

[South Indian Bharata Natyam Dancers Perform in Sri Lanka](#)

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Sivaswamy, V. Two of Tamil Nadu's most excellent exponents of Bharata Natyam, Dr. Miss Padma Subramaniam and Miss Kumari Swarnamukhi, came to Colombo, Sri Lanka, in late April, 1982, during the time of the World Hindu Conference, and thrilled audiences with superb Bharata Natyam recitals. Miss Swarnamukhi returned to Lanka in July for additional performances, including in the North, in Jaffna. It was noted that Padma's dance recitals were full of bhavas and rasas. She has developed an exquisite style of her own, and her execution of the beautiful Karanas (dance poses) in her recitals was stunning. Miss Swarnamukhi, with her supple body and intense training, performed with great ease several intricate Karanas, to the amazement of the spectators, who generally felt that they had witnessed a great yogic feat or gymnastic exercise. Anyone who knows the true Indian tradition will realize that Bharata Natyam itself a great yoga - a means of realizing the Supreme Being. Watching her dance, one could almost see the frozen Karanas coming to life from the temple sculptures that have preserved the art through the centuries.

Bharata Natyam is the most exquisite dance form of India. It harkens back to a hoary antiquity and is known as the dance par excellence of the Tamil people. By nature, it is immensely religious and philosophical and inextricably bound up with Saivism. This dance form provides unlimited potential for a dancer to express his or her artistic talents. Lord Siva, the Supreme God of Saivism, is said to be the originator and ultimate exponent of this art, which He revealed to His favorite Gana, Tandu, who then taught it to Sage Bharata. Bharata later passed it on to the people of the world.

The Natyasastra, ascribed to Bharata Muni, describes in detail the 108 Karanas, or Tandava dance poses of Lord Nataraja, in detail in the fourth chapter. Many of them are extremely difficult to perform, requiring intense training, rare poise and yogic flexibility. These Karanas, which once constituted the foundation of the repertoire of Bharata Natyam, eventually went out of vogue. But fortunately, all the 108 Karanas were 'frozen' in stone in some of the lofty and magnificent temple

gopurams of Tamil Nadu, such as those at Chidambaram, the holiest shrine of the Saivites. In the first half of this century came a renaissance of Bharata Natyam in Tamil Nadu, and scholars and artists became interested in reviving its important features. It was the study of these sculptures that enabled Miss Padma and Miss Swarnamukhi to retrieve and put to practice many of those poses which had been lost or had gone out of use.

Miss Padma holds an M.A. degree in music and a Ph.D. in dissertation, for which her subject was "The Place of the Karanas in Indian Dance and Sculpture." She has traveled all over India, collecting information on the subject. Miss Swarnamukhi, age 22, hails from a family of traditional dancers. Her father, Bopal, was himself interested in the Karanas and began training his daughter very early in her life in the those and other aspects of Natya. Especially gifted, she became an adept, and was appointed as the State Dancer of Tamil Nadu at the age of 16. Both dancers have their own dance schools and are keen on popularizing the art.

While in Sri Lanka, the artists received extensive newspaper coverage and parts of their recitals were televised, availing them a very large audience. The presence, and especially the exquisite dance recitals, of these artists have kindled a new interest in Bharata Natyam in Sri Lanka, not only among the older generation of artists and connoisseurs, but among the younger as well.

About this beautiful form of dance, Smt. Meenakshi Devi, in Nov. 1978 Yoga Life, wrote, "The Bharata Natyam is more than an art form, it is a powerful vibration which literally draws receptive souls into its own peculiar vortex of energy, lifting them higher and higher in consciousness. It has a powerful effect upon those who appreciate it as an audience, as well as upon the performer herself. After some time, the dancer finds she cannot separate her art from her life, nor her life from her art. They merge into one, and as a consequence, her existence is purified and uplifted. The art becomes her Master, the art becomes her path; the art becomes the driving force of her life. It is an art - one of the few existing in the world today - worthy of complete self-surrender, worthy of complete dedication and devotion, an art truly worthy of worship."

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