

Accent on the religious spirit

MELATTURS, Natarajan, head of the Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Bhagavata Mela Natya Nataka Sangam, and an outstanding artiste of this tradition, has been chosen for the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. An engineer by profession, Natarajan is based in Dubai and returns to Tanjavur every year to perform the divine dance ritual. Here he shares his thoughts with Nandini Ramani.

Excerpts from the interview:

How do you feel on being conferred the SNA Award this year?

I owe this award to Lord Narasimha. I am overwhelmed with joy. I feel it has come at the right time, when the art of Bhavagata Mela, a male ritualistic dance worship form is beginning to attract global attention. In fact, this is recognition for this tradition and for all my troupe members who have stood by me all these years. I have completed 55 years on stage in my 60 years of life, and 10 out of the 12 Natakams of Vekatarama Sastry have been successfully staged by us, with the enactment of "Dhruva Charitram" this year.

How do you rate the response from the audience for Bhagavata Mela?

It is well known that this is a ritualistic dance form offered as



worship in front of the Supreme. There is a view that such ritualistic performances do not require publicity. But the fact remains that it is the media, especially the newspaper that has been the major source of communication throughout the globe, bringing art lovers to the tiny village in the month of Vaisakha. All the modern modes of communication, like the press, radio, television and IT facilities have contributed immensely to the success of the festival.

Bhagavata Mela Natakams are

beyond the purview of critical analysis. Your comment?

Every performing art form, in its practice is bound to receive acclaim or criticism from the public and the press; In the contemporary scene, with several venues available for dance as an entertainment, it becomes important to realise the need for an understanding of the religious base of all our art forms.

In this regard, the print media is helpful in creating awareness about such ancient traditions. An unbiased analysis by the media helps the practitioners to make a careful evaluation of the work. They welcome feedback, especially whenever an innovation is made within the framework of tradition.

How do you plan to propagate the genre in the future?

With the grace of the Lord, our Sangam will continue to conduct the annual festival with dignity. I am planning to return to India for good, and concentrate on the growth and development of the art form. Out of the 12 plays, I am yet to lay my hands on the remaining two dramas; once they are ready we will start staging all the 12 plays of Sastry annually and thus enlarge the scale of the festival. Most important, I wish to teach young



Natarajan appears as Lilavathi in "Prahlada Charitam".

male artistes, the intricacies of this form. With the assistance of my senior colleagues, other trained artistes, my brothers and my daughter Priyamvada, all of whom have

absorbed the repertoire, I hope to keep this oral tradition alive and vibrant. I am sure Lord Lakshmi Nrisimha will guide me in the path of success.