar. So the moment I think of younger days my dreams relate to that Kalakshetra.

Yes, I did work as a teacher and dancer in the present campus of Kalakshetra in Tiruvanmiyur, which still bonds me with the institution. My attachment to the institution

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is still the same. The work that goes on there now is the same, full of dedication and passion, I think. I am also open to the newer ideas there now, as this is a natural way to evolve and move towards a creative future for the art forms. But my disappointment is with the absence of older stalwarts who guide the younger generation. Their artistic experience and knowledge are vital, to be shared by inexperienced students and staff.

The glaring disappointment that pricks us is the total distortion of the morning group prayer beautifully composed by Sangeeta Kalanidhi Budalur Krishnamurthy Sastri. The experience we shared with these scholars then is something to be cherished for all lifetime. I also feel that the one-family spirit with which we worked then does not seem to be the same now. Since I do not live in the campus I cannot for sure say what exactly the prevailing atmosphere is. Then it was a private entity, but now it is a government institution with bureaucratic restrictions (which is quite understandable), but we the old timers feel the exclusiveness is lost with the door open to all sorts of activities not congenial to the original Kalakshetra ethos. Maybe it is my feeling. On the other hand, the general public may welcome this 'new wave' atmosphere, though some of the old Kalakshetra associates cannot relish the idea of modernity creeping into a serene asram

atmosphere. Some of the modern presentations — both Indian and foreign — belie the divinity and dignity with which Kalakshetra is associated.

To move with the times, certain relaxation in the students' behaviour is obvious. But we feel very apprehensive about losing the identity of exclusiveness that prevailed then.

We are proud when people distinctly identify us as "Kalakshetrians". Since the government takeover and as several governing body members and staff members do not have any moorings in Kalakshetra, the lack of a 'sense of belonging' shows in their attitude and behaviour.

We do have to accept the changes and move with the times. All the same we would like Kalakshetra to flourish and keep the flag aloft as the morning prayer says:

Jayatu jayatu nityam na: Kalaakshetra-metat  
jayatu jayatu nityam tatra Lakshmi samagraaha  
jayatu jayatu loke tasya keertir visaala  
Jayatu jayatu sarvam Bhaaratam na: pavitram

*May our Kalakshetra be ever victorious  
May good fortune ever prevail upon it  
May its fame ever increase in the world  
Praise be to this divine country Bhaaratam.*

SHANTA DHANANJAYAN