

# Compagnie Prana

## Press Review

**Brigitte Chataignier** is an accomplished performer and a connoisseur of Indian culture, especially of Indian dance. Initially trained in classical and contemporary dance, she began studying Mohiniyattam in 1987 under Kalamandalam Leelamma at Kerala Kalamandalam, then Kalamandalam Ksheimavathy and Smt Sridevi Rajan.

In 1995, she founded Cie Prana to promote Kerala art forms and also to work on projects on related themes. Commuting between India and France, she co-directed with Adoor Gopalakrishnan the making of the film “The Dance of the Enchantress”. She has been organising choreography workshops for the past twenty years. She has performed Mohiniyattam in renowned festivals in India and France. She is a recognized empanel artist from ICCR.

Brigitte Chataignier is also deeply involved in her own contemporary dance productions as a dancer and choreographer. She is currently creating her new piece *Mala*, and conducting a research project with the Centre National de la Danse. Brigitte Chataignier is also teacher in training, Feldenkrais, Awareness Through Movement ®.

# L'appel de l'Inde

À MI-CHEMIN  
ENTRE L'INDE  
ET RENNES,  
LA TRADITION  
ET LA  
MODERNITÉ,  
LA DANSE  
CONTEMPORAINE  
ET LE MOHINI  
ATTAM, LA  
CHORÉGRAPHE  
**BRIGITTE**  
**CHATAIGNIER**  
PROLONGE  
DEPUIS 1995  
LES RAMIFI-  
CATIONS D'UN  
ART EXCLUSI-  
VEMENT  
FÉMININ.  
LES AMATEURS  
DE DOUCEUR  
POURRONT  
BIENTÔT SE  
METTRE À  
L'HEURE  
HINDOUE, EN  
PRÉSENCE DE  
DEUX MAÎTRES  
DU GENRE.

**A** un accent circonflexe près, Brigitte Chataignier porte le nom d'un arbre, dont le très proche cousin n'est autre que le marronnier d'Inde. Le pays de Gandhi, du bois de rose et du santal, de la cardamome et de la cannelle, où la cofondatrice de la compagnie Prana cultive depuis 1995 les fruits séculaires d'un art indéracinable.

Le mohini attam. Un style de danse indienne, donc, faussement indolent et frappant à chacun de ses gestes aux portes du royaume de l'indicible. C'est comme si, dans leurs robes blanches aux liserés d'or, les danseuses avaient dès le premier pas, le pouvoir de rendre l'air plus léger, de volutes virtuoses en réverences nous laissant rêveurs. Dans le mohini attam, même les sourcils dansent, accents circonflexes de ces géniales flexions, tandis que le visage donne toute sa vitalité à cette danse toute entière vouée à l'amour.

La douceur de vivre du Kerala, état rural du sud-ouest de l'Inde, Brigitte Chataignier et son mari Michel Lestrehan ont eu l'occasion de la caresser de 1987 à 1993, avant de fonder la compagnie Prana. En sanskrit, langue millénaire pourtant bien vivante, Prana signifie souffle vital... Comme pour nous rappeler l'importance de nos gestes élémentaires. De la nature aussi. Les racines d'un arbre de sagesse auxquelles s'abreuve chaque jour la chorégraphe. Dans quelques jours, l'auteure des *Vêpres des grenouilles*, *Amba*, *La Chambre des vertiges* et *Élémentaire* aura la joie de présenter à Rennes deux de ses muses, les maîtres Kalamandalam Kshemavathy et Kalamandalam Leelamma, accompagnées de quatre musiciens (un chanteur, un violoniste et deux percussionnistes). Un véritable événement programmé salle Guy-Ropartz, après avoir été présenté au festival de l'Imaginaire de Paris, en collaboration avec la Maison des cultures du monde. Parallèlement, une conférence



sera donnée par l'universitaire Brigitte Prost (mer. 24, 18h30, atelier culturel), et un concert est programmé à la MJC Bréquigny (le 1<sup>er</sup> avril). "Le mohini attam, dont le kalamandala est une branche, est un style assez peu connu en France, pose la chorégraphe. Une danse très peu acrobatique, tout en courbes et délicate, et au final très ouverte à l'expression des sentiments." En 2007, avec Gopika, elle invitait de jeunes Indiennes à se lancer dans le bain de la danse contemporaine. À l'automne 2010, si tout va bien, Ganga verra l'aboutissement d'un projet fleuve, "mariant des choses très organiques mais aussi très technologiques". Lieu sacré, "le Gange est un

rappel aux sources et à la mort." Un endroit où l'on se lave et où l'on passe dans l'au-delà. "Le lieu d'une violence terrible et d'une catastrophe écologique sans précédent, aussi", conclut Brigitte Chataignier. Loin de l'Inde indécente de *Slumdog millionaire*, "dans lequel on transforme un drame insoutenable, celui des bidonvilles, en divertissement", Brigitte Chataignier nous montrera bientôt un autre visage de l'Inde. Celle que l'on retrouve aussi dans *La Danse de l'enchanteresse*, magnifique documentaire qu'elle réalisa en 2007 en collaboration avec Adoor Gopalakrishnan. De géniales flexions en perspectives.

Jean-Baptiste Gandon

- **À consulter:** <http://cie.prana.free.fr>
- **À voir:** *La Danse de l'enchanteresse*, de Brigitte Chataignier et Adoor Gopalakrishnan. Existe en DVD (les films du paradoxe). 19 €. [prana@compagnieprana.com](mailto:prana@compagnieprana.com)
- **Sur scène:** Mer. 24 (avec Kalamandalam Leelamma), 20h30; mer. 25 (avec Kalamandalam Kshemavathy), 20h30, salle Guy-Ropartz. 10 et 20 €. 02 99 67 11 66 (office de tourisme de Rennes Métropole).

## La culture indienne, côté jardin

Rue de Vern, dans leur jardin, Brigitte Chataignier et Michel Lestrehan ont aménagé, à l'indienne, l'atelier de la compagnie Prana. Chorégraphes de danse contemporaine, ils puisent leur inspiration dans des formes traditionnelles de l'Inde du Sud, qu'ils pratiquent depuis une vingtaine d'années : « Ici, c'est un endroit pour s'étirer et un lieu d'inspiration pour créer. C'est aussi un espace ouvert au public pour des cours, des salons de musique et des rencontres ».

À partir du 20 mars, Brigitte reçoit ses maîtres, Leelamma et Kshemavathy. Le trio présentera une variation sur le Mohini Attam, Rasa (saveur en sanskrit), et animera des ateliers. **Christine Barbedet**

*21 mars, 15 h-18 h, initiation danse et  
31 mars-1<sup>er</sup> avril, ateliers musique et danse.  
Les 24 et 25 mars, 20 h 30, Rasa,  
salle Guy Ropartz.  
[www.compagnieprana.com](http://www.compagnieprana.com)*



Brigitte Chataignier dans l'atelier de la compagnie de danse Prana.

# To enchant the French

Danseuse Brigitte Chataignier is working on a book, which will be the first one on Mohiniyattam in French



BRIGITTE Chataignier, the French Mohiniyattam danseuse who has enchanted audiences in India and abroad, is now working on a book. It will be the first one on Mohiniyattam in French.

The dancer, whose association with Kerala began 22 years ago when she arrived at Kerala Kalamandalam to train in Mohiniyattam, is collaborating with Brigitte Prost, a lecturer on theatre at the University of Rennes, to bring out the book.

"I will put everything I know in the book. I want to leave something behind me," said Chataignier, who was at the Alliance Française de Trivandrum on Sunday in connection with a performance at the Soorya Festival.

"It is a big enterprise," said Brigitte Prost, who came to know about the classical Kerala dance form from Chataignier, as the latter takes classes on theatre and Indian dance at the University of Rennes. Prost is concentrating on the research part of the project. The book is expected to hit the stands in two years' time.

You can find articles on Mohiniyattam in French, and chapters in French books about Indian dance forms, but no comprehensive work dedicated exclusively to it in the language, says Chataignier, who collaborated with filmmaker Adoor Gopalakrishnan in 'The Dance of the Enchantress,' a colourful film on Mohiniyattam.

"In France, Mohiniyattam is starting to be known. Bharatanatyam is known, Kathak, yes. But Mohiniyattam is still rare."

Brigitte Chataignier was already training in Bharatanatyam in France when she came upon Mohiniyattam, courtesy a friend. "She gave me the address of the Kalamandalam." Her Kalamandalam life began in 1987.

Today, Chataignier spends her time between Kerala and France, but mostly in France, where her family is and where she runs 'Prana', a dance company which she runs with her husband Michel Lestrehan, a familiar face in the cultural circles of Kerala. (He was a Kathakali student at Kalamandalam).

Chataignier is fully immersed in Mohiniyattam and contemporary dance projects and organising lectures and workshops. Mohiniyattam continues to be her first love. She would also like to spend more time with her teachers Kalamandalam Kshemavathy and Kalamandalam Leelamma.

"The special thing about Mohiniyattam is the flow of the movements. There is an inner rhythm. It is subtle, and there is not too much of 'Veera' or heroism," she says.

"Dance is a gift given to some people. But it is the constant training that gives you the joy."



Tiki Rajwi  
tikirajwi@expressbuzz.com

Brigitte Chataignier performs at the Soorya Festival in the city on Sunday evening.

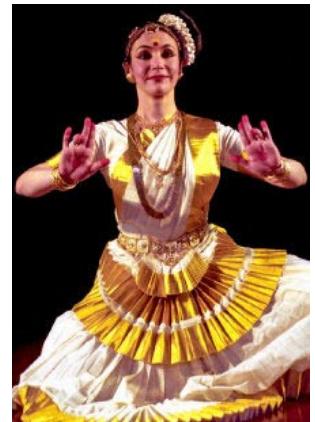
Kavyoor Santhosh

«The Hindu» - septembre 2009

## Mohiniyattam: ‘a cultivated art form’

*In the oriental art tradition, the relation between the Guru and the Shishya is exemplary.*

Brigitte Chataignier.



Among traditional performing arts of Kerala, Mohiniyattam along with Kathakali fascinated Western artistes even in the early 20th century. The first dancer to do historical research on Mohiniyattam based on what was available was Betty True Jones from the United States (U.S.) who landed at Kerala Kalamandalam in the early 1950's along with her husband, Dr. Clifford R. Jones. A little less than four decades later, Brigitte Chataignier from France became enchanted by the lyrical grace and poetic movements of Mohiniyattam. She reached Kalamandalam in 1987 and was under the tutelage of Kalamandalam Leelamma for three years with a scholarship from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Her training in Mohiniyattam continued under Kalamandalam Kshemavathy. Inquisitive about the stylistic differences congenital to this dance tradition, Brigitte became the disciple of Devi Rajappan, Nirmala Panickar, Bharati Sivaji and the like. In 1995, she, with her Kathakali-trained husband, Michel, founded the Pran Company in France to promote Indian performing arts and contemporary forms. Brigitte has successfully facilitated several cultural exchange programmes between France and Kerala and has also made a documentary film on Mohiniyattam, which was directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan. Brigitte speaks about her life and career in her accented English.

*Excerpts from the interview.*

### Contemporary dance to Mohiniyattam

I was a contemporary dancer in France. I learnt contemporary dance and mime in Paris under two teachers, one of whom was trained in Javanese dance. In the Oriental art tradition, the relation between the guru and the shishya is exemplary. In course of time I came to know that in Indian dance, there is a whole lot of internal practice. This was a revelation to me. The urge to get familiarised with a traditional art outpaced my passion towards contemporary dance. This was the time I met my husband, Michel, who had been wedded to Kathakali.

### On choosing Mohiniyattam over Bharatanatyam

In fact, I had learnt Bharatanatyam for a year under Savitri Nair in Paris. For some reason, I felt that my body does not conform to the techniques of Bharatanatyam. Hence I was on the lookout for a dance with mellowed movements and subdued expressions. Michel then advised me go for Mohiniyattam.

### Your gurus and the Kalamandalam sampradaya

Through years of learning and rehearsing, I gradually realised the differences between the style of the Kalamandalam school and that of Kalyanikutty Amma, which prompted me to explore the variations as two separate streams. I have imbibed the ‘lasya’ from the dancing culture of Kalyanikutty Amma. Since my first exposure to Mohiniyattam was through the intensive practice at Kalamandalam, I do have a definite inclination towards it.

### Redundant romanticism of Mohiniyattam and Western audiences

Mohiniyattam is not a well known Indian dance form in France unlike Bharatanatyam. The Western audience does appreciate the moods of the Nayika in and the movements of Mohiniyattam. I arrange the shows in such a way that the right atmosphere is created through light, sound and audience-proximity. My ensuing project is one in which my gurus Leelamma and Kshemavathy will perform at a festival in Paris followed by a few recitals for which all three of us share the stage. Since it is a cultivated art form I don't expect to draw a crowd to watch Mohiniyattam. But there will always be rasikas and connoisseurs in the audience.

### Thematically repetitive Mohiniyattam versus free style contemporary dance creations

I enjoy both. Repeating the same items is interesting too. Vacillating between the classical and the contemporary, one can experience diverse spaces of actions and emotions. I keep on performing Mohiniyattam. In December, I will be performing at the Soorya Festival in Thiruvananthapuram. Meanwhile I am getting involved in thematic and experimental works. My last choreography, ‘Gopika,’ had five dancers and was performed in Paris in 2007.

### Collaborating with Adoor Gopalakrishnan in ‘Dance of Enchantress’

I had this longing to make a film on Mohiniyattam for a long time. After watching the master pieces of Adoor Gopalakrishnan in Paris in the 1990's, I became an admirer. The film on Mohiniyattam he directed primarily aims at experiencing the ‘dance’ rather than dissecting it intellectually. It juxtaposes the life of women on- and off-stage. The film is on Mohiniyattam and not on the individual styles of performance. Working with Adoor was an ingenious and insightful experience.

V. KALADHARAN

# Expressions in dance

**CHAT** AMBILI RAMNATH meets Mohinyattom danseuse Brigitte Chataignier who is in the midst of a new choreography

**B**rigitte Chataignier, by her own confession, has lived and thought like a Keralite woman all these years. Not surprising for a person for whom Mohiniyattom has become a way of life.

Yet, at this point in her career Brigitte feels the need to concentrate on a French woman's point of view and present that perspective to the world. This, she hopes to do through a dance production that allows freedom of expression in a contemporary fashion, while maintaining the base and essence of Mohiniyattom.

## An offering

"It is my personal creation and offering. For me it is a chance to give the younger generation, the legacy that I have inherited from my gurus." The focal point of the creation will be the bhabha and abhinaya aspects as well as the circular movements typical of Mohiniyattom. However, the technique adopted will not be narrative in style, she emphasises. The training, to be held initially in Kerala, will include meditation and relaxation techniques.

The dancer was at Alliance Française in the city to select dancers for her production. In coordinating the project, Brigitte values the help given by Kunju Vasudevan Namboothiri, a connoisseur of



**POINT OF VIEW** Brigitte Chataignier wants to do a dance production that allows freedom of expression without moving away from the format of Mohiniyattom PHOTO: S. MAHINSHA

the art, besides the support of a committee that she has formed for the purpose.

"The cultural milieu in France is very different from what we see here. An artiste there has the liberty to innovate, improvise and experiment. This work, therefore, is an attempt to

take these young dancers through an experience of the contemporary," she explains. However she clarifies that she will not "distort the style."

Once her production is on track, she would like to give solo performances at regular intervals. Brigitte has also been working for a documentary film on Mohiniyattom with Adoor Gopalakrishnan. Her current production will be staged at the Museum Juimet in France meant for Asian Arts. However, the Kerala audience will have the chance to watch its preview that will be held under the aegis of Alliance Française

de Trivandrum.

Brigitte, a teacher of Mohiniyattom and Kerala art forms to theatre students at the University in France, is also a student of Carnatic music. Brigitte was trained intensively in the theatre arts, in classical and contemporary dance, in mime and expression.

Taking a trip down memory lane, she remembers that she was drawn irresistibly by the East, and fascinated by the beauty of Indian dance, began the study of Mohiniyattom in 1987 at Kerala Kalamandalam, under Kalamandalam Leelamma and later under Kalamandalam Kshema-

vathy. As a performing artiste, Brigitte traces the beginning of her successful career to the platform provided by the Soorya Dance and Music Festival.

Brigitte's husband is Michel Lestrehan, a choreographer and dancer, well versed in Kalaripayattu. PRANA is the company that the couple have founded to promote Indian performing arts as well as contemporary works.

Jaya and Shankar are their children and when Brigitte says that Jaya will soon follow in her footsteps, one notices the glow of motherly pride in her expressive eyes.

**FOR ME IT IS A CHANCE TO GIVE THE YOUNGER GENERATION, THE LEGACY THAT I HAVE INHERITED FROM MY GURUS**

« Indian Express » - 2007

# Hunting for talent

**Brigitte Chattaingier from France is on a rare artistic mission, looking for talents in Mohiniyattom who can think beyond the ordinary**

traditional. There is not much artistic exploration. It is into this realm that I want to introduce my students," she said.

Evolving Mohiniyattom as a contemporary dance form was her challenge. "Here people have a very wrong notion about contemporary dance. They think contemporary dance is all about jerky movements. But that is so not true. Contemporary dance, as we understand in the West is about making innovations in existing dance forms and create new forms in the process. The whole concept is to be in peace with oneself. It is more of a spiritual experience. Its about evolving the dance into a more personal form of expression," she said.

The students should also have the talent to improvise the dance pattern and add their own personal innovations to the dance. They should be able to elaborate the natyas and the movements in their own personal way.

The selected students will be flown to France after initial training in Kerala. There they will be performing at various venues, including theatres and Universities.

"As many as three theaters in France have already consented to support the troupe, and one of them at Lorient will also be co-producing our performances," she said.

"This is meant to be a long term artistic collaboration. So what is most important is to see is the students and genuinely interest and whether they support from her family. Being in Kerala for more than 20 years I know what family means for the students here, especially for girls. I know that without the backing of their family students from Kerala cannot continue in the team," she said.

— Express Features

**N**oted Mohiniyattom dancer, choreographer and teacher, Brigitte Chattaingier from France is on a rare artistic mission. To evolve Mohiniyattom, as a personal and spiritual experience through meaningful improvisations and present it on a global level.

And to accompany her in this mission, Brigitte is on the lookout for talents who can think beyond the traditional and have the calibre to perform world class.

"What I am looking for is a group of dedicated artists who can work as a team to bring

out new dimensions in Mohiniyattom, and who can collaborate with in a long-term basis to help bring Mohiniyattom on the global arena," said Brigitte. So here she was conducting an audition for students of mohiniyattom at the Alliance Francaise.

Brigitte, who came to Kerala for the first time in 1986, joined Kalamandalam in 1987. There she was trained in Mohiniyattom by the likes of Kalamandalam Leelamma and Kshemavati for six years. Later she moved out of Kalamandalam and learnt the dance from other gurus as well.

"Besides the Kalamandalam style of

Mohiniyattom I have also been exposed to the Kalyanikuttiamma style of the dance, which I learnt from her daughter Sridevi Rajan," she said. Brigitte is also working on a documentary on Mohiniyattom directed by veteran director Adoor Gopalakrishnan.

It is the urge to bring in innovations and add personal expression to the dance that prompted Brigitte to embark on her new mission. "This project is my attempt to personalised Mohiniyattom through innovations. Back in France, artists are always improvising their art and creating new dimensions to it. But here there is a tendency to stick on to the

«The Hindu» - décembre 2001

2\* THE HINDU, Sunday, December 9, 2001

## French connection

INTO THE distance, the thoughts wander. Beyond those sun dappled waters of the azure sea, far beyond the windswept fields and the dusk-hazed valleys where silence reigns supreme. So does peace. And here lies her own space.

"Artistes need peace. They need the glorious sight of the blue sea, the caressing of the gentle breeze and the purity of the morning dew to reconstruct themselves," her voice trails off. Perseverance and sincerity, she has in abundance as is evident in her quest to learn one of the most elegant of Indian dances.

"I do not know anything else. Dance for me is like breathing. Life is too short and one cannot compromise on things that are so dear to the heart. I consider lucky as many compromise out of compulsions of daily life," she says earnestly, her hair tied in a 'mundu'.

Brigitte was originally trained in theatre arts, classical and contemporary dances, mime and corporeal expression back home. "But, the mystic of the East was irresistible," she smiles. This brought her to India and to the famed Kerala Kalamandalam.

"It was the spiritual aspect of the Indian classical dances that attracted me the most. Here, dance is a tradition. Like water's perennial flow, it has been passed down the generations. Learning is a continuous process which spans a lifetime," she says.

"I am a normal person blessed with sensitivity like anyone else," she says, sending across the message of she not being your stereotyped foreigner raving (and ranting) about cows, snakes and ash smeared sadhus.

Why Mohini Attam? "Unlike



MEET...

### Brigitte Chataignier

*This is the journey of a French woman across the seas to the distant shores to master "Mohini Attam", the classical dance living in a far flung hamlet in the lush green landscape of God's own country.*

*Brigitte Chataignier talks to K.V.S. Madhav about life that is dance to her.*



Photo: P.V. Sivakumar

**"Dance for me is like breathing."**

Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi that are extremely physical and spectacular, this is gentle. It is all about 'lasya' with gliding steps and rich, poetic expressions. Being a quiet person, this was a natural choice," she explains. Dance, she says, is an expression of emotions. "It should make people move in their minds."

Was learning difficult given the fact that Carnatic music is inseparable from the danceform she chose? "It isn't easy. A decade-and-a-half after I began learning, I feel I am slowly evolving," she says.

How? "I lead a normal life like any other Keralite. One has to be an integral part of the lifeline to understand the land's dance with the sights and smells sinking into your mind. The place and its tradition should fill your imagination," Brigitte says. How else can one do justice to the sheer poetry of legendary composer Swati Thirunal, she asks. The buzz of the bee, the caress of the breeze, the undulating waves of the sea... "Mohini Attam's feminine and graceful style reminds one of the suppleness of paddy swaying in the wind and the strength of waves breaking on the beaches of Cochin. It transports you to the realm of divinity," the French lady, who performed in many temples, trails off.

She is pained by the stigma attached to classical dance in Indian households. "What is bad in it? Many friends stopped dancing either after they got married or bowing down to pressure from their parents paranoid about their ward's marital prospects. My father still cannot believe I can dance in a far off land..." she is amused. Only an Indian can understand his peer better. She is one undoubtedly!

«Danseur» - mars 2000

## Danser

### Courbes, douceur et sensualité

Française, mais «danseuse indienne», Brigitte Chataignier a choisi le mohini attam, danse du sud de l'Inde, pour exprimer sa passion pour la musique, le théâtre et la danse. Exclusivement réservé aux femmes, ce style tout en courbes rappelle les langueurs, la douceur du



Brigitte Chataignier dans un récital de mohini attam.

climat du Kerala, région où il est né. Sur le plateau, dès les premiers gestes, l'air semble plus léger. Un balancement s'installe, des volutes apparaissent. Exécutée «comme sans y toucher», la danse coule sans jamais s'arrêter. La danseuse joue avec finesse de la séduction, s'appuyant sur la maîtrise des expressions du visage et rappelle que cette danse est vouée à l'amour et à la dévotion. L'apparente mollesse des mains, la richesse des frappes de pieds, les inclinaisons du buste, confirment la présence d'une technique intégrée et convaincante. Les tambours frappent, vifs et piquants, le chant emplit l'espace, le temps s'étire, comme baigné de chaleur.

### O. Cougoule

Paris/Theâtre de la Ville/Les Abbesses.

«The Hindu» - 1997

# Committed to dance-theatre of Kerala

Mastery over any Indian classical performing art is well-nigh impossible to be realised in one's lifetime. Perhaps it was the insatiable urge for attaining mastery that compelled the French dancer-couple Michel Lestrehan and Brigitte Chataignier to return to India recently. They had left India four years ago after six years of arduous training in Kathakali and Mohiniyattom, respectively. At present, the duo is busy taking lessons of Kalarippayattu, the Kerala martial art, at Vallabhatta Kalarisangam, Chavakkad near Guruvayur.

Michel has been a consummate performer of contemporary dance since 1978. While Fil de La Vierge, Bionic and Ravi Des Yeux were some of his notable choreographies in the past, "Song of the Frog" and "Viraham" (pangs of separation) have been the new ones after he was initiated into the Indian art forms.

A keen interest in oriental dancers compelled Michel to practise Tai-Chi and Butoh dance. He even participated in Hideyuki Yano's "Hana" in 1984-85. Kumudini Lakhji gave him lessons in Kathak. But 'Kalakeyavadham' Kathakali, he chanced to see at Kottakkal, totally converted him into an ardent

Of all the different veshams, 'kathi' impressed him more as "that is more heroic". Even as he familiarised himself with all the varied veshams, he could also stage Bhima, Ravana and Narakausura on many occasions.

Michel, along with his wife has performed extensively in India and also been recorded by the Central Production Centre of Doordarshan.

A creative performer, Michel proposes to bring in an encounter between Kathakali and contemporary dance for which his present training in Kathakali would be more beneficial. As for Brigitte, she is busy practising and recording the varied schools of Mohiniyattom. She had her initiation at Kalamandalam. "I was enamoured by the extremely graceful evocation of Iasya in Mohiniyattom, the moment I witnessed a performance at Kalamandalam long back," she said. And sustained training under Kalamandalam Leelamma, Kalamandalam Kshemavathy and later Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma and Bharati Shivaji helped her graduate into an accomplished artiste.

Interestingly, Brigitte who also managed to

devotee of the dance-theatre of Kerala.

"It was a sort of fascination since I could discern a rare synthesis of expression, rhythm and dance in it," Michel explained how he got inspired by the very first play.

The premier institution of performing arts, Kerala Kalamandalam attracted him during a brief visit in 1985. But it was only in 1987 that he could enrol himself as a regular student of Kathakali, supported by the Indo-French cultural exchange programme.

The traditional mode of training involving rigorous physical exercises, language of mudras supplemented by appropriate facial expressions and moreover the sophisticated rhythm patterns drummed out from the composite percussion of chenda, chengala (gong) and maddalam - all added to his enthusiasm.

Michel's single-minded devotion compelled him to pursue the training even after he completed the three-year course in Kalamandalam. With a view to enriching the repertoire, he turned to the veteran Kathakali performer Sadanam Krishnankutty, under whom he honed his skills during his last three years in India until 1993.

practise three veshams in Kathakali — her Panchali in Kalyanasouganthikam is quite alluring — believes that both Kathakali and Bharatanatyam have influenced Mohiniyattom in no small measure.

At present, she is getting trained in vocal classical music under Mangattu Nadesan that seems to enable her to comprehend the bhavas of karunam, bhakti and sringara that Mohiniyattom embraces mainly. In this connection, she felt that the sopana style of rendition is most suitable to Mohiniyattom.

Apart from performances in temples, educational institutions and festivals for which she had been regularly invited, Brigitte enchanted her audience with her elegant artistry in the Onam festival, Thiruvananthapuram, Videshi Kalakar Utsav, New Delhi, Kumbhakonam Mahamagam, Chidambaram, Nisagandhi festival and South Zone Festival, Thiruvananthapuram. For the present, she may perform at the Malabar Mahotsav and a few other programmes at the national level.

G. S. PAUL

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Visakhapatnam and Thiruvananthapuram



Brigitte Chataignier performing  
Mohiniyattom.

«Libération» - juillet 1995

## SPECTACLES

**DANSE.** Pour ses quartiers d'été à Avignon, ce festival consacré à la jeune création présente en off des spectacles où pointent de fortes personnalités.

### Première estivale pour les Hivernales

**L'Été des Hivernales,**  
jusqu'au 17 juillet, puis du 20  
au 30 juillet à la Manutention  
(entrée nord), de 11h à 19h;  
tél: 90.82.33.12.

**E**lle est in l'hiver et off l'été. Amélie Grand, qui dirige les Hivernales d'Avignon, festival mêlant stages et spectacles et qui se consacre essentiellement à la jeune création, inaugure cette année sa première présence estivale. Le nouveau lieu que son association Iquatre occupe depuis quelques mois à la Manutention, au-dessus des cinémas Utopia, du club jazz l'Ajmi et du Grand Café, lui permet de proposer un off étalé sur tout le mois de juillet, chaque spectacle étant présenté une dizaine de fois, ce qui permet le nécessaire bouché à oreille dans un Avignon saturé. Évidemment, ce n'est pas encore l'idéal, mais le studio transformé en petite salle de spectacles (80 places) ne manque pas de charme, même si la climatisation a quelque mal à se roder. Ce n'est pas la formule dont rêve Amélie: «*Cette année, explique-t-elle, nous louons le studio aux compagnies. Les travaux ont coûté cher. Si nous avons été aidés par le ministère (via la Drac Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), par la Ville, le conseil régional, nous ne le sommes pas par le conseil général. Nous avons bon espoir de couvrir les dettes l'année prochaine puisque pour l'instant seule une première tranche de travaux a été financée. Mais j'aime-rais construire vraiment une programmation d'été, une sorte de festival du solo.*»

En attendant des Hivernales (du 24 février au 2 mars 1996) sur le thème «Quoi de neuf? Pas cher!...», ce nouvel espace pour la danse reçoit des compagnies de la région Paca (William Petit, le groupe Coline de la maison de la Danse d'Istres), mais aussi de Paris (Richard Mouradian, Faizal Zeghouadi, Jean-Marc Colet), de Rhône-Alpes (François Veyrunes, Marie Robert), de Languedoc-Roussillon (Florence Saul, Anne-Marie Porras), du Nord-Pas-de-Calais (Myriam Dooce)... Les danseurs et choré-



Le Mohini Attam, danse indienne dévotionnelle du Kerala, interprétée par Brigitte Chataignier, de Rennes.

graphes que l'on a pu y voir ne manquent ni de personnalité ni de propositions. C'est le cas du groupe Acanthe. Karina et Frédéric Brignon, après s'être rencontrés au Conservatoire d'Aix, avoir étudié à Moudra, l'école de Maurice Béjart, et dansé dans nombre de compagnies, ont fondé leur compagnie en 1993. La pièce qu'ils ont présentée, *Porteur de signes*, sur une musique d'Olivier Messiaen, retient l'attention malgré son côté bon élève et ses quelques maladresses, notamment dans la répétition de pas que l'on a beaucoup vus, dans le manque d'attaques rythmiques. Le duo a une telle qualité de mouvement, une telle sincérité dans la démarche volontairement sobre (un simple carré de tissu réversible, orange et vert, pour tout «décor»), qu'il sait maintenir l'attention jusqu'au détail d'une tête qui roule autour de l'autre, jusqu'à des fentes qui appartiennent autant aux arts martiaux qu'à la danse, jusqu'à la mobilité

du buste. On restera plus encore suspendu aux portés très physiques de Karina et Frédéric Brignon qui ont une belle sensualité parce qu'ils mêlent en un même mouvement puissance et fragilité. Deux drôles d'oiseaux qui, s'ils n'ont pas encore trouvé leurs branches, ont la qualité de l'envol.

Également séduisant, le Mohini Attam, une danse indienne dévotionnelle du Kerala, interprétée par Brigitte Chataignier, de Rennes, qui a passé de nombreuses années dans le sud de l'Inde comme danseuse mais aussi comme étudiante (autant de danse que de chant Carnatique). Son récital d'une grande sérénité a permis de découvrir un style lumineux et clair comme le costume blanc et or dont est elle parée. Très douce, cette danse qui est en fait «la danse de l'enchanteresse» et qui tire son origine de la mythologie hindoue (Vishnou prit l'apparence de Mohini pour séduire et vaincre les dragons) ravit effectivement le spectateur. Privilégiant plus les expressions

simplicité, qui égale la précision, laisse apparaître des lignes franches, amples, des courbes, et produit un effet effectivement enchanteur.

MARIE-CHRISTINE VERNAY

Festival  
AVIGNON

SAMEDI 15 ET DIMANCHE  
16 JUILLET 1995

Libération



Kalyanikutty Amma

Kalamandalam would give them.

Kalamandalam Sathyabhama retired as Principal of Kalamandalam in the last year of the decade. Also during the period, Kalamandalam Kshemavathy and Kalamandalam Saraswathy gradually reduced the frequency of their performances and started concentrating on teaching. But the three other senior Mohini Attam dancers from Kerala Sugandhi, Leelamma and Hymavathy continued to perform actively. The latter two are now the main artists of the Kalamandalam's Mohini Attam troupe. Others on the scene as performers included Shalini Anand, Radha Dutta, Priyadarshini Ghosh and Sunitha Rajan.

From Kalyanikutty Amma's school, her grand-daughter Sushama Rajan (now Sushama Uday) emerged as a talented dancer.

When Protima Gauri Bedi established Nrityagram outside Bangalore, Kalyanikutty Amma took charge of the Mohini Attam gurukula there

and taught the dance with the help of Sushama. Later, her health and Sushama's exit in rather unfortunate circumstances brought this arrangement to an end. In the event, Bharati Shivaji has taken charge of the gurukula.

Out of Mohini Attam dancers performing in the Kalamandalam style, Brigitte Chataignier of France earned a notable reputation during this period. Chataignier, a classical and Modern dancer, who began her training in this dance in 1987, was groomed by Kalamandalam Leelamma and later by Kalamandalam Kshemavathy. After six years of training and a few remarkable performances in various centres in India, she left for Paris in

AVINASH PASRICHA

Leela a board game based on dancing  
featuring sides swans, deer, birds

Brigitte Chataignier





## Extraits de presse indienne

«Elle est tendre, gracieuse et pleine de gaîté, sa danse va tout droit au cœur des spectateurs»

*Malayala Manorama, octobre 1998*

«Sous les lumières dorées de la scène, la gracieuse Mohini (enchanteresse) danse en exprimant le Sringararasa (sentiment de l'amour) à la perfection, accompagnée de mouvements on ne peut plus harmonieux ; elle nous mène jusqu'au comble de l'enchantedement...”

*Vanita, 1-14 mars 1998*

«Out of Mohini Attam dancers performing in the Kalamandalam style, Brigitte Chataignier of France earned a notable reputation during this period.”

«Outre ses performances dans les temples, institutions éducatives et festivals dans lesquels elle fut régulièrement invitée, Brigitte enchantait les publics par son art élégant et sa grâce délicate lors de la fête de l'Omam...”

*Georges S.Paul, Indian Express, August 1993*

“Among th performers in the festival, the star performer was without doubt Brigitte Chataignier whose Mohini Attam could compete with the best anywhere.”

*Leela Venkataraman, Sruti February 1992*

«Brigitte Chataignier a été la vedette de ce festival. Trois années passées au Kalamandalam avec Leelama, puis deux années à présent avec Kshemavathy ont développé en elle un intéressant mélange de styles. Aujourd'hui, le calme, la douceur, la maîtrise sans effort et l'engagement dont elle fait preuve dans les scènes de Nritta (danse pure), révèlent l'influence de l'enseignement de son maître.”

*Arshiya Sethi, Times Of India, décembre 1991*

«In the four-day Sahitya Kala Parishads Art without frontiers festival, a perfect example of an artist transcending national and cultural barriers was provided by the french Mohini Attam dancer Brigitte Chataignier. Exquisite in her slender gracefulness, Brigitte danced herself into the hearts of the people.”

*Leela Venkataraman, The Hindu, 6/12/91*

«Le spectacle de Mohini Attam présenté par Brigitte Chataignier fut la performance la plus remarquable de ce festival. L'enchanteresse elle-même semblait être descendue sur terre. Brigitte excella dans «Le Shankara Bharanam varnam' avec des gestes gracieux et des expressions communicatives. Elle peut être comparée avec les meilleures danseuses indiennes de cet art.»

*Statesman, novembre 1991*

# LA SAGA DES ASSOCIATIONS

## LA COMPAGNIE PRANA

### Compagnie Prana



© Christophe Le Devantat

Brigitte Chataignier et Michel Lestréhan

Brigitte Chataignier et Michel Lestréhan, danseurs et chorégraphes, fondent la Compagnie Prana en 1995 à Rennes. Ils partagent leur temps entre la France et l'Inde. Leur univers artistique se constitue d'une recherche chorégraphique contemporaine ainsi que d'une pratique des arts traditionnels – la danse, le théâtre et la musique du Kerala (Inde du Sud) qu'ils exercent depuis 1987, auprès des plus grands maîtres. Brigitte Chataignier est reconnue comme l'une des rares artistes occidentales à maîtriser la danse féminine Mohini Attam. Michel Lestréhan est spécialisé dans le



Brigitte Chataignier Mohini Attam - Inde

© M.Y. Brandy

théâtre-dansé Kathakali et l'art martial Kalaripayatt. Ils dansent et enseignent ces formes et développent une démarche de création où se rencontrent Orient et Occident, tradition et modernité.

La Compagnie Prana, c'est d'abord l'histoire d'une rencontre, celle d'un Breton né à Lorient et d'une Parisienne, qui partagent leur passion pour la danse et la culture indienne. C'est au Kerala qu'ils trouvent ensemble leur inspiration artistique, qui dépasse le travail technique pour englober un art de vivre, une philosophie et un amour pour l'Inde où ils se rendent chaque année pour retrouver leur deuxième lieu de vie.

En 1987, Brigitte et Michel étudient auprès des plus grands maîtres pendant six années passionnées, suivies de nombreux allers-retours avec le soutien des gouvernements indiens et français, et de l'AFAA pour leurs projets de recherche.

Ils dansent dans les temples du Kerala et présentent leurs spectacles dans les villes indiennes. Ils gardent intacte l'empreinte de leurs maîtres : Kalamandalam Leelamma, Kalamandalam Kshelmaavathy, Sri Devi Rajan, pour le Mohini Attam, Kalamandalam Vijayan, Sadanam Krishnan Kutty pour le Kathakali, Nelluvaye Krishnan Kutty Marar, Mangat Nadasan pour le chant carnatique, Krishnadas Gurukkal et Balan Gurukkal pour le Kalaripayatt... et traversent l'art de la danse, de la musique et du théâtre avec une sereine créativité, qui fait preuve de leur profonde imprégnation.

Depuis 1995, le travail de la Compagnie Prana s'est développé dans le domaine du spectacle vivant et de la pédagogie, soutenu par la Ville de Rennes, le Conseil Général d'Ille et Vilaine, le Conseil Régional de Bretagne et la DRAC. Prana fait partie du Collectif Danse Rennes Métropole, qui travaille à l'émergence d'un nouveau centre de création.

### LES SPECTACLES TRADITIONNELS

Par son talent d'interprète, Brigitte Chataignier contribue notamment au développement de l'Art Mohini Attam. Elle a été la première danseuse professionnelle « Indienne » de nationalité française invitée par le Théâtre de la Ville Abbesses en 2000. Michel Lestréhan,

un des pionniers européens de l'art martial Kalaripayatt, a su retrouver les liens entre cette forme ancestrale et le théâtre Kathakali.

La compagnie Prana organise régulièrement des tournées de ses spectacles traditionnels accompagnés des musiciens et invite ponctuellement les maîtres indiens.

Prana est également conseiller en programmation pour des festivals, semaines à thème : on se souvient du festival « Latitudes Villette/Inde du Sud » qui avait invité 60 artistes indiens en 2001.

### LES CREATIONS CHOREGRAPHIQUES

Elles s'inspirent librement des formes ou mythes traditionnels. Les résidences de création se déroulent tant en Inde qu'en France :

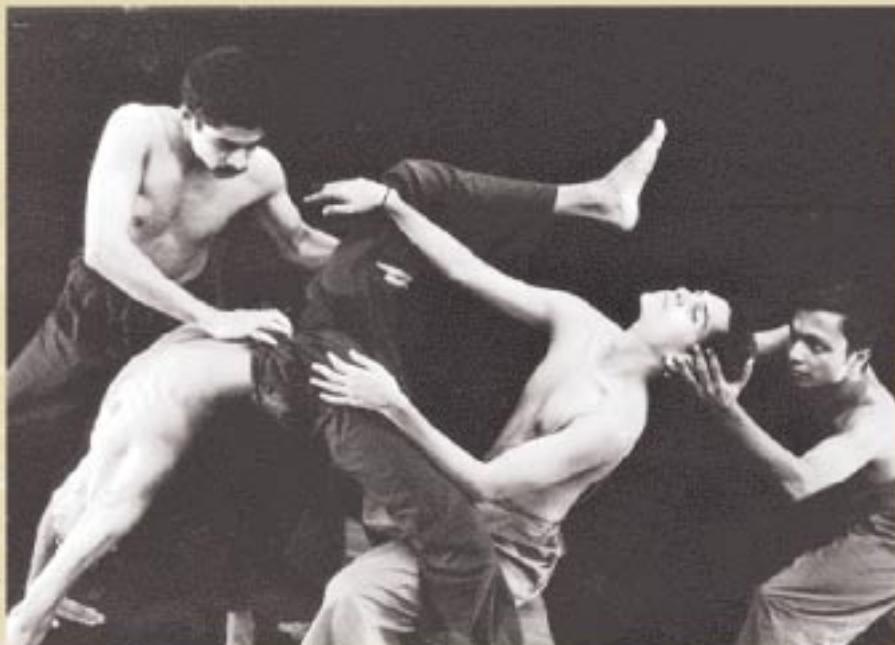
Après « Les Vêpres des Grenouilles » en 1996, Brigitte Chataignier chorégraphie plusieurs solos : « Amba » en 97, « La Chambre des Vertiges » en 2002 avec Zéno Bianu et Jean-Paul Auboux, « Élémentaire » en 2004, et Michel Lestréhan : « Le Corps de la Terre » en 1998, « Yadwigha » en 2000, « LOTUS (du nombril) » en 2003 avec de jeunes danseurs indiens qui rencontrent la création pour la première fois.

Pour ces artistes, un point commun, leur rencontre décisive avec l'Orient à travers la danse, la musique et l'écri-



Le Maître Sadanam Krishnakutty dans le rôle de Narakesura.

© Emmanuel Artur



Lotus (du nombril) chorégraphie Michel Lestréhan.



"La Chambre des Vertiges", création B. Chataignier.

ture dans une démarche de création résolument contemporaine.

Les créations ou spectacles traditionnels ont été présentés sur les scènes françaises comme le Théâtre de la Ville à Paris, Montpellier Danse, l'Onyx à Nantes, Pôle Sud à Strasbourg, Triangle à Rennes, Centre Mandapa, Châteauvallon, Grande Halle de la Villette, Redon, Vitré, Mayenne, Musée Asiatica Biarritz, ...

#### LA PEDAGOGIE

La venue des artistes indiens permet de créer des ateliers de sensibilisation ainsi que des conférences-démonstrations en partenariat avec les Associations de Musique et de Danse et les conservatoires, afin d'initier les amateurs ou les professionnels, et favoriser ainsi la rencontre avec les maîtres.

Brigitte et Michel sont invités régulièrement à enseigner dans les centres nationaux de danse et de théâtre, à l'Université Rennes 2, pour l'Education Nationale (en milieu scolaire notamment), à Cité de la Musique, ainsi qu'au centre Tapovan dirigé par Kiran Vyas, qui a « ouvert la porte intérieure de l'Inde » à Brigitte dans son adolescence et avec lequel elle continue de se former.

Des cours individuels ou collectifs sont aussi donnés au studio de la compagnie à Rennes.

Riche de ses traditions ancestrales, l'Inde connaît aujourd'hui une effervescence dans le domaine de la création. La Compagnie Prana s'inscrit dans ce mouvement qui interroge l'art contemporain en Inde et en France.

Pour la saison 2004/2005 Brigitte est chorégraphe-interprète pour l'opéra « Lakmé », travaille et partage avec le

chorégraphe Loïc Touzé et anime des ateliers de recherche avec des danseuses traditionnelles. Michel prépare une nouvelle création où se rencontrent l'art du Kalaripayatt et les acrobates du cirque...

PRANA veut dire en sanskrit le souffle vital qui anime tous les êtres. C'est avec les spectacles et les échanges où tout est à la fois enraciné dans la tradition et perpétuellement inventé, que la Compagnie Prana participe au rayonnement de l'Art Indien.

#### Activités

#### Spectacles

Brigitte Chataignier

Mohini Attam, danse féminine du Kérala

Michel Lestréhan

Kathakali, théâtre dansé

#### Concerts

Chant et percussions du Kérala

#### Créations chorégraphiques

#### Formation

Danse et théâtre de l'Inde du Sud  
Art martial Kalarippayatt, musique.

#### Conférences-démonstration

Atelier Jeune Public

Conseil en programmation

#### COMPAGNIE PRANA

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site web : [www.compagnieprana.com](http://www.compagnieprana.com)



Djaya Lestréhan Festival de Sylvanès 2002

# la danse de l'enchanteresse

un film de Adoor Gopalakrishnan et Brigitte Chataignier

## Documentaire 2007

Durée : 75 minutes

Format : 35 mm

Réalisation : A.Gopalakrishnan et B.Chataignier

Avec la participation de :

*Les maîtres de Mohini Attam* : Satiabhama, Sreedevi Rajan, Kalamandalam Kshemavathy, Kalamandalam Leelamma

*La jeune fille* : Keerthy Priya

*Les danseuses* : Kalaratna Smitha Rajan, Dr Neena Prasad Pallavi Krishnan, Sangeetha Gopi, Anitha Potti, Krishna Priya ...

Musique traditionnelle d'Inde du Sud



## Synopsis :

Ce film nous entraîne dans l'univers raffiné du *Mohini Attam*, cette danse du Kerala, en Inde du Sud, pratiquée exclusivement par des femmes. Nous suivons plusieurs Maîtres livrant en alternance l'assise de leur art à leurs disciples, dans un échange profondément respectueux, mais aussi une jeune fille dont les sentiments se reflètent dans la traversée des danses, des chants et de la musique. Ce qui compte derrière le particulier et la vie, c'est ce qui accède à l'universel et à l'art. Au-delà de l'homme, se cache le dieu ; en la femme, l'héroïne.

## Adoor Gopalakrishnan

D'origine kéralaïse, Adoor Gopalakrishnan est l'un des grands maîtres du cinéma indien d'aujourd'hui.

Il a réalisé dix longs métrages de fiction, dont *Piège à rats*, *Face à Face*, *les Murs*, *le Serviteur de Kali*, *Quatre femmes*, et quelques documentaires parmi lesquels *L'eau du Gange* et *Kalamandalam Gopi*.

Il a reçu à cinq reprises le prestigieux prix international de Fipreschi. Des rétrospectives de son oeuvre ont eu lieu à Londres, Helsinki, La Rochelle, Nantes, Munich, New York, ou à la Cinémathèque de Paris. Il a reçu le Phalke Award par le Gouvernement indien en 2005.

## Brigitte Chataignier

La démarche de Brigitte Chataignier se veut à mi-chemin entre tradition et modernité, recherche pour la transmission et la conservation d'un patrimoine culturel, et travail de création. En 1995 elle fonde à Rennes la Compagnie Prana .

Parallèlement à sa carrière d'interprète de *Mohini Attam* (danse féminine du Kerala), elle a créé plusieurs pièces chorégraphiques contemporaines dont *Gopika* en 2007 avec un groupe de danseuses indiennes.

Avec *La Danse de l'Enchanteresse* son premier long métrage, Brigitte Chataignier rend hommage au *Mohini Attam*. Ce film est le fruit de sa rencontre avec le cinéaste Adoor Gopalakrishnan.



## Selection festivals :

Locarno 2007, Suisse

Dei Populi 2007, Florence, Italie

IMZ Dancescreen 2007, La Hague, Pays-Bas

Goa et Trivandrum 2007, Inde

Rencontres cinéma du réel à l'imaginaire 2008, Manosque

Monstra curta 2008, Sao Paulo, Brésil

## Prix du documentaire :

1st International audiovisual festival of performing arts 2008,  
Lisbonne, Portugal

## Production :



## Distribution France :



## Avec le soutien de :

CNC,  
Région Centre – Centre Images,  
Ville de Rennes,  
Procirep-Angoa

## Sortie nationale :

**8 octobre 2008**

**Disponible en DVD**

**En savoir + :**  
**[www.compagnieprana.com](http://www.compagnieprana.com)**



## LA DANSE DE L'ENCHANTERESSE d'Adoor Gopalakrishnan et Brigitte Chataigner avec Kalamandalam Satyabhama, Keerthy Priya (Fr., Inde, 2007, 1h15)

Une pépite du cinéma d'auteur indien, hélas en voie de disparition.

Initié par la chorégraphe Brigitte Chataigner et mis en scène par le trop méconnu Adoor Gopalakrishnan, dont certaines œuvres sont proches de Satyajit Ray, le film est un panorama soigné de l'art du *mohini attam*, danse de l'Inde du Sud. Les grandes prêtresses de cette discipline et leurs élèves, enfants ou adultes, y présentent de véritables chansons de gestes accompagnées par des musiciens, qui alternent avec des séances de répétition. Plus qu'ailleurs la danse est narrative, chargée d'exprimer des sentiments, des situations dramatiques, prosaïques ou sacrées. Et, contrairement aux danseuses occidentales, les Indiennes doivent raconter une histoire non seulement à travers leurs corps, mais aussi avec leurs visages. Voir la séquence où l'enseignante demande à chacune de ses élèves d'exprimer différents sentiments (peur, joie, colère, etc.). Tourné soit en extérieurs, soit dans des palais, avec des danseuses richement costumées, ce résumé vivant du *mohini attam* rappelle les plus belles miniatures mogholes. **Vincent Ostria**

## L'Humanité

Grâce. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, figure de proue du cinéma du Kerala, prête son talent à la chorégraphe Brigitte Chataigner, qui, travaillant en Inde depuis des décennies, a voulu rendre hommage aux maîtres de la danse « *mohini attam* ». Une série de saynètes raffinées où alternent vie domestique, séances de répétition et numéros en costumes de jeunes danseuses qui, accompagnées par des chants et de la musique, miment des histoires d'amour mythiques ou profanes. Splendide et délicat.

## Le Monde

### La Danse de l'enchanteuse

Film franco-indien  
d'Adoor Gopalakrishnan  
et Brigitte Chataigner (1 h 15).

Danseuse française établie en Inde pour se consacrer à l'art du *Mohini Attam* (en français la « danse de l'enchanteuse »), Brigitte Chataigner a voulu faire partager sa passion au-delà des frontières. Le fruit de ce désir est cet assemblage de moments dansés, entrecoupés d'intermèdes qui dispensent laconiquement des informations sur cette danse du Kerala. T. S.

## POSITIF

Franco-indien (Kerala), d'Adoor Gopalakrishnan et Brigitte Chataigner. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, qui a commencé sa carrière par la réalisation de courts-métrages en général documentaires, n'a jamais arrêté d'en tourner, et en a réalisé plus d'une vingtaine, intercalés entre ses longs-métrages. Beaucoup sont centrés sur la culture la plus authentique du Kerala, à travers les formes d'expression du théâtre (qu'a pratiqué Adoor Gopalakrishnan avant le cinéma, en raison notamment de son environnement familial) et de la danse. *La Danse de l'enchanteuse*, long métrage, est consacré à la danse du « *Mohini Attam* » interprétée exclusivement par des femmes, avec l'accompagnement d'un groupe musical d'hommes incluant parfois des femmes. Comme souvent dans les danses de l'Inde du Sud, la gestuelle est très codifiée par une quantité d'expressions pour toutes les émotions et sentiments, particulièrement les techniques de séduction (l'enchantement), et une des caractéristiques du « *Mohini Attam* » est parfois d'être réduite à la seule station assise, l'essentiel de l'expression étant recentrée sur le visage. Sans commentaire, le cinéaste filme le rapport des disciples et des maîtres par lesquels passe la transmission des danses indiennes, l'enseignement, des représentations et quelques gestes ou activités de la vie quotidienne. Fidèle au dépouillement de ses derniers films, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, filme de manière assez large pour saisir la globalité de la danse et du développement de ses courbes harmonieuses, la relation avec le décor, souvent en bois, propres à l'Inde du Sud. Les plans sont longs laissant le spectateur pénétrer peu à peu cet univers de calme et de séduction. Tourné essentiellement la nuit, avec une photo très contrastée qui sort de l'obscurité les silhouettes habillées de blanc des danseuses, le film est magnifique.

H.N.

«India Today » - 2007

# la danse de l'enchanteresse

M. G. Radhakrishnan

September 10, 2007

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Celebrated filmmaker Adoor Gopalakrishnan's documentary on Kerala's classical dance form, Mohiniyattam, premiered at Locarno Festival this year. Dance of the Enchantress, the 73-minute film, is co-produced by Brigitte Chataignier, a French Mohiniyattam exponent with backing from the French National Centre for Cinema. The film was first screened in Thiruvananthapuram recently.

Dance of the Enchantress steers clear of conventional documentary practices like narration, voiceovers or forays into the art form's history or sociology and focuses on its sheer formal beauty. "My documentary is not to teach its history but to enable the viewer to go through the sheer experience of enjoying the art form," says Gopalakrishnan. Although he usually abhors "reality" in his documentaries on classical arts, he has weaved in the Enchantress's narrative, faint brush strokes of a storyline to juxtapose the ethereal beauty of the art form with the banal and often miserable life of its practitioners.

Cameraman M.J. Radhakrishnan ensures that the lyrical charm of the dance blends organically with specially chosen locations like Padmanabhapuram Palace, Kuthira Malika, Kalamandalam—the showpieces of Kerala's traditional architecture.

Although he has made only nine feature films in his four decades of career, Gopalakrishnan has been prolific with docum-entaries. "Feature film is a mission for me while documentaries provide me with daily livelihood," he says.

While Enchantress is the latest among his more than a dozen documentaries on classical arts, the maestro is currently giving finishing touches to his tenth feature film, 4 Women—a trilogy based on three short stories by the late Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. The film is slated to premiere at this year's Toronto Festival.

# In step with a legacy

**FILM** Adoor Gopalakrishnan's documentary 'Dance of the Enchantress' is a tribute to Mohiniyattom.

'Dance of the Enchantress,' a documentary on Mohiniyattom, is a master filmmaker's tribute to the dance form of Kerala. The 72-minute film, which was screened in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday, is also French danseuse Brigitte Chataignier's homage to a dance form that enchanted her when she arrived in Kerala in 1987.

The film was screened in Locarno on August 4 and 5 along with Adoor's 'Mukhamukham.' Critics eulogised 'Dance of the Enchantress' as a superb introduction to the art form, its training, the costumes and the music.

Shot in picturesque locales in Kerala, the documentary shows how Mohiniyattom is an intrinsic part of Kerala's culture and tradition; an expression of the land and her people. Performances in Thiruvattar Temple, Padmanabhapuram Palace, Kuthiramalika, Bhajanapura, Kottaram, Kalamandalam and an ancient 'mana' showcase Mohiniyattom in the places that nurtured this dance form.

"It is a dance form that is rooted in our soil. There are so many dances in India. But it is only in Kerala that we have Mohiniyattom. So, we have adopted a format that lets the viewer experience the dance form in its true surroundings. There is a structure but the narrative does not restrict it to the feel of a documentary," says Adoor.

"Brigitte gave me the pas-



**PICTURE PERFECT:** The maestro Adoor Gopalakrishnan, left; Smita Rajan in the dance hall of Padmanabhapuram Palace.

sages and I chose the ones used in the film. Excellent dancers extol the finer points of the art form and the intrinsic beauty of the lyrics and the dance," adds the filmmaker.

Students training in Kala-

mandalam and evocative performances throw light on Mohiniyattom. The deep relationship between a guru and her disciple is also woven into the film. Tracing the genesis of the film, Adoor explains: "Brigitte, a good

performer herself, approached me seven or eight years back. I was impressed by her dedication and passion to the art form. I agreed to write the script of the film while she organised the finance. Helen Coer of the

French production house 'Ideal Audience' agreed to fund the film. However, although she backed out later, she put us in touch with the National Centre for Cinema, which gave us a grant. The major funding was by a pro-

duction house called La Vie est belle."

"The innate lasya in Mohiniyattom is enhanced by lyrical music and the entire art form resonates with love, longing and the pangs of separation. Even devotion to god is suffused with love," says Adoor and he recites a few lines from the Swati padam 'Ali veni yentu cheyvu.'

Kalamandalam Satyabhama, Neena Prasad, Pallavi Krishnan, Sreedevi Rajan, Kalamandalam Kshemavathy, Smitha Rajan and Kalamandalam Leelamma also appear in the film. Kavalam Sreekumar has sung the title song. The songs for the dances have been sung by Kalamandalam Jayaprakash, Kalamandalam Jagadeesh and Madhavan Namboothiri to the accompaniment of traditional instruments like the mridangam, veena, flute, edakka and maddalam.

**S.N.**



## World premier of 'Naalu Pennungal'

The world premier of Adoor Gopalakrishnan's 'Naalu Pennungal' will be at the Toronto film festival where it will be screened in the prestigious Masters section on September 10, 12 and 14. "Although 'Dance of the Enchantress' was screened in Locarno, I did not go there as I wanted to complete the work on this film that is based on four stories by Thakazhy Sivash-

ankara Pillai," says auteur filmmaker Adoor Gopalakrishnan.

After Toronto, the film will travel to the London festival in October. Audiences in Kerala will also see it in October.

'Naalu Pennungal' narrates the story of four women from different economic strata; a sex worker, a peasant, a middle class homemaker and a woman from an

affluent family. Nandita Das, Padmapriya, Manju Pillai and Geethu Mohandas play the key characters in the film. Kavya Madhavan, who plays Nandita's sister, has an important role in the film.

Doordarshan had approached Adoor to make a 10-part programme on any of Thakazhy's stories. Eventually, it evolved into a story of four women. This is

Adoor's third film that is an adaptation of a literary work. 'Mathilukal' and 'Vidheyan' were based on Bashir's and Paul Zacharia's works respectively. Produced by Benzy Martin, this is the first feature film that does not have Adoor's favourite cameraman Mankanda Ravi Varma behind the camera. The cinematographer is M.J. Radhakrishnan.

**S.N.**

**Saraswathy Nagarajan**

# gopika



Patrick Guigueno

Gopika s'inspire d'un épisode de la mythologie indienne, celui des Gopis, femmes et filles de vachers, et de Krishna, l'amant divin. Dernière représentation, ce soir, au Plateau des Quatre-vents.

## Ouest-France, Vitré, 08/12/2007

« En avant-première, quelques extraits de Gopika étaient proposés. Entre-temps, Brigitte Chataignier expliquait les orientations données à son spectacle. D'inspiration mythologique, on a pu admirer combien la gestuelle révèle toute une palette de sentiments humains, la danse comme liberté d'expression : « le spectacle est aussi adapté en fonction du caractère de chacune de mes danseuses ». Sangeetha, Gopika et Sobha étaient auparavant des danseuses traditionnelles et ont dû se faire à l'improvisation : « une vraie découverte pour elles », indique t-elle. »

## Ouest-France Vitré 18/12/2007

« Le public est sous le charme... (...) Les six jeunes femmes qui dansent sont magnifiques. Leurs corps mettent en image les sonorités musicales. Tout en souplesse, leurs bras, leurs mains, leurs jambes et leurs pieds donnent l'impression d'un mouvement perpétuel. Le spectacle est composé de phrases musicales à l'écoute des corps. La puissance du regard ajoute à l'intensité des mouvements. La couleur des costumes, des lumières sont en harmonie avec la musique et les corps...»

## Journal de Vitré, 21/12/2007

«... Le public a été sous le charme dès la première seconde. Des déplacements qui épousent la partition, des gouttes de musique qui se confondent avec l'écriture en mouvement, des ralentis, de la grâce... Chaque tableau de Gopika est captivant. En solo, en duo ou à plusieurs, les six danseuses ont offert samedi 15 décembre au centre culturel un spectacle unique à un public aussi hypnotisé. (...) Samedi soir, l'interprétation de la troupe était joyeuse, harmonieuse, colorée, vivifiante ou lancinante, bref la féminité dans toute sa spontanéité.»

India's holy river becomes a fluid inspiration for French choreographer and dancer Brigitte Chataignier who recently performed at the Bonjour India Festival

## A River In Motion



Since 2010, Rennes-based French choreographer and modern dancer, with years of expertise in the Indian classical dance form Mohini Attam, Brigitte Chataignier has been working on Ganga – a multi-disciplinary project and performance that began its journey in different places in France and has been enriched at each stage of its route, like the river itself. The latest stop (but not the final one) on the path of Ganga was at the 'Bonjour India' festival.

Your project seems to combine different references – your own idea and metaphor on the Ganga with the reality around the river. The project has many different levels. There is the age-old mythical level with the rituals associated with the Ganga and its ascribed holiness emphasised by the many temples alongside its banks. On a more contemporary level Ganga is viewed as a woman. Like the flow of the river, the woman is holding together her own life, sentiments, and intuition. She is also physical, like the river and the main element of course, is water. In his poem, writer Zéno Bianu has also introduced different elements

– geographical, mythical, and poetic – the river becoming the place of imagination and dreams.

### *How have you interpreted it in terms of the performance?*

In my choreography, an important accent is on femininity as Ganga is a river goddess. The characters played by one (Ganga) is accompanied by three dancers, the others being symbolic ramifications of the first. The physical explorations of gesture go beyond the fluidity and detailed language of the Mohini Attam to explore cycles, time-periods and contrasting climates with regard to the river. The dancers will have a live musician playing a powerfully evocative Indian instrument simultaneously with a recorded sound track. Zeno Bianu's poem, translated from French to English, will be heard through a narrator. A very minimalist stage will represent the ghats and the steps and perhaps an altar dedicated to the Divine. There will also be a large screen with a video projection – two films made by Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Paris-based abstract painter and filmmaker V. Viswanadhan.

### *How have you dealt with rampant industrial growth turning Ganga into a toxic sewer?*

I do not wish to explain pollution within my choreography itself. It is more about the nature of the water, the poetical aspect, so that we become more conscious about what the Ganga is. Although ever since I started the project I have been conscious about the question of pollution and want to find ways to blend the issue into my work. We are creating a piece about transformation and experimenting on bringing about change.

### *Where in India would you present your show?*

In Delhi, Kolkata, Jaipur, Bhopal, and hopefully others cities later like Khajuraho. Symbolically, it is coming back to the origin, to the source, to India – Ganga's final merging with the sea. ▼

– ROMAIN MAITRA

Chanchal Ghosh  
Celine  
Mom

# MYSTIC RIVER

**T**he stage was set in the form of a ghat. Think Haridwar. A big screen in the backdrop replayed the scene of a river rippling away. Think Ganga. Bonjour India, a cultural extravaganza presented by the French embassy, combined dance, music and poetry in an on-stage collaboration titled *Ganga*. The cultural do's Kolkata chapter thus traced the journey of the river that is known as the life source of India, equating the river with a woman who represents the feminine force of the universe.

The river's journey was broken down in

three parts featuring three dancer-actors. Each had a different role to play. They moved as if to an inaudible symphony sometimes swaying in perfect sync and sometimes going their own ways.

The pace of the play mimicked the rhythm of the Ganga — alternating between a slow-sync and a fast-staccato. Was it the woman being portrayed as the river? Or was it the river portrayed as the woman? The question met no satisfactory answer. That is where the play nailed it.

The presentation smacked of the genius of **Brigitte Chataigner**, a French contemporary dancer, who is also an expert in Mohiniatram. Both her co-performers, Mom Chatterjee and Celine Pradeu, matched step with step with effortless poise. After two hours of dancing, an exhausted Brigitte panted. "This play also describes my journey from the West to the East, the confusion of it all and the ultimate spiritual release that I found in India."

Sutapa Singha

Brigitte & Mom

MUSIC/DANCE

Sharmila Basu Thakur

The entire area of Mohor Kunja was filled with music and movement, colour and craft, ecstasy and enjoyment. Dance, music, art and craft together created a joyous atmosphere where various art forms mingled to commemorate the theme, 'music for peace'. Presented by Banglanatak dot com, *Sufi Sutra*, a three-day international festival at Mohor Kunja (February 1-3) was a wonderful blend of Sufi and traditional music. It brought about a convergence of ideas on truth, harmony, peace and divinity. Groups from countries like Egypt, Spain, Iran and Russia as well as Indian states like West Bengal, Gujarat and Rajasthan created a tapestry of universal brotherhood and bonhomie. Sanskrit hymns and Egyptian Sufi chants along with the sound of conch shells marked the beginning of the evening.

## Harmonious rivers

Nine teams from all over the world participated in this festival. A team of six beautiful women from Iran charmed the audience with their mellifluous music. Ghazal Sufi Ensemble, a troupe formed by Sahar Lofti and Maryam Gharasou, rendered Iranian folk tunes based on Sufism and ancient Iranian music. This was followed by an interesting combination of African and Indian folk music, by Sidi Goma of Gujarat. It began with *baithi dhama*, songs of remembrance, and ended with *khari dhama*, an expression of joyful dancing.

The second day of

the festival showcased the most striking performances. It featured flamenco music and dance from Spain and Bengal's own soulful music. The Pinana Brothers Group from Spain combined traditional flamenco with its individual charismatic style. Egyptian Sufi performers stole the show. Renditions by *bauls* and *fakirs* from Nadia expressed love, devotion and humanity. There was an innovative combination of *baul* music and Bangla *qawwali*.

The final day featured *mugam* music from Azerbaijan. The refined skills and dedication of the artists



Pic: Ajoy Mukherjee

were evident. Langas, the folk singers, sang *sufiana kalam* and Rajasthani and Punjabi folk songs with verve and power. The elaborate, three-day festival concluded spectacularly.

**B**rigitte Chataigner, a French contemporary choreographer and a Mohiniattam dancer, presented *Ganga*, a choreographic piece uniting poetry, music and dance, at Bonjour India 2013 at the ICCR on January 31. It was an evening dedicated to femininity and spirituality. Three dancers set against a minimalist set and with accompaniment tried to explore the feminine intensity symbolized by the Ganga. She based her choreography on Western patterns along with the Mohiniattam dance style. Through this, she attempted to reveal the journey of a woman. Chataigner and her co-dancers, Celine Pradeu and Moni Chatterjee, were graceful and agile. Sandeep Chatterjee on the santoor supported the presentation aptly.

## GOOD MORNING JAIPUR

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Jaipur, Thursday, February 7, 2013

### SNAPPED



French artiste Brigitte Chataigner performs her show *Ganga* at Jawahar Kala Kendra on Wednesday.



Sarah Khatoon  
no boundary so language  
can be a hindrance. This  
was brilliantly showcased  
by Brigitte Chataigner, contem-  
porary dancer and Mohiniyattam  
dancer at Bonjour India

The Kolkata chapter of the  
French artiste will be performing  
an Indian choreographic piece

today, uniting poetry with dance and music titled — *Ganga*. Talking about *Ganga* she says, "After having worked on different subjects I wanted to work on a theme that would be received in India and France equally. Some things come from the subconscious mind and this was a result of the same. *Ganga* was like a revelation to me. It kept reappearing, inspiring me to understand its character and its Godly origins while providing life for

humanity. I watched a film on *Ganga* by Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Vishwanathan. That helped me a lot." Brigitte will be seen performing the dance during the festival that starts from today and continues till March 24. Keeping the sensuous river as the backdrop, Brigitte performed a beautiful number paying tribute to its feminine intensity. Drawing parallels between a woman and the river she informs, "There are a lot of similarities between a woman and a river. Just like the character of a woman, the river too knows only how to embrace and give everything."

What makes the dance a delight to watch is the poetic element that accentuates the flow of the dance. "The poem has been written by a French poet especially for this theme. We both worked together and he wrote it in five parts. Each part is a resemblance of different parts of we, you and I," says Brigitte who is fascinated with Mohiniyattam, the classical dance of Kerala. And it was her fascination for

French artiste Brigitte Chataigner talks about her love for Indian dance, the river *Ganga* and more...

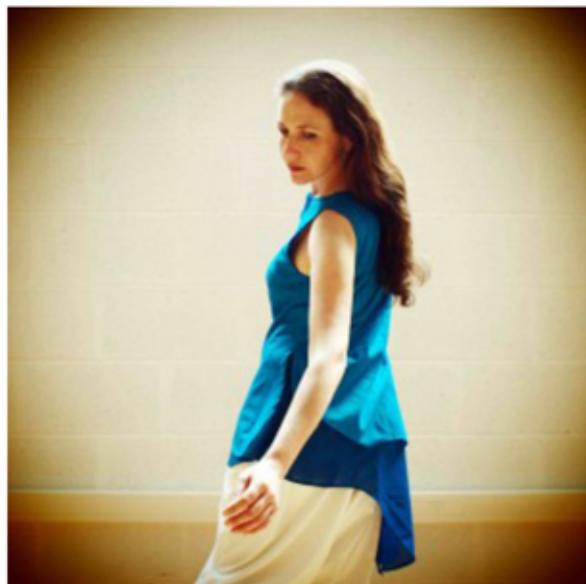
this dance that brought her to India. "I knew Mohiniyattam before coming to Kolkata. I wanted to dance without thinking much, so I stayed in Kerala for 11 years and practiced. I was introduced to this dance form by a French woman and immediately liked it. The dance form is very natural and I liked the flow and the movement that it carries," annotates Brigitte who feels that she is a women belonging to the stage. *Ganga* is a blend of contemporary and classical dance forms but Brigitte believes the fusion happens within her. "I do not restrict myself to just one dance form but bring them all together. I know Bharatnatyam, Mime, Ballet and I am practicing Kathakali too, but I do not restrict myself," explains Brigitte who is working on a disaster and reconstruction strategy which will be released in 2014. She is also working on a long-short film. "I have worked with Adoor Gopalakrishnan and I am also making a long-short film dance on the enchantress," she continues. The festival that starts today will also see a host of events including music art and theatre. *Gates to India Song*, a play starring Nandita Das will also be a highlight of the festival.



«Alliance Française de Bengale» - 7 août 2012

## En attendant Gangâ

Posted by [AFBengale](#) on Tuesday, August 7, 2012 · [Leave a Comment](#)



crédit : Richard Volante

*Entre la poésie du Mohini Attam et la liberté de la danse contemporaine, tel pourrait se définir le style unique de la danseuse et chorégraphe, française d'origine et indienne de cœur, Brigitte Chataignier. L'artiste mêle habilement tradition et modernité en puisant son inspiration dans la danse traditionnelle du Kerala qu'elle a étudiée pendant sept ans. A l'occasion du festival Bonjour India 2013 (janvier – mars 2013), elle présentera sa nouvelle pièce Gangâ pour la première fois au public indien. En attendant, elle est passée à l'Alliance française du Bengale donner un avant-goût à la soixantaine de curieux présents. Rencontre avec une artiste à mi-chemin entre deux cultures.*

### **Vous avez un parcours professionnel très complet et plutôt atypique. Etais-ce réfléchi ou le résultat de l'évolution de votre réflexion artistique ?**

C'était voulu. J'ai commencé par un parcours traditionnel : d'abord du classique et du contemporain. Puis j'ai étudié le mime et les techniques orientales. Dans les années 1980, je suis partie 6 ans au Kerala pour y étudier le Mohini Attam auprès de plusieurs maîtres. J'ai toujours été très attirée par l'Orient de manière générale et ma passion pour l'Inde est venue plus tard, après avoir voyagé. De tout ce que j'ai vu, c'est la culture qui m'a le plus fascinée. J'ai été séduite par la pensée, la diversité et la richesse de ce pays.

### **Comment définiriez-vous votre pièce Gangâ ?**

Gangâ est un travail sur l'intensité féminine du Gange qui est déesse géographique. Ceci implique à la fois une dimension mythologique et réelle. Gangâ a été conçue en référence au film *La Danse de l'Enchanteresse*, que j'ai coréalisé avec Adoor Gopalakrishnan en 2008 et dans la continuité de Gopika, création de 2007. Entre les deux, il y a d'ailleurs une évolution. On passe du thème du romantique au

## «Alliance Française de Bengale» - 7 août 2012, suite

thème de la maturité et de la transmission. *Gangâ* mêle les danses : il y a une imprégnation de la danse indienne en distorsion vers une expression plus libre car le fleuve, l'eau circulent. C'est une traversée, un échange. Il y a de moins en moins de barrières : le travail est très ancré dans les deux styles.

### **Quelles attaches gardez-vous avec l'Inde après ces 6 années ?**

Je continue de faire des aller-retour entre l'Inde et la France. J'ai d'ailleurs acheté une maison dans le Kerala. C'est à la fois un espace personnel et de travail. Car j'ai l'impression d'apporter ma contribution dans le domaine artistique. Je suis désormais intégrée à un processus de création et non plus d'apprentissage.



### **Vous avez été invitée à tourner dans les plus grandes villes indiennes, début 2013, dans le cadre du festival Bonjour India 2013. Comment l'appréhendez-vous ?**

J'étais déjà passée dans la communication du festival l'an dernier, alors que j'étais en tournée, à Pondichéry notamment. Bonjour India est l'occasion de montrer la diversité entre différentes compagnies implantées en France. J'ai l'habitude de me produire en Inde depuis de nombreuses années, mais je vois cette invitation comme une réelle chance que j'ai envie de saisir. Je veux faire de mon mieux car il s'agit ici de représenter la France, tout en étant dans le thème du pays. Un aller-retour entre l'Est et l'Ouest, en quelque sorte.

## «Télérama» - mars 2011

### SPECTACLES - DANSE-DANSES DU MONDE

«Danseuse, musicienne et chanteuse, Brigitte Chataignier, figure connue de la danse traditionnelle indienne, s'inspire du Gange pour sa nouvelle pièce intitulée "Ganga". Cette experte en mohini attam, style souple, ondulant et doux originaire du Kerala, région du sud-ouest du continent indien, croise le mouvement, la poésie et la musique live pour évoquer une kyrielle d'images liées au Gange. Des milliers de personnes s'y retrouvent pour tout faire : s'y baigner, y laver leur linge, y offrir des offrandes aux dieux... Le fleuve sacré est une affaire de vie que la chorégraphe entend sublimer avec la beauté impeccable qui sied au mohini attam.»

Rosita Boisseau

# Giving a French twist to classical Mohiniyattam

Pramita Bose  
focus

**French dancer and choreographer Brigitte Chataignier speaks about her tryst with Mohiniyattam in the late 80s and the affair with the dance form that still continues through her fusion performances.**



**A**t one moment, her fingers form a lotus, at another; she applies imaginary kohl to outline her eyes. Here she makes a seated traditional pose to denote a patient waiting for her lover or expecting him desperately or immersed into some deep thought. And there, she looks at the mirror to admire her reflection.

French dancer and choreographer Brigitte Chataignier strikes a matrix of expressions, gestures, hand-movements and leg postures of pure classical Mohiniyattam, only to mesmerise the bemused onlookers. It is indeed intriguing to find a French woman's fixation for a South Indian *nritya*, but that is exactly what happened to Brigitte, a good 26 summers ago, when she visited India for the first time with her husband Michael Lestrehan, who picked up Kathakali, another dance style stemming out of the Deccan plateau.

"Both Mohiniyattam and Kathakali are like sisters emerging from the same soil, grown and fostered in similar ambience, and learnt mostly by aspirants hailing from the same province of Kerala. But with time, Indian classical dances like Kathak, Odissi, Bharatnatyam, Mohiniyattam and Kathakali have expanded their reach beyond borders and have become popular in other parts of the world as well. Their intricate beauty, finer nuances, subtle aesthetics and flawless technique certainly call for a work of preservation for the posterity," Brigitte says.

Having been a serious student of western classical dance back home, Brigitte was formally trained in ballet.

"I was barely five or six years old then and used to go to a small institution that taught me the power and finesse of toe work, and the art of spinning lit-

erally on one foot. By the time I was a teenager, say around 14, I decided to completely devote myself to dance," Brigitte fondly recollects the beginning of her journey.

Later as it was predicated, Brigitte took a wholehearted plunge into contemporary dance and joined another institute to brace her basics. Simultaneously, she perfected her histrionics with mime and grasped the ropes from a school specialist in the genre. She also dabbled in a string of theatrical workshops to hone her acting skills and expressions to gel as an integral part of dance in its entirety. It wasn't just out of the blue that this nimble-footed *nartaki* simply fell for Mohiniyattam at first sight. It was on her mind to learn traditional art forms in India ever since she made dance her destiny. But a chance trip to India in 1986 just cemented the ties for her.

"Yes, I did travel to this part of the globe along with my husband, only to get glued to one of its richest and conventional dance forms, out of a vast treasure-trove of other classical genres," she says.

"I always wanted to link my area of discipline with an ethnic dance form that is strongly rooted to a country's culture, and India has a wealthy cultural heritage with myriad kinds of codes, customs and indigenous traditions. So, I feel immensely proud to be associated with this particular form of dance that is so spiritual at its core. It is slow but sublime, and offers an oasis of peace and solace to the minds of both the performer as well as the delighted spectators. It is amusing to watch a gracefully attired dancer, bedecked with floral make-up and draped in an elegant sari, perform live on stage from a distance," she explains.

After Brigitte's career took a new turn in the late 80s, during which she discovered her love in her own contem-

Mohiniyattam, she studied the dance form for seven successive years in Kerala. Since then, she has been dividing her time between India and France. But she doesn't wish to spread her wings into too many different things. "I'd like to concentrate on only one subject at a time, otherwise the focus tends to go haywire and gets dispersed," she reasons.

While it's natural in her case to make elements of Mohiniyattam seamlessly seep into her contemporary choreography, but Brigitte remains adequately alert while treading the line of fusion cautiously, lest it tampers with the true syntax and format of the classical dance style.

Her current tour of India sees her trailing from Kolkata to Delhi and from the capital to Bhopal and Jaipur as the last stop. In 2013, Brigitte will be rendering her kitty of choreographic portraits on the occasion of the Indo-French cultural sojourn — *Bonjour India* in Kolkata and elsewhere. Apart from this, she'll be collaborating with the prestigious precinct of the Sangeet Natak Akademi in Kerala this November, and come September in France, she would perform a *jugabandhi* with her revered guru in Mohiniyattam — Padma Shree Kshemavathi.

Brigitte spearheads her company — Compagnie Prana — which she founded in 1995 and floated in the city of Rennes (Brittany, France). Echoing her philosophy in dance, her approach carefully combines tradition with modernity and includes research on the conservation of a cultural heritage. To the uninitiated, this extremely talented and multi-faceted dancer is also deeply involved in her own contem-

porary dance productions, which include several collaborations with the renowned French poet Zano Bianu, who wrote the text of *Ganga*.

But what is the project of *Ganga* all about? "Well, it's a contemporary work, involving different artistes from across the planet," she sums up in a nutshell. She has witnessed *Ganga* in her different moods, noticing the changes her colour, texture, which becomes silky-satin and sometimes rough, at times rippling away like a prancing little girl or gurgling like an angry deluge in some other phase.

Through gesture, voice and breath, *Ganga* explores the intense femininity of the river in its ever-changing aspects of joy, sensitivity, meditation, mourning and melancholy, thereby opening up and appealing to a desire for space.

Where choreography, poetic composition and musical improvisation meet, *Ganga*, a nomadic, multi-dimensional production, seeks to create an atmosphere and share a ritualistic fervour. The pictorial piece primarily encapsulates a series of dances with a story-telling show, forming its main connecting tassel throughout.

While a chief protagonist will represent the Mother Ganges, the rest will appear as its symbolic emanations or ramifications.

Following an invitation to India by the Embassy of France in New Delhi, *Ganga* is thus gradually entering a new phase of its creation-process. The programme will be performed in several major Indian cities during the *Bonjour India* festival scheduled next year.



Brigitte Chataignier  
strikes a pose

ABHINIT MUKHERJEE

# Dance of the Enchantress is meditation in joy



Sharon Lowen

dance without frontiers

I have always loved the ephemeral nature of dance. The magic of the performance exists in the synergy of performer and audience in a particular moment in time and space. Entering the stage, the dancer offers one's creative best available for the moment, not for posterity. Another day and the "same" dance may be exponentially different in performance. It always seemed to me that when a book was published or a painting displayed, the creator had made a statement of completion that I did not in dance. Of course, as I matured, it was clear that tangible arts are also "of the moment" in the creative process, yet dance is a poignant reminder of impermanence.

Because of this, we treasure filmed moments of dance in documentaries or archives knowing that they can provide only a tangential experience to being part of a live performance experience. For Indian classical dance, straight forward quality documentation is available from the Doordarshan Archives created by Kamalini Dutt. Documentation by other government and autonomous bodies leaves too much to be desired.

Given that every artistic medium has its own abilities and parameters, a good film on dance can shift time and place to provide not only varying angles of the dance but also of the lives, context of the dance, gurus and dancers. A great film can shift energy and even our willingness and ability to perceive.

*La Danse de l'enchanteresse* (*The dance of the Enchantress*) by Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Bridget Chataignier is a great film. As everyone familiar with other films of this master, Adoor-ji chooses not to lean on a linear narrative to convey meaning. The viewer is respected as a Rasika to experience the rasa evoked. This is done through images of Mohiniattam performed in temples, palaces as well as classroom, contextualised in the Kerala environment.

When the renowned French Mohiniattam exponent, Bridget Chataignier, a graduate of Kerala Kalamandalam was directed to Adoor Gopalakrishnan with her film concept, she discovered he had also been studying and considering Mohiniattam for decades without yet having decided on how to approach it in film. Bridget managed to secure funding, create a production house and together they co-scripted this exquisite film. The sensitivity and expansiveness of spirit in this virtually wordless depiction of the lush traditional ethos of Kerala is breathtaking.

An exception to the rule of classical

dancers making documentary films, Bridget did not feature herself or make even a transitory appearance, instead presenting accomplished performances by Smitha Rajan (daughter of Sreedevi Rajan), Dr Neena Prasad, Pallavi Krishnan and Usha Balaji. I was personally delighted to see included two compositions that I had never seen before, Swati Tirunal's Aliveni and the popular lullaby, Omanathinkal Kidavo in Mohiniattam, as I had performed these in Odissi in Kerala decades ago.

There are only two scenes with spoken dialogue. One finely crafted scene is in a bus as dancers and their musicians are returning from a performance. The vocalist is singing and a bus discussion reiterates the revival of Mohiniattam by the Maharaja Swati Tirunal (his over 400 classical compositions are the core of the repertoire since the first half of the 19th century) while another bus rider reminds that Vallathol Narayana who established Kerala Kalamandalam revived it in the early part of the last century.

The sole other scene with dialogue involves the guru asking why a student is not in class. The answer - she is getting married and her in-laws don't approve of her continuing to dance. The guru declares that this is an outdated attitude. Meanwhile the images of the young girl, her betrothed, even the selection of wedding saris are dovetailed with the stringer of the dance and luxuriate Kerala landscapes.

Without dialogue, the sound landscape of birds and rain in nature, dance music and solkattu in class, courtyard and inner sanctum calms down our inner voices to rest in a more metaphysical serenity.

We see the bhava of the most revered and beloved gurus sharing with their shishyas in the classroom. These interactions with Kalamandalam Satyabhama, recently departed Guru Prof. Kalamandalam Leelamma, Sreedevi Rajan (daughter of the 'grandmother of Mohiniattam', Kalyani Kuttiyamma) as well as Guru Kalamandalam Kshemavathi evoke the delicious flavor of learning to experience and share rasa.

The well chosen dance sequences were shot in temples and palaces associated with Maharaja Swati Tirunal and Mahakavi Vallathol, generations apart, who both revived Mohiniattam and other Kerala art forms when they were fading into oblivion.

This film is so much more than a documentary; it is an aesthetic experience that evokes rasa through the music, dance and visuals. If you already appreciate Kerala or are uninitiated, immersing yourself in Bridget and Adoor-ji's *Dance of the Enchantress* will be a meditation in joy.

■ The film is so much more than a documentary; it is an aesthetic experience that evokes rasa through the music, dance and visuals



French  
Mohiniattam  
exponent Brigitte  
Chataignier (above)  
and the DVD cover of  
*The Dance of the  
Enchantress*





Tête-à-tête with French Mohiniyattam dancer and choreographer Brigitte Chataignier, who was in T'Puram for a two-day dance workshop



# A FRENCH DANCE AFFAIR

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**C**ARESSING her long hair with her fingers tips, Brigitte Chataignier, the French Mohiniyattam dancer and choreographer, talks in-depth about the traditional classical dance of Kerala. The 60-year-old dancer's love for Mohiniyattam is evident from the way her kohled eyes light up when she talks about it. Her acquaintance with Kerala and its culture is over three decades-long, but the artist is still not fluent in Malayalam. She has trained under Padmashri Kalamandalam Kshemavathy and was in the capital city for a dance workshop organised by Alliance Française de Trivandrum.

Brigitte was introduced to Mohiniyattam in 1986. She joined the Kerala Kalamandalam in Cheruthuruthi and studied dance for seven years. A contemporary artist from France, Brigitte could make many personal contributions to the art form while exploring her artistic expressions. For instance, contemporary classical choreography pieces like Gopika, Ganga and Bhopal Blue.

And this mix is what helps Brigitte stand out. Her contemporary productions combine tradition and modernity. She researches each of them deeply, even as she is shuttling between Kerala and France. But she chooses to perform classical Mohiniyattam pieces and con-

temporary additions separately. She is also an artist for the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

Talking about her two-day workshop in the capital city, Brigitte says it was meant for dancers to meditate with their minds and body. "This was inspired by classical and contemporary techniques in dance. It was a conversational workshop and the idea was to share the movements while preparing for the creativity piece. Talking is also an important part of these workshops as we should share our perspectives about music or theme. Observing and describing our emotions are good for creativity," she says.

The artist performs in the traditional Mohiniyattam dress made of white kasavu. She believes solo performances bring out the real charm of Mohiniyattam pieces. "I feel comfortable performing Mohiniyattam solo. I am not keen on performing fusion pieces in groups. For me, inter-

preting themes in Mohiniyattam is still a challenge, apart from the traditional padams," says the artist who looks forward to performing at the upcoming Soorya festival.

Brigitte is currently working on a contemporary production titled Mala. "It is a solo contemporary piece that blends music, poetry, dance and visuals. I wish to conduct a national and international tour of the production, so it will be communicated in English. It will be an abstract art production," she says. Her production company in France named Cie Prana promotes Kerala's art forms and provides Indian artists with a platform to perform in France.



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Brigitte Chataignier, Mohiniyattam dancer