



**Esplanade
Presents**

**Kalaa Utsavam
Indian Festival of Arts**

AN ESPLANADE CO-PRODUCTION

ARISI RICE

**APSARAS ARTS
DANCE COMPANY**

(Singapore, Indonesia, India)

**25 & 26 NOV 2022, FRI & SAT, 8PM
ESPLANADE THEATRE**

PROGRAMME NOTES

About Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

Esplanade is Singapore's national performing arts centre. It hosts a year-round line-up of about 3,500 live performances and activities presented by Esplanade, its partners and hirers. Esplanade also brings the arts virtually to audiences in Singapore and beyond, through its diverse range of digital programmes on *Esplanade Offstage*, an all-access backstage pass to the performing arts and guide to Singapore and Asian arts and culture, with videos, podcasts, articles, quizzes and resources.

As an arts centre for everyone, Esplanade also creates opportunities for seniors, youth, children and underserved communities to experience the arts. More than 70% of the shows that take place each year at the centre are free for all to enjoy.

The centre works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities and content, push artistic boundaries and engage audiences. Esplanade supports the creation of artistic content by commissioning and producing new Singapore and Asian work for the international stage. It also develops technical capabilities for the industry nationally.

Turning 20 in 2022, Esplanade marks the occasion with a year-long celebration themed *20 and Beyond: Keeping the Lights On*. In addition to the presentations of its year-long festivals, programme series, and special initiatives and events, there will also be a season of new works by Singapore and Asian artists specially commissioned for the arts centre's 20th anniversary and official opening of its newest venue, Singtel Waterfront Theatre.

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is operated by The Esplanade Co Ltd (TECL), which is a not-for-profit organisation, a registered Charity and an Institution of a Public Character. The Charity Council awarded TECL the Charity Governance Award – Special Commendation for Clarity of Strategy in 2016, and the Charity Transparency Award for four consecutive years since 2016. Esplanade is Singapore's first Dementia-Friendly Arts Venue and a certified Dementia Go-To Point, as well as a Guide-dog Friendly centre.

TECL receives funding support from Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and its Community Programmes are supported by Tote Board Family, comprising Tote Board, Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club.

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Festival Message

The Indian culture spans myriad art forms and genres that branch out from its long history. Presenting this diverse and extensive culture in Singapore is no mean task. Over the past two decades, *Kalaa Utsavam – Indian Festival of Arts* has been a champion for the Indian arts and this year from 18 – 27 Nov 2022, the festival builds on the relationships developed over the years with artists and arts groups, while also introducing new and exciting artists and art forms that audiences can look forward to.

In the unique position of being the first Indian arts festival with a multi-genre focus in Southeast Asia, *Kalaa Utsavam* has sought to be a catalyst for excellence by developing and supporting the creations of both international and Singapore artists through debut performances by up and coming artists and premieres of new work, all telling their unique stories. Keeping in line with that vision, this year's edition will also feature the return of international artists such as sitarist Anoushka Shankar, and newly co-produced works by Apsaras Arts, Bhaskar's Arts Academy and playwright A Yagnya.



Through **ARISI : Rice**, Apsaras Arts explores the importance of rice from a Southeast Asian perspective; Bhaskar's Arts Academy collaborates with playwright Alfian Sa'at for **Marabu – Footprints of an Artist** which pays tribute to the late doyenne Mrs Santha Bhaskar; and upcoming local playwright A Yagnya's **Between 5 Cows and the Deep Blue Sea...** which is directed by Alvin Tan will explore traditional Indian matchmaking and the struggles of a Tamil girl. Presented as part of *PopLore – A Year of Singapore Popular Music* in celebration of Esplanade's 20th Anniversary, we welcome back the ever-popular **Vasantham Live** which will chronicle the evolution of the Indian pop scene in Singapore.

Kalaa Utsavam also features many exciting and upcoming musicians, such as Punjabi outfit **Band Walle**, Tamil group **D.N.S.V** and a night of soul and R&B with singer-songwriter **Shak'thiya**.

The festival has also had the wonderful opportunity of featuring many leading musicians from overseas. Whilst this could not be achieved in the past two years due to the pandemic, this year we are thrilled to welcome world music icon and sitarist **Anoushka Shankar**, collaborating with Austrian percussionist Manu Delago and our very own Orchestra of the Music Makers; Maverick Indian carnatic vocalist **T M Krishna** and his ensemble; and popular Malaysian hip-hop collective **#PU4LYF** who are primed to bring the house down.

We also take immense pride in featuring the works ***Can I Make You a Suit, Mate?*** by Singapore stand-up comedian Rishi Budhrani as he takes us down memory lane with a comedic monologue based on his father's experiences as an immigrant from India, and ***The Indigo Jackal*** directed by Grace Kalaiselvi which adds to the list of popular children's productions that were commissioned in the

past few editions of the festival. The festival will also feature workshops, talks and a slew of free programmes for everyone's enjoyment.

We express our heartfelt thanks to *Kalaa Utsavam 2022*'s Principal Sponsor, the High Commission of India, Singapore, Supporting Sponsor Fort Sanctuary, and supporter Bowen Enterprises Pte Ltd and The Silent Foundation. Having said that, no festival is possible without all of you, our audience and fans. We thank you for the unwavering support that has been extended to us over the last 20 years. As we step into a new frontier into the next decade of the festival, we invite you to join us once again on this journey of exploring and marvelling at the sheer diversity and beauty of Indian culture and arts.

See you at *Kalaa Utsavam*!

V M Sai Akileshwar

Programmer, The Esplanade Co Ltd
On behalf of the *Kalaa Utsavam*
Team

Sponsor's Message

As we celebrate 75 years of India's independence with a series of events under 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', the High Commission of India is delighted to support the 21st year of *Kalaa Utsavam – Indian Festival of Arts* in Singapore. It is heartening to see the impressive growth of the festival over the past two decades, with its focus on multiple genres but creating a niche for itself as a unique event featuring both global and local artists.

This edition of *Kalaa Utsavam* is special, as it brings to the audience an exciting bouquet of performances by several internationally acclaimed musicians such as Sitar Maestra Anoushka Shankar and Carnatic vocalist TM Krishna, apart from the dance musical, *ARISI: Rice*, which is a cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary performance inspired by the life-sustaining grain that links vast sections of humanity across Asia. The festival provides useful opportunities for children and adults to participate in interesting workshops and lectures, helping them develop a keener understanding of various art forms. In addition, it also provides a valuable platform for



local talent, contributing towards keeping the Indian arts alive and thriving in Singapore.

The long and unique history of people-to-people connections between India and Singapore makes collaboration in the field of culture a joyous and spontaneous celebration of music, dance and the arts, and contributes to the vitality of our bilateral relationship. Festivals like *Kalaa Utsavam* keep artistic traditions alive and provide an opportunity to bring about greater harmony and understanding.

Arts and artists have been instrumental in providing a healing touch to our tired souls as we continue to navigate the challenging circumstances of the pandemic. We are glad to have been a key partner of *Kalaa Utsavam* last year, albeit under a heavy COVID-19 overhang. It gives us greater pleasure to see the event being held this time in-person, just as in the years before the pandemic. Esplanade has already enthralled audiences in Singapore this year by playing host to events like *Ashayein* by Salim Sulaiman and *Triveni* featuring Ustad Zakir Hussain, as part of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations. We are hopeful that the vibrant audiences of Singapore will again give a resounding thumbs up to the events planned in this edition of *Kalaa Utsavam*.

The High Commission of India conveys its best wishes to all the performers and hopes that this edition of *Kalaa Utsavam* surpasses the high standards it has set for itself, and adds another glittering chapter to India-Singapore cultural relations.

P. Kumaran

High Commissioner of India
Singapore

"Over the years, Apsaras Arts Dance Company has grown from strength to strength, creating quality productions that are unafraid to push boundaries. Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay has walked alongside Apsaras Arts in its artistic journey, particularly through works such as *ARISI : Rice* to be presented as part of our upcoming cultural festival, Kalaa Utsavam – Indian Festival of Arts. This ambitious, multi-cultural work is an example of the dance company's imagination and courage to experiment and collaborate with various artists from Singapore, Indonesia and India."

Yvonne Tham

CEO, The Esplanade Co, Ltd

"Singapore Chinese Orchestra is very honoured to be part of *ARISI : Rice*, produced by Apsaras Arts Dance Company. We are certain that the unique sounds of Chinese instruments will add a

different dimension to this multi-disciplinary performance that transcends culture."

Terence Ho

Executive Director,
Singapore Chinese Orchestra

"Ethnic art performances play a significant role in connecting people, engaging communities and in preserving Singapore's multiculturalism. We hope that dance-theatre performances such as Apsaras Arts' unique dance performances will promote greater appreciation towards Singapore's ethnic-traditional Indian dance as well as our Asian cultural arts. By integrating the symbolic significance of rice cultivation with the performance, we can bring the audience closer to our Asian identity and rituals."

Lim Hock Chuan

Head of Programmes,
Temasek Foundation



Artistic Director's Notes.

I have been keen to create a dance work based on a topic that brings awareness towards one of the global issue that we are facing in this era: food security. My father, Mr N Kumarasamy, had a very illustrious career as an irrigation engineer in enabling farmers in Sri Lanka and then in Indonesia to have access to water for their crops. This created a curiosity in me to understand more about the tedious work that goes into agriculture. The thought of creating a dance work based on rice cultivation had lingered in my mind for several years, as I realised that the rice grain is not only a staple food source, but also has a lot of significance in the cultures of Asian civilisations. This sparked the idea of telling stories about rice and the cultural customs surrounding it through dance and music.



Working on *ARISI : Rice* is in line with our company's philosophy of telling stories of empathy, sustainability, diversity, inclusion and equity through dance. Our decades of journeying through Southeast Asian cultures in search of meaningful collaborations, *ARISI : Rice* has brought us to the island of Bali, Indonesia. It has been an exciting experience to integrate this dance performance with segments of film footages capturing the lives of former farmers who eke a living as migrant workers in Singapore. We are proud to present this new creative and imaginative work,

inspired by rice and rice culture, showcasing our very own Singaporean Indian dancers with the musicians from Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

This production is a significant milestone in our partnership with Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. My gratitude to the inspiring creative team who have brought many innovative ideas to the table, and to the amazing musicians and dancers without whom we could have not realised this dream project.



My sincere thanks to our programme sponsors Temasek Foundation and TVS Motor (Singapore) Pte Ltd, and for the support from Singapore Airlines and our DEVATA Friends of Apsaras Arts. We are humbled to receive their generous support.

We dedicate this premier of *ARISI : Rice* to the many farmers who dedicate their lives to ensure that they produce enough rice to feed our families.

Aravinth Kumarasamy
Artistic Director





Bharatanatyam Dance Choreographer's Notes.

I am so delighted to have worked on the choreography and costume designs for *ARISI* and played a key appearance as a performer. This experience has been totally different from what I have created in Apsaras Arts Productions . While planting rice, farmers make use of song and dance to overcome their tiredness. These movements by the farmers were used as a base during the choreographic process of *ARISI : Rice*.

Just like how movements, rhythms and tunes are a part of farming, the choreography in *ARISI* also tries to relive those elements of dance and music practiced by the rice farmers in their fields. I was excited to learn about the beliefs of the Balinese people and the significance of rice in Bali. It was intriguing to witness the similarities between Balinese and Indian culture, culminating in the choreography incorporating various dance vocabularies from the ancient treatise *Natya Sastra* has been a fascinating journey.

Balinese genres of music such as gamelan and kekcuk have strong mathematical elements which are similar to Bharatanatyam rhythms. It was a totally different experience for me as a choreographer, to create steps for pan Asian music, while using pedagogy of Bharatanatyam.

Juxtaposing the idea of paddy as a grain and a beautiful heroine is an abstract concept in *ARISI* brought to life in the idiom of Bharatanatyam. I truly enjoyed creating this piece titled Sringaram; this has been one of my favourites along with many others in *ARISI*.

My sincere gratitude to my mentor Priyadarsini Govind, artistic director Aravinth Kumarasamy and dramaturg Lim How Ngean for their valuable inputs. I am very honoured to have had the opportunity to perform an act with Padma Shri Awardee Prof Pak Dibiya; our interaction on and off stage enabled me to gain many facets of Balinese culture and arts forms.

Costumes are a piece of art that add depth to the dance. I imagine that each piece tells its own story depending on the way it is designed or adorned. In the making of *ARISI*, I moved slightly away from the typical style of silk Bharatnatyam costumes and created new designs that pertain to the element or nature they represent in the paddy field and the farmer's life. The different type of textured cotton fabrics have their own movement and flow, and by incorporating craft works such as fine thread embroidery, the results have been exquisite.

The collaboration of Bharatnatyam and Balinese Dance gave me an insight into the common ikat fabrics from Bali and India, which are weaved using the double knots technique.

Envisioning the key costume with this unique ikat fabric, inextricably binds, not only the two countries but their dance forms as well. I am very grateful to all the artisans and craftsmen for bringing my visual prints of the costumes come alive with minute intricate details

Mohanapriyan Thavarajah

Bharatanatyam Choreographer
and Costume Designer

Balinese Dance Choreographer's Notes.

"Since 1990, I have been collaborating with various artists in different parts of the world. In 1990, I collaborated with Keith Terry from Oakland-California (USA); in 2016, I worked with Lata Pada to collaboratively create Pralaya Dance Theatre, the latest working with Aravinth Kumarasamy to produce *ARISI : Rice*. In this work, I have utilised different forms of Balinese music, such as gamelan selonding, balaganjur, and kecak played by Gamelan Gita Semara. Among the various Balinese dance forms, I utilised legong, kebyar duduk, gebug ende, and perang tipat. Through these artistic collaborations, I have been able to learn about some artistic principles of other cultures as well as to share the beauty of Balinese cultures. I strongly believe in working in collaboration is the best way to create a cross-cultural work and without ill-treating elements of other cultures."

Prof I Wayan Dibia

I Wayan Dibia is an emeritus professor of dance at Indonesia Institute of The Arts (ISI) Denpasar. He was born in Singapadu-Gianyar, Bali, Indonesia, into a family of performing artists. He started learning music and dance at the age of eight with various masters in Bali. Since the 1970s, he has created numerous of classical, new, and contemporary works utilising different elements of Balinese culture. He has also written a number of books in both Indonesian and English.





His formal art education include the Conservatory of Traditional Performing Arts in Denpasar, Indonesia Dance Academy in Denpasar and Yogyakarta. In 1982, he received a grant from The Asian Cultural Council, New York to pursue his Master of Arts in choreography, and in 1987 from The Fulbright Hays for his Ph.D. in Southeast Asian Performing Arts, both at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), USA. He has toured internationally to many countries in Asia, Europe, USA, Canada, and Australia.

For his long dedication and devotion to the arts world, the government of Bali has awarded him several awards, such as Wija Kusuma, Dharma Kusuma, and Bali Jani Nugraha. In 2021, The President of India has awarded him with the Padma Shri Award.

GEOKS ART SPACE

GEOKS (Geria Olah Creativitas Seni) is a non-government art space located in the heart of Singapadu village of Gianyar, Bali, Indonesia. The arts space was built in 2004 by I Wayan Dibia, to provide space for young innovative artists to present their works. Since its inception, Geoks has organised several international events featuring both Asian and Western artists, produced a number of new works, and has been involved in a number of artistic collaborations. Two of the most recent collaborations are Pralaya Dance Theatre (2016) with Lata Pada from Sampradaya Dance Creation-Toronto, and *ARISI : Rice* (2022) with Aravinth Kumarasamy from Apsaras Arts Singapore.

Dramatrug's Notes.

~ *Grains of Stories Taking Root* ~

Telling stories through dance. Such is the simple objective of the art form Bharatanatyam, coming onto its own formidable force some 2,000 years ago. Time and again a multitude of stories have been presented in this intricate bodily discipline that boasts a highly complex matrix of facial expressions and codified hand gestures with the all-vital three-point movements pivots of the head, torso and lower limbs of the tribhanga. Set this matrix to a another rich matrix of emotions (bhavam), melody (ragam) and rhythm (talam), and there truly is no story that cannot be told through Bharatanatyam. Hence the very survival and continuous flourishing of the art form to the present millennium.

Yet, stories are increasingly more complicated, more layered, running numerous parallels, ever more intersecting, becoming global. So how does a 2,000-year-old art form stays relevant and rises to the challenge of a contemporary dramaturgy for the present audience, young and old? To this, Apsaras Arts continues to innovate the very form while respecting the integrity of the artistic tenets of Bharatanatyam, for instance, expanding the role of the ensemble to name but one creative push forward.





Dramaturgically, artistic director Aravinth Kumarasamy reaches even further with a global outlook of telling stories away from the Indian and Hindu cosmology, from architecture to the refugee experience, not to mention technological advancements with sound engineering and lighting design.

It is with *ARISI : Rice* that the seemingly simple story of rice takes on multiple perspectives that are linked, layered and intersecting. The performance takes us through the cultural and aesthetic practices where rice is central, from significant life stages to folk traditions in planting, harvesting and even celebrating the grain that is the life-bringing and affirming. Not stopping there, *ARISI* also presents different lives from migrant workers who left their rice fields to work on different fields of concrete and steel, to how our cultural neighbours—like the Balinese—also celebrate rice in everything cultural and social.

Thus, the multiplicities of *ARISI* begin to reach the audience and by now, it is not only dance, song and music, but there is another medium helps to layer further the human story of rice. Acclaimed filmmaker and documentarian K. Rajagopal lends his deft storytelling through his camera lens giving distant voices to migrant workers and farmers.

With a cultivation history that dates back at least 4,000 years, we only highlight what is at present. Apsaras's story of rice is only a small glimpse into the multitude of angles that could have been taken. Specifically, the Apsaras signature of Bharatanatyam constitutes the beating heart of *ARISI* that in turn is fed by the arteries of song, music and film. Ultimately, it is the soul of *ARISI* that reveals the wealth of human experience with rice; with the beautiful and the mundane, in their joys and pains, with grace and compassion.

Lim How Ngean
Dramaturg



Film Director's Notes.

Shot in Singapore and India, the film celebrates the humble grain - rice. Through stories about the production and consumption of rice by farmers and their families abroad, rice becomes a symbol of longing, labour and love. As a filmmaker, this was my first collaboration with a dance company. *ARISI : Rice* was an opportunity to revisit my love of dance and theatre and investigate how the moving image complements and contrasts with physical bodies in motion on stage. Filming in India was an incredible experience; being able to document the landscape, culture and meet the families of the migrant workers has given the film depth and heart.



K Rajagopal
Film Director



Music Composer's Notes.

Let me begin by saying that this is an amazing project. In the initial stages of music composition, it looked like a typical abstract theme with no storyline and no visible links. My God—the way it slowly unfolded and took us along is a sheer mystery! We all sat together, planned what details had to be brought in and from there it took off. The one great advantage we had was that we had multiple musical genres and international musicians at our disposal. So, we could discover interesting musical passages which had so much variety in melody, rhythm and tones. I thoroughly enjoyed scoring music for this humongous project, and would like to sincerely thank Aravinth for the great opportunity!

| *Dr Rajkumar Bharathi*





Music Director's Notes.

ARISI : Rice is an extravaganza that combines art, the artists and technical excellence. The concept of the production is by itself something that is a part of every Asian's daily life. Many of us limit rice to just a food grain not acknowledging how important it is as a metaphor in our life. Producing and arranging music for *ARISI* was an unique experience. The music is a representation of world music in its best avatar. It was also my dream to produce sound that is as diverse and rich as rice grains. This led me to push boundaries, producing a soundtrack that would bring a unique surround experience to the audience. *ARISI* features not just musical notes but also soundscapes of asian countries captured in their native land.

ARISI is life, and is never to be forgotten! I am forever indebted to its conceptualiser, Mr. Aravinth Kumarasamy.

| *Sai Shravanam. R*



ARISI RICE

Dance inspired by the grains of life!

A cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary performance inspired by the grains of life that link humanity across Asia. In a shift away from epic storytelling, award-winning artistic director Aravinth Kumarasamy has imagined the dance production as episodic vignettes that intersect stages of rice cultivation with gestural rites

and rituals in life stages where rice is the principal ingredient in these ceremonies. Dramaturged by Lim How Ngean, a performance-maker, dramaturg and dance researcher, *ARISI : Rice* takes the audience through a kaleidoscope of dynamic images brought to life through Bharatanatyam dance.



Apsaras Arts shares the stage with their traditional Balinese peers, choreographed by Professor I Wayan Dibia collaborating with the company's resident choreographer, Mohanapriyan Thavarajah. For the first time ever, Apsaras Arts collaborates with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra to melodically enhance the music score composed by Rajkumar Bharathi, produced and directed by Sai Shrvanam.



Featuring an immersive soundscape created through live Indian and Chinese instruments performed and sung by leading award-winning artists such as Bombay Jayashri Ramnath, D Sathyaprakash, Naveen Iyer, Pratik Srivatsava and other eminent

Singapore Chinese Orchestra musicians, Balinese gamelan and kecak choric singing to echo and accent certain scenes. The production also incorporates critically-acclaimed film director K. Rajagopal's powerful filmic layer of stories from former farmer migrants who eke an existence in developing foreign lands.

Following the success of earlier co-productions with Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay of dance-theatre works—*ANGKOR - An Untold Story* at Kalaa Utsavam 2012 and *ANJANEYAM - Hanuman's Ramayana* at Kalaa Utsavam 2017 —Apsaras Arts Dance Company is excited to present another epic dance-theatre production for this annual festival.

PROLOGUE

The Bereft

A loved one departs—the collective cry for the beloved moves the soul. Grief signals the end but it might also herald a new beginning.

Rice in Last Rites

Rice plays an important role in Hindu funerals and death rites.

Family and relatives pay their last respects by placing rice at or near the mouth of the deceased in the final rites just before cremation. Rice balls (pinda) are offered as part of the rites.

In other folk cultures, rice is brought to the funeral and pounded as part of the funeral rite. In certain Tamil communities, the hymns of the 7th century Shaivite saint poet Manickavasagar is sung while rice is pounded.

Song of Death & Birth

*"Death is when it is all over
Death is when one worries no more
Death is mysterious
Yet it is great when it arrives with no suffering
The mouth that relished all that you cooked,
Can hardly taste this rice now
Rice, O Rice"*

*"Every ending has its new beginnings – Birth!
Worries await – Birth
Birth is mysterious too
Live as one – Great Birth!
Born today, born anew, born again.
Taste this morsel of rice, my dear,
Rice O Rice!"*

Rice at the end as rice is at the beginning;
rice as a part of our life-cycle.

We offer it to the deceased as part of a send-off from home.

We feed cooked rice as the first solid food for a baby after months of just mother's milk. It is the act Annaprashana, of eating cooked rice.

OVERTURE

i. IMPRESSIONS

Sounds Of The Rice Field

We take inspiration from a 10th-Century Tamil Ramayana poetry where dancers illustrate lively sounds that emanate from a rice field.

*"Is it all noise? No, it is all music!
Bubbling rivers
Slushing ploughs
Gushing juices from
sugarcane presses
Blaring conches
Clamour of fighting bulls
Splashing of buffaloes in tanks
Is it all noise? No, it is all music!"*

- Poet Kambar
(from the Kambaramayana)

Connecting Legend

A Balinese legend has it that Devi Sri is the rice goddess and together with her consort, Vishnu, they create fertile earth by coming together as water and earth.

The result is the rice plant which produces its grains to nourish mankind.

ii. CULTIVATION

Blessings

In Balinese culture, the rice farmers conduct blessing ceremonies in the rice field at the beginning of the planting cycle. They also seek blessings from the village temple priest and sprinkle holy waters across the field.

Planting

A choreographic study of preparing the rice field, from ploughing to sowing, from transplanting seedlings to watering the young plants.

Hardship

Farmers endure natural calamities during the cultivation cycle: drought, pestilence, even vermin. They are also at the mercy of



climate change as unpredictable conditions wreak uncertainty over the well-being of their crops.

For some farmers, their field of dreams are devastated and may never recover economically. Families are torn apart as younger members seek fortune across oceans in alternative vocations working in foreign lands. To save the family, to salvage the bone dry fields.

Fighting For Life

In the eastern Balinese village of Seraya, a stick fight-dance is practised in the rice field to invoke rain during the dry months.

Welcoming Rain

The heavens open and rain descends, blessing earth and mankind, thunder and lightning follow.

*"It is a deluge, breaking all barriers!
The universe is swaying in this
tempest!"*

*"Blinding lightning. Roaring oceans.
Thundering clouds. Whistling winds
piercing the skies.*

*Is it the sky playing the rhythm?
Where did this torrent come from,
my friend?"*

- Poet Maha Kavi Bharathiyar

iii. CULTURE

Learning Grains

In South Indian cultures, young children are admitted into schools on the auspicious day of Vijayadashami. A special Hindu ceremony called the Vidyarambham is conducted to initiate children in the world of education by exposing them to reading and writing: they are introduced to their first letters. The young child learns to write the Tamil alphabets on a tray of raw rice. The letters are generally a mantra of prosperity that is again written with gold on the child's tongue. Rice is utilised in this ceremony to represent fortune and blessings for the prosperous development of the child.

Foundation of Dance

In the ancient era of the Devadasi system of female temple dancers in Tamil Nadu, South India, dance training for young Devadasi girls was conducted with rice. Novice dancers would take their first dance steps by stamping on raw rice that has been spread over a cloth on the floor. The pouring of the rice grains onto the cloth is a significant ritual signalling the beginnings of a dancer.

iv. CELEBRATION

A Love Song

As the rice grains reach maturity,
they long for the rays of the Sun.
They yearn to be kissed so that
they can continue to grow and turn
golden.

*"My darling will be here, shining
Just as I wish him
To touch my heart and give me life
At the right time
My darling will be here, shining"*

*"Like the cupid, shower he does, with
arrows of love, on me
Hither and thither flies he,
Like the flower arrows of the cupid, the
sprightly sparrow and the bright bee
Causing, searing pain on me!"*

*"Rise I did at the right time
Rise I did in the right way
The day will arrive when I bow my
head with pride and shyness
And never shall anyone in the world go
hungry!"*

- Dr Rajkumar Bharathi

Bounty

The harvest is a communal affair, with the entire village coming together to harvest the rice from the fields, regardless of who owns each field. The farmers energise each other through song and dance to lessen the punishing work of harvesting.

Odes and Dedications

To rejoice a bountiful harvest, the special cooked rice called Pongal is offered to the sun god Surya as an expression of gratitude and to secure blessings of prosperity. It is also a time to honour the rice goddess Ponni Amman.

The Thai Pongal festival is observed during mid-January among the Tamils of South India to mark the end of the harvest season. The day's celebrations include an early morning ceremony of boiling rice with milk and sugar in clay pots. The bubbling up of the boiling (which also means *pongol*) milk is considered an auspicious sign. The festival is actually celebrated across India with different names such as Shakrain in Bangladesh, Makar Sankranti in Kerala and Goa, Maghi in Punjab, to name a few variations.

Rice at Play

Meanwhile, the Kapal village in the south of Bali boasts of a special 'war' called the Tipat Bantal war where the villagers celebrate the bounty of harvest with a 'rice fight.' They playfully throw cooked rice cakes in the form of little pillows at each other.

Heritage

During a Hindu wedding, rice is often sprinkled over the newlywed couple to bless them with a prosperous married life. The bride is welcomed into her new home by her in-laws as she brings rice as a symbol of prosperity. They seek blessings from Annapurna, goddess food and nourishment.

*"Long live, O Dear Couple
May we shower this holy rice on you
May you live for hundred years."*

*"Dear Bride
Enter our house putting your best
foot forward,
You are the wealth that brings
prosperity,
You are Goddess Annapurani, feed
all well.
Welcome Dear Bride, you are here to
nourish generations!"*

- Dr Rajkumar Bharathi

~EPILOGUE~



Bharatanatyam Dancers

Apsaras Arts Dance Company



Seema Hari Kumar is a senior performing artist and faculty member at Apsaras Arts. She trained under Smt Neila Sathyalingam and has performed with Apsaras Arts at major festivals in Singapore and abroad. In 2019, she underwent a dance residency with Smt Priyadarsini Govind and staged a thematic solo under the Indian Performing Arts Conference banner. She's a recipient of the Neila Sathyalingam Memorial

Award 2019 and Bharatha Kala Mani Award 2022. Seema is a financial advisor and a mother of two beautiful girls.

Deva Priya Appan is a senior dancer at Apsaras Arts. After starting her journey under the tutelage of Mrs Mohana Harendran, she continued to be trained by Smt. Neila Sathyalingam. She has performed in various productions by Apsaras Arts in India, Australia, UK, Sri Lanka and South Africa. She was a part of the first *Raga* series at Esplanade with the production *Dvayam* in 2011. She and Seema Hari Kumar collaborated with



Sheejith Krishna and Parvathy Menon in 2011. She is a recipient of the Bharata Kala Mani Award 2022. Priya is a consultant psychiatrist and mother of two children.



Periyachi Roshini started her dance journey at the age of five under Guru Neewin Hershall. She is currently a disciple of Guru Geethanadhan PK. In 2022, she completed her diploma from SIFAS and was awarded with the title Natya Visharad. As of 2019, she is a company dancer of Apsaras Arts. She is also trained in theatrical acting and has completed her degree in acting from LASALLE College of the Arts.



Janani Arun Kumar has been learning Bharatanatyam for the past 11 years. She started with Guru Ramu Kanagal in Bangalore and later moved to Singapore and learnt under Srimati Sangeetha and Lavanya at Alapana. She is now a student of Sri Mohanapriyan Thavarajah and an active company dancer at Apsaras Arts since 2020.

Nagalakshmi is a disciple of Guru Geethanadhan PK at SIFAS, under whom she completed her diploma in Bharatanatyam and was awarded with the title Natya Visharad, completing her Arangetram in 2022. She has been a company dancer of Apsaras Arts since 2020 and has performed in productions such as *Amara* and *Nirmanika*.



Nitya Sriram graduated from SIFAS in 2017 with a diploma in Bharatanatyam and the Natya Visharad title award under Guru Sreeliji. She has been a company dancer with Apsaras Arts since 2021, performing in productions such as *Nirmanika* and *Amara*.

Priyadarshini Shiva Sankar is a faculty member and performing artiste at Apsaras Arts. She started training under the tutelage of Guru Smt. Latha Ravi in 1998 and holds a Masters degree in Bharathanatyam from the University of Madras. She is a recipient of multiple awards including Natya Sringara Mayuri from Gana Mukundhapriya and Natya Tharagai from Salangai Oli Sabha. Priyadarshini has been with Apsaras Arts since 2020 and has performed in productions such as *Amara* and *Nirmanika*.





Gopikka graduated from SIFAS in 2018 with a diploma in Bharatanatyam and the Natya Visharad title award under Guru Sreeliji. She has been a company dancer with Apsaras Arts since 2021, performing in productions such as *Nirmanika* and *Amara*.

Deeksha Amrita Nayar started at Apsaras Arts under the Balabharatham curriculum in 2019 at the age of five. She currently is learning under her mother, Seema Hari Kumar at the Academy. This will be her debut at a major company performance.





Bharatanatyam Dancers

Guest Artistes from India



Apeksha Kamath is a young talented dancer who has been learning Bharatanatyam for the past 12 years, currently training under Acharya Smt. Indira Kadambi in Ambalam, Bangalore. She has taken up a distance education course from the University of Cambridge, UK. She has performed Koham for Natyavamsham – Guru Shishya Series along with Acharya Indira Kadambi and Meera Sreenarayanan in September of 2022.

Nivedha Harish is a versatile young dancer, having studied Bharatanatyam for the past 15 years under the tutelage of Smt. Roja Kannan. She is currently pursuing Electronic Media in MOP Vaishnav College and also a Bachelor's Degree (Data Science) from IIT Madras (online). She is a recipient of the CCRT scholarship from the government of India for Bharatanatyam, the Best Dancer award from Parthasarathy Swami Sabha and was also a runner-up in Sankara TV's *Natyaratna*, a dance reality show.





Rutuja Marne is a passionate young Bharatanatyam dancer, currently learning under the able guidance of Shri. Shijith Nambiar and Smt. Parvathy Menon. She has completed her Bachelor's in Performing Arts (Dance) from Nalanda Nrityakala Mahavidyalaya, Mumbai University and she has been awarded the Nalanda Academic Excellence award for three consecutive years.

Vaishnavi Srinivasan is a young multifaceted dancer who has been learning Bharatanatyam under the tutelage of Guru Smt. Roja Kannan for the past 12 years. She has been performing regularly in many *sabhas* and is now currently a dance faculty at the DAV group of schools. She is a visual communication graduate, passionate about her interests in performing arts.



Guest Artist



Narain, What a contrast when a baker, model and actor get rolled into one fine young man. The self-taught baker – never in his wildest dreams thought he will become an accomplished actor; remains ever-grateful for all the opportunities which spring-boarded him to new heights. Narain makes it a point to never be the same person in the roles he gets as he believes his audience should experience a new ride with every character he plays.





Balinese Dancers

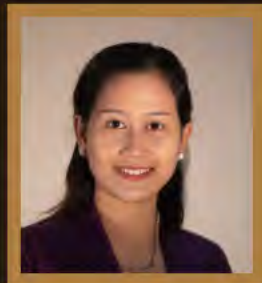
Guest Artistes from GEOK Ensemble, Bali, Indonesia



Ni Komang Ayu Pramesti started learning dance from her father at the tender age of four. She studied at a studio in Bali, completed her Bachelor's degree and Masters of Arts at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Denpasar in 2021. She has participated in art performances in Bali and other countries such as Japan and Singapore. She has worked on several traditional and contemporary dances and is now one of the

dancers at Geoks Singapadu, collaborating for the first time with Apsaras Arts Dance Company.

Ni Ketut Santi Sukma Melati has been pursuing dance since she was nine years old in several studios in Bali. She completed her Bachelor's and Masters of Arts degrees, majoring in Dance at the Indonesian Institute of the Art, Denpasar. Currently, she is the founder of Lintang Ayu Entertainment, while also working as a makeup artist for Balinese brides. She has worked as a choreographer at several events in Bali and

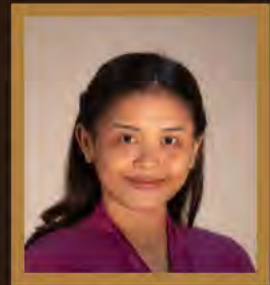


nationwide. She has travelled across the world for performances, including touring in several cities in India with Sampradaya Dance. She is also one of the Singapadu GEOKS dancers, collaborating with Apsaras Arts Dance company for the first time.



Ida Ayu Triana Titania Manuaba is a 24-year-old dancer from Bali. She completed her Masters in Dance from Indonesian Institute of the Art, Denpasar. She started dancing from the age of seven and is currently working as a dancer, choreographer and Balinese dance teacher. She has experience dancing in several festivals in Bali and several countries. She is the owner of Griawika Management and the head of the Gria Tetamian Dance Studio.

Ida Ayu Putri Widiastuti learned Balinese dance from the age of five. She has pursued and won several awards in the field of dance, representing her school. She has worked on creative dances for competitions and performances in several regions. Apart from Balinese dance, she has also been involved in contemporary cabaret dance. She completed her undergraduate education at the Indonesian Institute of The Art Denpasar in 2022



and became one of dancers with Geoks Singapadu. This is her first time collaborating with Apsaras Arts Dance Company.



I Gede Radiana Putra has been pursuing dance since he was four years old in several studios in Bali. He completed his Bachelor's and Masters of Arts degrees in Dance at ISI Yogyakarta. Currently, he is a teacher at an art college in Bali. He has worked as a choreographer at several international events. He has presented several international performances, including the Europalia event, *Pralaya* with Sampradaya dance.

He is also one of Geoks Singapadu's dancers, collaborating with Apsaras Art Dance Company for the first time.



I Nyoman Agus Hari Sudama Giri entered the world of dance when he was nine years old. In 2021, he completed his Bachelor's and Masters of Arts at the Indonesian Institute of the Art Denpasar, emerging as its best graduate that year. He has participated in performances in Bali and other countries such as South Korea and Singapore. He has choreographed both traditional and contemporary dances at the Bali Arts Festival.

among other events. Aside from being a dancer, he also has skills as a costume designer. He is now one of the dancers at Geoks Singapadu and is collaborating with the Apsaras Arts Dance company for the first time.

I Kadek Karismayana started learning dance at the age of eight by joining Sanggar Puri Saraswasti dance community and graduated from the Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI), Denpasar in 2017. He has performed in several domestic stages such as Jember, Purwakarta, Jakarta, Yogyakarta and abroad performances include New York, Taiwan, Daegu (South Korea), Malaysia, Singapore. He is now a dancer at Geoks Singapadu and is collaborating with Apsaras Art Dance Company for the first time.



I Gusti Ngurah Alit Satria Wibawa is a Balinese dancer who has been learning dance since he was 10 years old. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Dance from the Indonesian Art Institute Denpasar in 2021, where he also continued his Masters programme. In 2019, he went to Korea to perform for a university event. He is now actively participating in theatre and is one of the current dancers at Geoks Singapadu. This is the first time he is collaborating with Apsaras Arts Dance Company.

Musicians



Indian Flute:
Flute Navin
(India)



Sarod:
Pratik
Shrivastava
(India)



Percussions:
Ganapathi
Venkatasubramanian
(India)



Nattuvangam:
Gaayathri
Chachithanandar
(Singapore)



Erhu:
Ling Hock Siang
(Singapore Chinese
Orchestra)



Percussions:
Benjamin Boo
(Singapore Chinese
Orchestra)



Dizi:
Lee Jun Cheng
(Singapore Chinese
Orchestra)



Yangqin:
Ma Huan
(Singapore Chinese
Orchestra)



Guzheng:
Xu Hui
(Singapore Chinese
Orchestra)

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The Making Of *ARISI : RICE*

By V. K. Santosh Kumar

The topic of rice for a dance production may sound abstract. But to Apsaras Arts' artistic director Aravinth Kumarasamy, it is an amazing experience to unravel.

"There are so many nuggets of information and stories about rice and rice cultures," he said, "Dance is a language to tell stories. And *ARISI : Rice* allows us to tell so many stories about this grain of life."

In *ARISI : Rice*, Aravinth and his team explored the many cultural links that rice created across Asia, probing deep into the many alternatives and choices to make in their journey.

"Working on this production was an interesting learning journey, as the universe started to reveal a lot of details—legends, facts, folklore, traditions and more," said Aravinth.

"I had the good fortune of working with Dr Nanditha Krishna, a Chennai - based historian, environmentalist and writer, who shared many different facets of rice and rice culture. Her inputs helped me form the content structure for the story. My collaborators from Singapore, India and Indonesia

added their thoughts and details, which contributed to the stage script."

Using the techniques of dramaturgy, which is considered unique in the Indian traditional dance sphere, Aravinth and dramaturge Lim How Ngean brought together elements of choreography, music, set design and written text to tell the story.

ARISI : Rice has a segment that illustrates the origin of the rice grain as celebrated in Balinese legends and other interesting stories that talk about the cultivation of rice and rice cultures.

Aravinth also worked with Singapore filmmaker K. Rajagopal—a first in Apsaras' multi-disciplinary art making—to tell the stories of youth from South Indian farming communities leaving their rice fields to work in urban cities like Singapore.

"This raises thought-provoking questions on the sustainability of rice cultivation for our future generations," said Aravinth.

Inspired by his mentor Padma Subrahmaniyam's philosophy of "hear dance and see music", Aravinth used the music score as the cornerstone in visualising the production.

"Composer Rajkumar Bharathi created an inspiring music score," he said, "and music producer Sai Shrivani combined music elements from South and North India, Bali, China and Singapore to create a marvellous musical platform on which we have created the production."

In another first, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra will be performing for an Indian dance production. Leading principal soloists of key instruments such as the guzheng, yangqin, erhu, dizi and pipa breathe Chinese sounds into a music score based on Carnatic and Hindustani melodies.

"Apsaras' resident choreographer Mohanapriyan Thavarajah, with whom I've collaborated for over 10 years, has imagined the body movements of everyday farming life and stylised Bharatanatyam vocabularies to create the dance ensemble," said Aravinth.

"His working experience with Prof I Wayan Dibia from Bali also helped him create a cross-cultural collaborative choreography with an interplay of Indian and Balinese classical dances." "As the costume

designer, Mohanapriyan also injected depth into the visual aesthetics by inserting elements reflective of the rice cultures. Wong Chee Wai has interpreted our imaginations into a set design that will enhance the audience's experience."

This production is a treat for the senses: Magical live music performed by multi-genre musicians from India, Singapore and the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, path - breaking choreography with the two deeply-rooted classical dance styles of Bharatanatyam and Balinese dance, visually stunning costumes and creative set design. "Most importantly, the production will inspire the audience to ponder about rice and its sustainability for future generations," said Aravinth.

"Each segment is imagined and designed as a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. When they are all pieced together, it creates a visual picture, like a painting coming alive with each brush stroke."

ANNAM BAHU KURVITA

Let there be an abundance of rice

Dr. Nanditha Krishna

President, The C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Chennai

Green fields of rice stalks waving in the wind are beautiful memories of every Asian's childhood. Rice is sacred in India and Asia because it is the staple grain in these regions. It is so sacred that Indian children are taught '*annam na nindyat tad vritam*' which means "never abuse rice, that is the rule". Rice has been cultivated in India for nearly 6000 years. Pottery with carbonized images of rice grain and husk from the fourth millennium B.C.E. are among the earliest indications of the food in the region and there is evidence of its cultivation by 3000 B.C.E.

The Sanskrit word for raw rice is *vrihi* and boiled rice is *annam*. The goddess of rice is Annapoorna, whose name means "full of rice", and is often depicted as holding a bowl in one hand and a long ladle in another. She is the presiding Goddess of Kashi (Benares). Incidentally, the word for food is also *annam* and charitable feeding is called *annadhanam*.

There is no reference to rice in the *Rig Veda* but it appears by the period of the Atharva Veda, which means the population had already been moved eastwards into the Gangetic valley where rice cultivation prevailed. The sanctity of Kashi was due to the fact that Annapurna, the Goddess of Rice, was the presiding deity of the city.

Annadevata, the God of Rice, is the progenitor of immortality and sacrifice. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says that the Purusha, the Supreme Being, is made of rice (*annam*) and vital essences (*rasa*). The *Upanishad* go on to celebrate the greatness of rice, saying that all that is born, is born of rice, whatever exists on earth is born of rice, lives on rice and merges into rice. Rice is the first born among all beings, which is why it is called the medicine that relieves the body of all discomforts. Those who venerate rice as Brahman achieve the mystical union with Brahman. The *Upanishad* has several injunctions related to rice where it is regarded as equivalent to food and even Brahman Himself.

Apart from annam, there is one other word for raw rice in Sanskrit which is *akshata*. *Akshata* refers to the offering of raw rice grain and it is described in the *Shiva Purana*. In fact, *akshata* is used for every ritual symbolising auspiciousness, wealth and prosperity. The most frequent use of *akshata* is for a blessing when rice grains mixed with turmeric powder are sprinkled on the head of a young person.

Another form of offering rice is boiled rice mixed with jaggery or ghee (clarified butter) called *naivedhyam*. It is consumed in three portions, the first being fed to crows who are believed to represent the souls of the ancestors.

Navadhānya or the nine sacred grains that represent the nine heavenly bodies (seven planets plus Rahu and Ketu) are represented by rice, wheat, yellow gram, green gram, beans, white beans, sesame seeds, horse gram and black gram. During the ritual, the devas or gods are invoked and brought into the sacred pot of water.



The rice offered to the sacrificial fire (*homam*) is called *havis* and served to *Agni* (God of Fire) along with ghee and *samhit* (sacred twigs).

Kolam or ritual designs made on the floor in front of each home are made of rice flour which keeps away the evil eye and demons. Incidentally, it is also eaten by birds and insects which is another form of *annadhānam* or gifting of rice varieties.

A large sheaf of paddy (*nelkadhir*) is hung up outside the house to keep away the evil eye and evil demons.

In the southern states, the rice Goddess Annapurna is called Annalakshmi. As in Sanskrit, the Tamil word for boiled rice—*soru*—also means food, while the word for raw rice is *arisi*. Annalakshmi holds a small sheaf of rice in one hand while Dhanyalakshmi (goddess of grains and cereals, including rice) holds several sheaves in her hand. The Tamil word for rice, *arisi*, entered the Greek and Latin languages as *oryza*, whence the English word rice.

In the *Mahābhārata*, Krishna gives Princess Draupadi an *akshaya pātram* or bowl of plenty. It is repeated in the Tamil epic *Manimekalai* where a sage owns a similar bowl which later comes into the hands of *Manimekalai*.



Rice is an essential part of all Hindu *samskāras*. During pre-natal *samskāras*, such as *valaīkāppu* and *sīmantham*, rice grains mixed with ghee (clarified butter) is kept in a bowl before the pregnant woman, along with *kumkum* powder and sandal paste. Each married woman visitor applies the *kumkum* powder on the prospective mother's forehead and the sandal paste on the arms of the pregnant woman, and then sprinkles rice grains on her head, wishing her prosperity and an easy pregnancy. During the *sīmantham* or hair-parting ceremony, the parents of the pregnant woman distribute different kinds of rice (curd rice, tamarind rice, lime rice, etc.) to all the visitors.

Rice plays an important role in the childhood *samskāras*. During the *nāmakaranam*, the baby is placed on the lap of the father's sister who whispers the name into the baby's ear, while the father or the priest writes the name on a heap of paddy placed on a banana leaf.

The first solid food for a baby is called *annaprāsanam*, a combination of ghee and rice. The first offering is made to *Vāc*, the goddess of speech, to bless the baby.

The first boring of the ears performed by the goldsmith is called *karnavedham*, when the child is seated on the lap of his maternal uncle. After the ceremony, the goldsmith is given a bag of rice and yellow lentils.

The first haircut for the child is called *chādākaranam*. This ceremony is initiated by the father and completed by the barber. For his efforts, the barber is given a bag of rice, yellow lentils and the cloth used to wet the child's hair.

When a girl reaches puberty, a steamed rice cake *puttu*, is given to the girl.

When the child's education begins, the child is seated on the father's lap before a heap of raw paddy, placed on a banana leaf. Holding the child's first finger, the father first writes Om. Then he writes "Salutations to Ganesha" or "Salutations to Narayana". The priest is then given rice and lentils.

During the *Upanayanam* or thread ceremony, rice is used in several ways:

- The first is *kalaśa āvāhanam*, the establishment of the sacred pot on a bed of raw paddy and surrounded by eight other grains, the whole making up the *navadhānyam* or nine grains that represent the nine heavenly bodies. The gods are invoked by the *āvāhanam*, and the ancestors by the Nandi.
- Along with other young boys, the young novitiate is fed a *kumārabhojanam*, a brunch consisting of varieties of rice and sweets and no salt. This prepares him for the long and tough ceremonies to follow.

■ The highlight of the *upanayanam* is the *brahmopadeśam*, when the boy is taught the sacred *Gāyatri* mantra invoking the sun. All the persons present shower *akshata*—rice grains mixed with turmeric powder and blessed by the priest—on the novitiate.

■ The boy has now been initiated into the phase of studentship. He must leave home; he owns nothing except the clothes he wears, and he lives by begging for his food, to learn the quality of humility. When the rituals are finished, the novitiate goes to the women present and asks, three times, "*bhavati bhikshām dehi*", meaning "Lady, please give me food". The women who are attending the *upanayanam* bring along some rice, which they pour thrice into his bowl. This rice is known as the *bhiksharisi*, and must be cooked and fed to the novitiate by his mother.

During the wedding, nine kinds of grains (*navadhānyam*) must be raised in nine mud pots. This is called *pāligai* valarthal in Tamil. One of the grains is naturally rice. Nearly all communities commence the wedding with the *kalaām* placed on a base of sesame, rice, black gram, wheat grains and paddy on a banana leaf. Rice, coconut, flowers and turmeric are given by the bridegroom's sister to the bride, who ties it to the *pullu* of her sari. This signifies fertility and prosperity.

The ceremony of the seven sacred steps (*saptapadi*) involves the pouring of cooked rice or *havis* into the fire, followed by the *nel pori* (fried puffed paddy), when the bride's brother pours fried rice over the bride and groom's hands, after which it is poured into the fire.

Several castes and communities have different ways of celebrating rice during the wedding rituals. Generally, the mangal sutra or *thāli*, the marriage pendant, is kept on a pile of rice on a banana leaf. After the tying of the marriage pendant, the elders take the rice in their hands and pour it thrice over the young couple. While the mangal sutra is being tied, the entire audience showers *akshata* on the young couple as a blessing.

During death, people pour half-cooked saltless rice (*vākarisi*) on the mouth of the corpse. By this act, the family gives its last offering. The half-cooked and saltless rice is intended to discourage the soul from lingering on earth. From the first to the tenth day, *pindam*, a large ball of boiled rice, sesame seeds and water, is thrown into the river or sea or tank to feed the fish and, thereby, satisfy the soul. The rice assuages hunger and the sesame seed water quenches thirst, as the soul—the *sukshma sharira*—wanders around, waiting to move to another world. On day 10, the rice is mixed with raw banana and drumstick or certain greens and thrown into the water. Day 11

starts with the *kalasa pooja* to Rudra or Shiva. A male calf, representing Nandi, the vehicle of Rudra, is fed rice. On the twelfth day, fifteen Brahmanas are given a gift of rice to enable the soul to pass through the sixteen stages on the path to the home of the ancestors. On day 13 (day 16 in some families), a *kalāsam* is set up on rice and worship is offered to the nine sacred grains (*dhānya*), which include rice and represent the nine planets and Rahu and Ketu. The *dhānam* or gift consists of the nine sacred grains.

Rice in festivals

Different festivals use rice in different ways. The *naivedhyam* or offering of food always consists of rice, the *kalāśm* is always placed on paddy and rice dishes and rice-based sweets are a must. However, there are certain special days in connection with the growing harvesting and celebration of rice. They are:

- *Patinettāmpurukku* – The eighteenth day of the month of Adi (Āshāda) is celebrated as the day of planting the new seed. Four varieties of mixed rice and one sweet rice dish are prepared for this day.
- *Varalakshmi vritam* – a *kalāśm* is filled with rice, coins, a box of *kumkum* powder, turmeric, a small mirror, black beads, green

glass bangles, betel leaves, areca nuts and turmeric, with five mango leaves and a coconut placed on the mouth of the *kalāśam*. Lakshmi's face is drawn on the *kalāśm*. The *kalāśam* is placed on a heap of rice spread over a plantain leaf. The *pooja* is performed with *akshata* and flowers.

- *Āyudha pooja* or *Saraswathi pooja* is a day when the tools of one's trade are ritually worshipped. Puffed rice flakes, jaggery and Bengal gram are offered to the Goddess Saraswathi and then shared by family and friends.

Pongal is an important festival, the harvest festival of Tamilnadu when the fresh rice crop is harvested. It coincides with Makara Sankranti, when the sun enters Capricorn and the northern hemisphere. A clay or bronze vessel is decorated with sandal paste and dots of wet *kumkum* powder. A bunch of ginger and another of turmeric with the leaves are tied around the mouth of the vessel. Milk, water, green gram, jaggery and freshly harvested rice are boiled in the vessel, permitting the mixture to overflow. As it overflows, everyone shouts "*pongalo-pongalo*", meaning "the pot boileth over". The overflow signifies prosperity, brought about by the new rice harvest. The *pongalo* is offered as *naivedhyam* to Surya, the sun, and then eaten by the family.

The day after is *māttu Pongal*, when the excess rice cooked for the *naivedhyam* is mixed with salt, curd and ginger and made into little balls, some coloured red with *kumkum* powder and some yellow with turmeric powder. Along with some sweet *pongal* and pieces of sugar cane, the rice balls are offered to birds, cows and calves.

Ūrani pongal is celebrated in honour of the village's guardian deities. The first rice of the new harvest is ritually offered to the Sun God and cooked in different ways to symbolise plenty. Rice is collected from every family in the village and cooked in the temple as *pongal*, a portion of which is offered to the gods and goddesses and then distributed as *prasādam* to those who contributed to the festival. After the ritual, the rice is given away to the officiating priest or fed to the cattle. *Ūrani pongal* is a thanksgiving ceremony to the local god and goddesses. The collective cooking of rice in the village symbolizes the increase in and sharing of prosperity.

In Kerala, *pongal* is known as *pongāla*. The most famous *pongāla* celebration takes place at the Āttukal Bhagavati Temple at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, where around 3.5 million people participate. The festival is considered to be the biggest festival in the city and has entered the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest congregation of women in the world, drawing

over 2.5 million women on a single day in March to perform the *pongāla* ritual. Rice, coconut and jaggery and clay pots for cooking are brought by women participating in the *pongāla*. They set up makeshift stoves using bricks and firewood around the temple. They cook the mixture in the earthen pots and offer it to the goddess to seek divine blessings. The chief priest of the temple lights the main hearth from the divine fire inside the sanctum sanctorum. This fire is passed from one stove to the next. The Goddess of the temple is believed to be Kannagi, the heroine of the epic *Silappadigāram*. During ancient times, the entire population from nearby villages would stay there for several days, when social cooking used to take place by the women. Such social cooking strengthened the bonds between the villages. This custom continues in the form of the *pongāla* offering. Although the *pongāla* festival is celebrated on a large scale mainly in the Attukal Temple, other temples where it is celebrated are the Mankulam Parashakthi Devi Temple, Vellayani Devi Temple, Kovilvila Bhagavati Temple, Karikkakom Devi Temple, Puthiyakavu Bhagavathi Temple, Kanakathur Sree Kurumbakkavu Temple, Pulpally Seetha Devi Temple, Palakunnu Bhagavathi Temple, Mulluthara Devi Temple, Chakkulathukavu Temple, Anikkattil Ammakshethram and Thaloor Bhagavathy Kshetram in Kerala.

Apart from Annapurna and Annalakshmi, Ponni, a local variety of rice, is also deified as a goddess. Ponni Amman is worshipped once a year during the month of Ādi (Āshāda), when the annual festival of Ūrani Pongal is celebrated. However, some villages celebrate it in the month of Chithirai. Every family in the region comes to the temple for the ritual cooking of rice. On this occasion, all the villagers bring boiled rice, sweet cakes of rice and jaggery, flour, sugar and coconut in large quantities, and spread them all on large plantain leaves placed on the ground before the image. The villagers regard the festival as a community rice cooking of the village. According to the villagers, Ponni is an incarnation of Bhooma devi, or Mother Earth. Her image is generally a sculpted head resting on the earth, which represents her body.

The rituals connected with rice are endless and cover every region of India. I have mainly covered the south, where I live.

To end, let us remember the divine admonition:

Annam bahu kurvita. Tadvritam.

Let there be an abundance of food.
That is a discipline.

and

*Anne date nareṇṇa prāṇā dattā
bhavantyuta
Prānadāṇāddhi paramam na
dānamiha vidyate*

The one who gives rice gives life
itself.

What can be a greater gift than the
gift of life itself?

Source:

1. 'The Art of Rice – Spirit and Sustenance in Asia', Roy W. Hamilton, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, 2003, pp.271-273.

2. 'Annam Bahu Kurvita', Jitendra Bajaj; Mandayam Doddamane Srinivas, Centre for Policy Studies Madras, 1996.



A woman in a traditional Balinese dance costume, featuring a white and blue outfit with gold jewelry and a large, ornate gold headdress. She is performing on stage with her arms raised in a specific pose. The background is dark with blue lighting.

Credits

Creative Team

Concept & Artistic Direction:
Aravinth Kumarasamy (Singapore)

Choreography (Bharatanatyam):
Mohanapriyan Thavarajah
(Singapore)

Choreography (Balinese):
Prof I Wayan Dibia (Indonesia)

Choreography Mentor:
Priyadarsini Govind (India)

Music composition:
Dr Rajkumar Bharathi (India)

*Sound design, Music Arrangement
and Producer:*
Sai Shravanam (India)

Dramaturge:
Lim How Ngean (Australia)

Film director:
K Rajagopal (Singapore)

Costume design:
Mohanapriyan Thavarajah
(Singapore)

Set design:
Wong Chee Wai (Singapore)

Light design:
Gyandev Singh (India)

Musicians – Live Music

Indian Flute:

Flute Navin (India)

Sarod: Pratik Shrivastava (India)

Percussions:

Ganapathi Venkatasubramanian
(India)

Nattuvangam:

Gaayathri Chachithanandar
(Singapore)

Erhu:

Ling Hock Siang (SCO)

Percussions:

Benjamin Boo (SCO)

Dizi:

Lee Jun Cheng (SCO)

Yangqin:

Ma Huan (SCO)

Guzheng:

Xu Hui (SCO)

Musicians – Pre-Recorded Music

Vocals:

G Shrikanth (India)

Chitra Poornima Sathish (Singapore)

Sathya Prakash (India)

Meenakshi Ilayarajah (India)

Rahul Raveendran (India)

Savitha Sai (India)

Sarod:

Pratik Shrivatsava (India)

Flute:

Flute Navin (India)

Percussions:

Ganapathi Venkatasubramanian
(India)

Konnakol:

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Benjamin Boo (SCO)

Dizi:

Lee Jun Cheng (SCO)

Yangqin:

Ma Huan (SCO)

Guzheng:

Xu Hui (SCO)

Wardrobe, Hairstyling and Make-up

Selvy Radhakrishnan

Nagaletchimi Balasupramaniam

Sankari Elavalahan

Soniya Selvaraju

Project Team

Project Administration:
Sankari Elavalahan & Vijaya
Nadesan

Artiste Management:
Rajyasri Muralidhar

*Production Manager &
Stage Manager:*
Charlinda Pereira

Assistant Stage Manager:
Siti Safwanah Binte Ismail

Rehearsal Master:
Gayathri Chachithanandar

Technical Team

Assistant Sound Engineer:
R. Kamakshysundaram

Visual Media Manager:
Naveen Selvanayagam

Rehearsal Audio Manager:
Praveen Selvanayagam

Surtitles:
Madhumitha Abhirami
Kumarasamy

Technical Assistant:
Abdul Alim Bin Aini

Technical Assistant:
Darren Lee

Technical Assistant:
Abdul Asim Fami

Technical Assistant:
Nur Fazilah Bte Mohd Fazil

Profiles in the Documentary Film

Hariharan Natarajan
Kabilan Murugaiyan
H. Rajeswari (*Hariharan's wife*)
Nadarajan (*Hariharan's father*)
Elavarasi (*Hariharan's mother*)
S.Murugaiyan (*Kabilan's father*)
P.Poonkodi (*Kabilan's mother*)
Ramamoorthi Chinnaiyah
(*co-worker*)
Rajesh Ramu (*co-worker*)

Crew for the Documentary Film

Director of Photography
Shaun Neo Shuo Jun

Senior Grip
Ong Jun Kai

Junior Grip
Muhammad Zaki Bin Zaini

Sound Recordist
Mohammad Noor
Rasyid bin Noordin

Post Production for the Documentary Film

G Saravanan
N Sachithanandam
Sight Sound Studios

Special Thanks for the Documentary Film

GIE Foundation Pte Ltd
Westlite Juniper
Rajendran Neethipandi

Costumes By

Athreya Blouses (India)
SS Tailors (India)

Photography

Lijesh Karunakaran
Aneesh Jose
Manoj Chandran

Videography

Bethmage Kasun Wageesha
Thilina Madushan Soorige
Mihindu Panangalage

Promo Videos

Lijesh Karunakaran

Promo Video Editing

Naveen Selvanayagam

Promo Materials and House Program Design

Ravindu Thimantha





75
Azadi Ka
Amrit Mahotsav



Celebrating 75 years
of India's Independence

High Commission of India, Singapore
is proud to be part of Esplanade's **KALAA UTSAVAM 2022**



ADVOCATING
and PIONEERING
an
EXCLUSIVE
CONCEPT of
FINEST TEAS
made in
SINGAPORE

FORT SANCTUARY
presents

*painting
with fire*

RHAPSODY
346.2208

*an indulgence
in tea
leaves
performing*

*magic
of storytelling*



The legendary Wuyi rock-essence teas, crafted using leaves harvested from prime regions in Wuyishan, China, are symbols of luxury and prestige.

In 2014, Fort Sanctuary invested in a series of bold experiments crafting and aging the prestigious tea in Singapore.

Seven years later, in late 2021, we were excited to release some of the teas from our experiments in 2014. Fort Sanctuary 346 is one of our works based on the leaves released.

Rhapsody 346.2208 is a tea demonstration on deciphering the enigmatic teas.

Our invention of precise firing, conceptualized as "painting with fire", awakens the tea to perform to the tune of fire.

Here, the beautifully aged 346 depicts a human narrative of the sight of date palm trees in a desert while presenting an imaginative space for open-ended interpretations.

This special tea performance comes with perfect brews of the tea at Fort Sanctuary@Esplanade.

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grow

#mydurian

Help bear more fruit in the arts

**Join us in bearing more "fruits" in the arts
and help us grow #mydurian so that we can:**

- Continue to keep over 70% of our programmes free.
- Bring the arts to people of different backgrounds and different abilities.

Adopt one of the 7,139 sunshades, claddings or "spikes" that have earned us our "durian" nickname! A donation of \$98 allows you to virtually personalise one of these "spikes" or gather your friends and family to collectively personalise a cluster of "spikes".

These "spikes" protect us from the heat and harsh glare, while letting the beautiful glow of sunlight into our building. Like these "spikes", your donation helps us continue being an arts centre for everyone while supporting our efforts to grow new fruits in the arts for our future!

Find out more about
what your donation
helps us do here.



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Esplanade is a charity and not-for-profit organisation.
Help us bring the joy and inspiration of the arts to
different communities, including the underserved.

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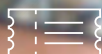
Esplanade gives our heartfelt thanks
to our Esplanade partner, arts benefactor, donors and sponsors for believing in our vision to be a performing arts centre for everyone. They made all these possible!^



2,976

activities took place at Esplanade.

Ticketed



821

Non-Ticketed



1,891

2,062,549



People attended our activities at the centre.

Ticketed

72,756

Non-Ticketed

379,989

We believe that everyone should be able to experience the joy of the arts, including children, youth, seniors, migrant workers and individuals with special needs. Our community engagement activities bring the arts to those in need.



465

Activities

7,522

Participants

*Figures for Esplanade's activities from Apr 2021 to Mar 2022.

Your contribution* will make a difference.



On behalf of the communities we serve, thank you!
Find out how you too can make a difference through the arts at Esplanade.

Donate at www.esplanade.com/donate

To find out more, email us at donations@esplanade.com or speak with us at 6828 8321.

Esplanade is a charity and an Institution of a Public Character. Your donation to us is matched dollar-for-dollar by the Cultural Matching Fund. Please note that the prevailing tax exemption scheme for donors and sponsors of Arts-Related Businesses will depend on the qualifying criteria imposed by IRAS.

With Gratitude

Esplanade–Theatres on the Bay is a charity, a not-for-profit organisation and Singapore’s national performing arts centre. We seek to entertain, engage, educate and inspire through the arts.

In 2022, we mark our 20th anniversary of being an arts centre for everyone. We thank everyone who has been a part of our journey. You have helped us bring joy, inspiration and positive impact to Singaporeans from all walks of life.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes especially to our Donors and Sponsors, for their steadfast belief in our mission and for generously supporting us.

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Join us in sharing the joy of the arts and help us reach more communities in need.

We believe that an experience with the arts is special and that with your generous support, more people will get a chance to enjoy the arts. Join us in sharing the joy of the arts and help us reach more communities in need.



The Esplanade Co Ltd is funded by Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and our Community Programmes are supported by Tote Board Family, comprising Tote Board, Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club.



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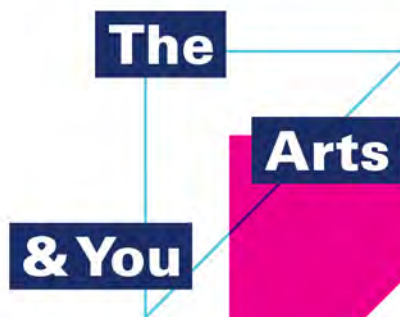


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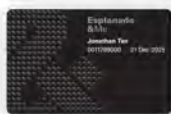
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you spend \$500



Free upgrade when
you spend \$1000



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Programme feedback



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Thank you.





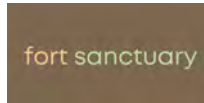
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