

After successfully conducting the first ever *Nattuvanga Arangetram* in the city, Meenakshi Sagar speaks to **Anula Aboobacker** on the need for having an exclusive platform for *Nattuvanars*



Pix : S Kamalakannan

**At the event**  
The show which featured seven *Nattuvanga* renditions was graced by Kalaimamani M Selvam, lecturer, *Nattuvangam*, Chennai and Natyacharya M Swaminathan, director, *Narthana Gananatha, Barathanatya Vidyalaya*, Chennai

**Role of Nattuvanar**  
*Nattuvanar* can boost the spirit and energy of the dancer and can even help the dancer when they forget the steps. The *Vallinam* and *Mellinam* (hard and soft intonation) of the *jathis* also adds to the aesthetic pleasure of the dance form.

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# Rhythm of cymbals

Meenakshi Sagar is on cloud nine. Her venture *Nattuvanga Arangetram*, held in the city, for the first time has broken the conventional beliefs about *Nattuvangam* and has opened up whole new possibilities for *Nattuvanars*. *Nattuvangam*, an inseparable part of *Bharatanatyam*, is an art on its own, asserts Meenakshi and the idea of *Nattuvanga Arangetram* without *Bharatanatyam* stemmed from this belief. "When a dancer graces the stage with her beautiful smile, there are no eyes for the accompanying instruments. Violin, *mridangam* and similar instruments have separate *Arangetram*. But this is not the case when it comes to *Nattuvangam*. Till now a *Nattuvangam Arangetram* is always accompanied by *Bharatanatyam*. I wanted to break away from this convention," she avers.

Meenakshi Sagar, director, Aradhana School of Dance, has choreographed several novel classical dance numbers, sequences and dance dramas and has around 150 students training under her for classical dance and another 100 for Carnatic music. *Nattuvanga Arangetram*, held at Ramar Kovil last

week, saw six of her disciples strike cymbals, reciting *jathis*, *korvais* and *theermanams*. "*Nattuvanar* plays a very important role during the rendition of *Bharatanatyam*. He/she can boost the spirit and energy of the dancer and can even help the dancer when they forget the steps. The *Vallinam* and *Mellinam* (hard and soft intonation) also adds to the aesthetic pleasure of the dance form," she says.

She admits that organising an event exclusively for *Nattuvangam* was challenging. "The biggest challenge of course was the absence of the dancer (laughs). *Nattuvanars* plays the cymbals looking at the feet of the dancer. For this my students had to memorise everything and we did the show in six-months. Three of them who performed are married; even then they worked day and night to achieve the feat. A lot of sacrifice and hardwork has gone into the performance," she smiles.

Meenakshi who hails from Alwarpet, Chennai, founded Aradhana in 1990 at the Russian Cultural



Centre, Chennai to train Russian and Indian students. She shifted her base to Coimbatore eleven years ago and has been training Kovaiites since then. "I always wanted to contribute something to dance without compromising on tradition. Today I'm satisfied," she avers.

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