

EMORY UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

# AN EVENING *of* TELUGU ARTS

*Carnatic Vocal*

Subhashini Krishnamurthy

*Kuchipudi Dance*

Sasikala Penumarthy

*Poetry Reading*

V. Narayana Rao &  
Joyce B. Flueckiger

March 26, 2015 at 7:30pm

Emerson Concert Hall  
Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts  
Atlanta, GA 30322

# AN EVENING *of* TELUGU ARTS

*This concert is made possible by the Koppaka Family Foundation  
with support from the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies.*



The Koppaka Family Foundation was established, in part, to further the lifelong interest of Dr. Koppaka Visweswara Rao in Telugu classical literature, music, and arts and his expressed desire to make Telugu culture more accessible in the United States. In this spirit, his wife and children have provided support for this evening's performances with the hope of sparking broader interest in these classical arts in the community.



*Front cover: Kalamkari textile art  
Cover design and program: Anandileela Salinas*

*Welcome* – Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, Emory Faculty  
*Remarks* – Robin Forman, Dean of Emory College  
*Master of Ceremonies* – Harshita Mruthinti Kamath



## ***Ganesha Stuti: Invocation to Ganesha, Remover of Obstacles***

Poet: Ramakrishna Bhagavata, 21st century • Performed by Sasikala Penumarthy

## ***\* A Definition of Poetry***

Poet: Peddana, 16th century • Read by V. Narayana Rao and Joyce Flueckiger

## ***\* Paluku Tenala Talli: Mother who speaks so sweetly***

Poet: Annamayya, 15th century • Performed by Sasikala Penumarthy

## ***\* Enta Matramunan Evvaru Talacina: You are as one imagines***

Poet: Annamayya, 15th century • Performed by Subhashini Krishnamurthy

## ***Balagopala Krishna Tarangam: Praise to child Krishna***

Poet: Narayana Teertha, 17th-18th century • Performed by Sasikala Penumarthy

## ***\* Vamana Avatara: The dwarf incarnation of Vishnu***

Poet: Potana, 15th century • Read by V. Narayana Rao and Joyce Flueckiger

## ***Proddu Poyyenu: So much time has passed***

Composer: Thyagaraja, 18th-19th century • Performed by Subhashini Krishnamurthy

## ***Bhajana Seya Rada: Why don't you sing of God?***

Composer: Thyagaraja, 18th-19th century • Performed by Subhashini Krishnamurthy

## ***\* Rescue of the Elephant Gajendra***

Poet: Potana, 15th century • Read by V. Narayana Rao and Joyce Flueckiger

## ***Ardhanarishvara: The Lord who is half woman***

*Stotra* attributed to Adi Shankara, 8th century

Performed by Sasikala Penumarthy, Akhila Takkallapalli, Sri Yellamraju,  
Parina Shah, and Smriti Suresh

The full text of the starred items appear below in the program. The poetry has been translated by Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman. Non-starred items are summarized.

## TRANSLATED TEXTS & ITEM DESCRIPTIONS

### \* *A Definition of Poetry* • Poet: Peddana, 16th century

One day the king Krishnadevaraya brought a golden anklet to his court and announced that he would give it to any poet who could compose equally well in Telugu and Sanskrit. Peddana is said to have spontaneously sung this verse and to have been rewarded with the anklet, which the king himself placed around the poet's foot.

Is poetry a surface sheen,  
the green delusion of unfolded buds?  
It must be real inside  
and out, exploding fragrance,  
an aching touch your body can't forget  
by day or night, like of your woman,  
whenever you think about it.  
It should come over you, it should murmur  
deep in the throat, as your lover in her dovelike moaning,  
and as you listen, yearning comes in all its beauty.  
If you take hold of it, your fingers tingle  
as if you were tracing the still-hidden breasts  
of a young girl, wholly embraced.  
If you sink your teeth into it, it should be succulent  
as the full lips of a ripe woman from another world,  
sitting on your knees. It should ring  
as when godly Sound strokes with her fingernails  
the strings of her vina, with its golden bulbs resting  
on her proud, white, pointed breasts,  
So that the raga-notes resound.  
That is the pure Telugu mode.

If you use Sanskrit, then a rushing, gushing  
overflow of moonlight waves, luminous and cool,  
from Siva's crest, the mountain-born goddess beside him,  
enveloping actors and their works, the dramas  
spoken by Speech herself in the presence of the Golden Seed,  
pounding out the powerful rhythms, the beat  
of being, through drums and strings  
and chiming bells and thousands of ringing anklets  
dancing, drawing out the words, the fragrant and subtle  
winds wafting essence of unfolding lotus



from the Ganges streaming in the sky should  
comfort your mind. You should shiver  
in pleasure again and again, each time  
you hear it, as rivulets of honeyed juices and butter  
and sweet milk flow together  
and mix their goodness more and more  
and more.

*A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India*, Collected and translated by Narayana Rao and Shulman (1998).



### \* *Paluku Tcnala Talli* • Poet: Annamayya, 15th century

Mother, who speaks so sweetly,  
has gone to sleep.  
She made love to her husband  
With all her feminine art.

Now our friend is sleeping  
long into the day,  
hair scattered on her radiant face.

Endlessly inventive  
she played with him, stealing his mind  
until dawn.

Now, upstairs in her golden room,  
she's sleeping, her sari slipped  
from her breast.

Eyes glistening,  
red in the corners,  
she made love to the father  
of Love. Now she's exhausted.  
She's lying on her side,  
pearls on her thighs.

The god on the hill  
held her in his arms.  
She's sleeping,  
a half-open flower.

*God on the Hill: Temple Poems from Tirupati* – Annamayya. Translated by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2005).

You're just about as much as one imagines you to be.  
As they say, the more dough, the more bread.

People who follow Vishnu love you as Vishnu.  
Philosophers speak of you as the ultimate.  
Those who go with Shiva think of you as Shiva.  
Those who carry skulls see a skull in your hand.

You are as one imagines.

People who serve the goddess think you are their goddess.  
Different schools of thought measure you by their thoughts.  
Small people think of you to get rich, and for them you become small.  
Thoughtful minds contemplate your depths, and for them you are deep,

as deep as one imagines.

There's nothing missing in you.  
The lotus spreads to the limits of the lake.  
There's water in the Ganges, also in wells on the shore.  
You're the god on the hill,  
The one who's taken hold of me.  
For me, you are real,

as real as I imagine.

*God on the Hill: Temple Poems from Tirupati* — Annamayya.  
Translated by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2005).



***Balagopala Krishna Tarangam: Praise to child Krishna***

Poet: Narayana Teertha • 17th-18th century

*Tarangam* literally means “waves” and is associated with the plate dance unique to Kuchipudi. In this *tarangam*, Krishna is portrayed as a little boy who, with his friends, has entered the home of one of his village neighbors in order to steal some luscious homemade butter from a clay pot that is hanging from the ceiling rafters. His friends sit one atop another, so he can use them as a ladder to reach the butter. When the cowherdress (*gopika*) returns home and finds the butter is gone and her house in disarray, she angrily goes to find Krishna, who is known for these kinds of antics, and complains to his mother Yashoda. Yashoda ties him to a heavy grinding stone to keep him from wandering off again. The little boy Krishna drags himself (and the grinding stone) out to the backyard, where his touch transforms two huge trees back into *gandharvas* (celestial beings), releasing them from their curse from a previous lifetime.

[Vishnu comes in his dwarf *avatara* (incarnation) to the sacrificial site of the demon king Bali.]

[The king asked his guest:]  
“Where are you from, young boy,  
and what is your name?  
Where do you live? ...

“How can I say I belong to this place or that place?  
I live everywhere.  
How can I say I am his or hers?  
I am me. I walk alone.  
How can I say this is my path?  
I go all three ways.  
No need to say I know this or that.  
I know everything.

No one is kin to me. I belong to everyone.  
I'm alone, with no family,  
though the goddess of wealth was once mine.  
I'll tell you where you can find me—  
wherever good people are. ...

I'm single. I don't need much.  
Just two or three feet  
of land. That will be enough.  
I'll reach the zenith of my desire.” ...

[The eager donor now responds:]  
“You have spoken well—  
wise and true.  
But you have asked for so little.  
Have a little thought.  
The giver is a king.  
What have you asked for? A piece of earth?  
Don't you want any elephants?  
How about some horses?  
Take a look at these pretty girls.  
You're a child. You don't know how to ask.  
But so it goes. Still, how can I,  
king that I am, give you  
so little?”

[A knowing smile plays on the boy's lips as he replies:]  
“An umbrella, a thread, a water pot, a stick to lean on—  
these are the things I need. I'm a bachelor.





Why do I need land? Or elephants, or horses,  
or girls? I have my rituals to perform.  
Just give me these three feet.  
That is all  
I ask.” ...

[As Bali is about to pour the water that will mark the gift he will give to the dwarf/small boy, the king's adviser cautions him:]

“My lord, this boy is not a Brahmin.  
He is Vishnu, the inexhaustible,  
born as a son of Kashyapa and Aditi.  
You promised him a gift without knowing  
who he is. This is disaster for the dynasty of Diti.  
He'll steal your wealth, your kingdom, your home, your power  
and give them to Indra. He will swell up and fill  
the entire universe with his three steps.  
After you've lost everything to Vishnu,  
how will you survive? ...

And one more thing:  
When it comes to women and marriages,  
or when your honor, your money, or your life  
is at risk, or to save cows and Brahmins,  
you can tell a lie and it's no sin.

Save your family, your kingdom, your power.  
This dwarf can swallow the earth.  
He won't settle for a little. He'll fill the worlds  
with his three steps. Is there anyone to stop him?  
Pay attention to my words: no gift, no nothing.  
Tell him to go.” ...

[The demon king Bali answers:]  
There were kings before, with vast kingdoms.  
Proud, too. Where are they?

Did they take their wealth with them?  
We don't even know their names.  
The ones we remember are Shibi and others,  
who gave everything.

That fullness that can't be seen  
by rites or prayers  
makes itself small as a little boy  
and begs from me. Shouldn't I give him  
what he asks?

[Recognizing that this small form may be Vishnu, the king continues]  
That hand of his that plays with Lakshmi's hair,  
that strokes her body, her dress, her feet,  
her cheeks, her breasts, and is more beautiful  
at every spot—that hand is now stretched out to me,  
and mine will be above it. That is what's good.  
These kingdoms come and go, and my body  
will not last.

I may go to hell, or go to jail. The world  
may go to pieces. I may die a horrible death.  
My family could be destroyed. Let it be. Come what may,  
I'll keep my word to this person,  
even if he is Shiva or Vishnu or Brahma,  
or whoever he may be. ...

He's never asked anyone before.  
He's all alone. No father, no mother, no brothers.  
And he knows everything.  
I don't have the heart to say no  
to this little fellow, who stands before me  
stretching out his hands.” ...

[And, pouring water on Vishnu's feet, the king pronounces:] ...  
“On this Brahmin, who has taken his vows  
in the very form of Vishnu,  
who knows the Veda is proof, to you  
I bestow three feet of land.”  
He stretched out his hand,  
eager in the deed, and poured the water  
as he chanted, “May God be pleased.”  
The world was stunned. ...

And the wide-eyed god took this water in his hand  
as if it were the tears that would soon flow from the eyes of the demon's wives.

Taking it,  
the dwarf grew bigger and bigger,  
more and more, higher than the sky,  
farther than the farthest clouds,  
past the sun, past the moon,  
beyond the pole star, the other worlds,  
all the way to the seventh,  
filling all the space there is.

**Tyagaraja** • 18-19th centuries

***Produ Poyyenu: So much time has passed***

This famous Tyagaraja song exhorts us to think of Rama. “Time is flying,” it says. “We have wasted a lot of time in ignorance, in sensual pleasures and stupid chatter with foolish people.” “Wake up,” the song tells us, and “think of Rama.”

***Bhajana Seva Rada: Why don’t you sing of God?***

This *bhajana* exhorts people to sing Rama’s name. It is the name that is on the lips of Shiva and Brahma. “Sing of Rama,” the song says. “Singing his smiling face is the only way to cross the ocean of life.”



***\*Selections from The Rescue of Gajendra*** • Potana, 15th century

From the famous myth of Vishnu’s rescue of the elephant Gajendra, who has been fighting a losing battle with a crocodile in a pond of lotuses in South India. The struggle has gone on for thousands of years until Gajendra, in despair, cries out to Vishnu for help.

“They say He is there  
for poor people.  
They say He is there  
where yogis live.  
They say He’s everywhere.  
But is he or is he not?

I’ve lost my strength,  
my courage. I’m dying.  
My body is dead tired.  
You’re my only hope.  
Save me. Come, lord.  
Help me now.

People say you hear them,  
that you will go to impossible places  
to help them,  
that you answer their cry.  
They say you see everything  
there is to see.  
Only I  
have my doubts.” ...

Far away in heaven,  
in his private palace,  
lying in bed with his wife  
beside the lake at the edge of the garden,

he [Vishnu] heard the elephant’s cry  
and rushed to go.

He didn’t say a word to Sri [Lakshmi]  
didn’t reach for conch or discus,  
didn’t call to his servants  
or harness his bird,  
didn’t straighten the long hair that fell, disheveled,  
about his ears,  
didn’t even let go  
of the end of his wife’s sari  
that he was holding as they quarreled.  
He simply rushed out, racing  
to save that elephant’s life.

Lakshmi ran after him,  
and after her, the other wives,  
and after them, Garuda,  
and then his bow, his mace, his conch and wheel,  
then Narada, and the Commander,  
and, finally, everyone in heaven,  
even cowherds and kids. ...

Now Vishnu, flooded with compassion,  
cut the crocodile to pieces  
with his discus  
that shook the world, sending off sparks  
that dimmed the sun—  
a weapon unimpeded  
by anything in creation.  
With his long arms, the god  
lifted the elephant from the pond  
and softly stroked his face  
with his fingertips  
to end his sorrow.

*Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology*, translated by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002).



***Ardhanarishvara: The Lord who is half woman***  
*Stotra* attributed to Adi Shankara • 8th century

The *stotra* (hymn) to which this dance is set describes the two sides of Ardhanarishvara, female and male, Parvati and Shiva. Her hair and body are gracefully ornamented with gold and gemstones; his anklets and armbands are snakes. Her features are well-proportioned; his are uneven. Her garland is made of forest flowers; his garland is made of skulls. Her hair is dark like storm clouds; his shines like lightning. The poet bows to both: mother of the universe, father of the universe. In the item, the dancer simultaneously represents Parvati and Shiva by nimbly shifting the veil to cover one half of her body to the other, and adjusting her bodily movements in accordance.

## Performers' Biographies

**Sasikala Penumarthi** is one of the most accomplished students of Guru Padma Bushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam, with whom she trained at the Kuchipudi Art Academy in Chennai for seventeen years and with whom she performed both in India and internationally. Sasikala moved to Atlanta in 1991 and founded the Academy of Kuchipudi Dance in 1997. She has received the Master Artist award from the Georgia Arts Council and the National Foundation for the Advancement of Arts. Sasikala is also an artist affiliate at Emory University. She has been on the Georgia Arts Council State Touring Artists Roster for ten years and, as a member of the Young Audiences of Atlanta Roster, she has introduced Kuchipudi in schools throughout the state of Georgia. Over the years, she and her students of the Academy of Kuchipudi Dance have performed the dance dramas of Chandalika, Krishna Parijatham, Srinivasa Kalyanam, and Rukmini Kalyanam. She has also choreographed and performed the dance dramas Rathi Manmadha, Swapna Vijayam, Andal Kalyanam, and Pasidi Poornamma.

**Subhashini Krishnamurthy** is a consummate solo artist, composer, and accompanist for dance productions in the Carnatic style of Indian classical music. She received *veena* and vocal training from her grandmother Smt. P. V. Pattammal, a veteran artist of All India Radio. Her vocal skills were later developed under the tutelage of Smt. Meena Subramanian, a disciple of late Dr. M. L. Vasanthakumari. She has composed original music for many Indian classical dance productions and for collaborative ventures with modern dancers. She was featured at the Women Composers Festival held at the Department of Music at the University of Florida in 1999. She also is a software engineer and resides in Atlanta.

**Velcheru Narayana Rao** is a poet, literary critic, translator, and cultural historian and has been a pioneer in introducing and advancing the study of Telugu language and literature in the American academy. He has been a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Emory University since 2009. Prior to coming to Emory, he taught at University of Chicago and, for 37 years, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he served as the Krishnadevaraya Professor of Languages and Cultures of Asia. Narayana Rao's most recent publication, a translation of Allasani Peddana's *The Story of Manu: Manucaritramu* (with David Shulman), is one of the inaugural translations appearing in the new Murty Classical Library of India (a series that publishes original texts and English translations of Indian literary masterpieces). Narayana Rao's numerous translations of Telugu classical poetry, many translated with David Shulman, have made these available to English-speaking readers for the first time. His translations include: *Girls for Sale: Kanyasulkam, a Play from Colonial India* (2007), *God on the Hill: Temple Poems from Tirupati—Annamayya* (2005), *Hibiscus on the Lake: Twentieth-Century Telugu Poetry from India* (2003), *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology* (2002), *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Pre-modern South India* (1998), and *When God is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Ksetrayya and Others* (1994, with A. K. Ramanujan). Other ground-breaking publications include a cultural biography of the poet Srinatha, *Srinatha: The Poet who Made Gods and Kings* (2012) and a translation of the Basava Purana, *Siva's Warriors: The Basava Purana of Palkuriki Somanatha* (1990).

**Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger** is a professor of Indian religions, performance studies, and anthropology of religion at Emory University, and worked under V. Narayana Rao for her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. She has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Hyderabad, Tirupati, and Chhattisgarh. Her publications include: *Everyday Hinduism* (2015), *When the World Becomes Female: Guises of a South Indian Goddess* (2013), *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender & Vernacular Islam in South India* (2006), and *Gender & Genre in the Folklore of Middle India* (1996). Flueckiger received a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for 2014-2015 to support her new project titled *Material Acts: The Agency of Materiality in India*.

**Harshita Mruthinti Kamath** received her BA from Emory College in 2004, and her PhD from Emory's Graduate Division of Religion in 2012. She was an Assistant Professor of Religion at Middlebury College from 2013-2014, and is currently a Visiting Research Scholar at Middlebury College. Her forthcoming book, based on her dissertation, is titled: *The Dance of Maya: Imagining Gender on the Kuchipudi Stage*. She is currently working on a translation of Nandi Timmana's sixteenth century Telugu poetic text, *Parijatapaharanamu*, with V. Narayana Rao.



## Orchestra Members

**Seshu Sarma** is a physician and teacher by profession and has been an active participant in the cultural life of the Indian community in Atlanta for the past three decades. She holds a diploma in Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam dance. She received her training on *veena* from Sri Kavirayani Jogarao and Smt. Pappu Padmavathi. She is the vice president of Sankara Nethralaya of Chennai, a premium institution providing eye care for the needy. Currently she is an associate professor of gynecology and obstetrics at Morehouse School of Medicine.

**Bhagavatula Sastry** comes from a Bhagavatula family of Kuchipudi. He is an expert in *mridangam* and *ghatam* and a noted scholar of Yakshagana. Sastry was trained in the fundamentals of Kuchipudi by the late Sri Bhagavatula Ramakotayya and received advanced training from Padma Bhushan Guru Vempati Chinna Satyam through participation in many Kuchipudi of ballets like the Ramayana, Haravilasam, Sreenivasa Kalyanam, and Ksheerasagara Madhanam. Sastry learned *mridangam* from his father. He holds a master's degree in computer science and works as a software engineer in Rochester, NY.

**Suresh Kothandaraman**, a software professional based in Atlanta, started learning *mridangam* at an early age from Sri Ramanad V. Eswaran. He received advanced training from the late Sri K. M. Vaidyanathan, a noted *ghatam* exponent. Suresh has played the *mridangam* as an accompanying artist for both vocal and instrumental musicians, as well as for dance programs in India and the United States, including the dance ballets Chandalika, Menaka Viswamitra, Andal Kalyanam, Rukmini Kalyanam, and Pasidi Poornamma. Besides playing the *mridangam*, Suresh also plays Carnatic music on flute.

**Sri Anjaneya Sastry** is a disciple of the eminent *tabla* maestro Pandit Prithwi Bhattacharya. For the past nine years, he has trained in *tabla* with the world renowned Ustaad Zakir Hussain. Anjaneya regularly performs at Hindustani classical concerts and has accompanied several luminaries such as Ustaad Shahid Pervez and Pandit Nand Kishore Mooley. In addition, he enjoys performing for dance dramas and musical ballets.

**Ramesh Panchagnula** has trained in Carnatic classical music for more than 15 years. He is a disciple of renowned vocalist and violin guru Sri Neti Srirama Sarma of Hyderabad, and he has continued learning from Prof. Shivkumar Kalyanaraman in Troy, NY. Ramesh has accompanied several artists, given solo concerts, and performed in percussion ensembles both in India and the United States. He has performed with the Emory South Indian Classical Music Ensemble for the past several years. Ramesh holds a master's degree in electrical engineering and currently works as a senior video engineer for ARRIS Group in Atlanta.

**Subra Viswanathan** learned to play *mridangam* from Sri Trichy Raghava Iyer at the Bharatiya Fine Arts in Mumbai and also earned a diploma from Mumbai University for *mridangam*. Over the years, he has played *mridangam* for several dance programs and concerts in and around Atlanta. Subra also learned Carnatic vocal music from his father, Sri N. S. Viswanathan, and is continuing his vocal training in Atlanta, first with Ms. Sujata Rayburn and currently with Sri Salem Shriram.



#### *Additional Dancers in Ardhanarishvara*

**Akhila Takkallapalli** has been a student of Sasikala Penumarthi for the past fourteen years. She completed her *ranga pravesam* in 2008 and has performed major roles in several Kuchipudi dance dramas. She currently assists Sasikala in teaching in the Academy of Kuchipudi Dance. Akhila is also a physician's assistant in Atlanta.

**Parina Shah** joined the Academy of Kuchipudi Dance in 1996 and completed her *ranga pravesam* in 2007. She continues to be involved with teaching and performing as a member of the Academy. Parina is a practicing physician in the Atlanta area.

**Siri Yellamraju** has been studying Kuchipudi dance for the past 17 years. She is currently a second year law student at Georgia State University.

**Smriti Suresh** has studied Kuchipudi dance with Sasikala for seven years. She is the daughter of *mridangam* player Suresh Kothandaraman.



*With you in my mind,*

*I open the book to read.*

*Saraswati! Goddess of learning!*

*Bright as the full moon!*

*Stay in my heart, speak through me,*

*eloquently,*

*good words,*

*well pronounced with joy.*