

INDIA ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company

Godan Nambudiripad

Narrator

Dan Rein

Interviewer



**MINNESOTA HISTORICAL
& CULTURAL GRANTS**

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company

The India Association of Minnesota (IAM) was formed in 1973 as the India Club of Minnesota. IAM is a not-for-profit organization that represents people with an interest in the culture and heritage of India to **build** a sense of cohesiveness within this community, **represent** the community to the population at large, and **serve** as the focal point for advancing the educational, cultural, and charitable interests of the community. The organization is statewide, though the largest numbers of its members live within the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area.

“Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company” is the seventh project in a series conducted over the past 17 years between the India Association of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society. This project has three goals:

- 1) Create an oral history of Ragamala Dance Company.
- 2) To preserve over 30 years of dance performances by Raneer Ramaswamy and the Ragamala Dance Company.

Acclaimed as one of the Indian Diaspora’s leading dance ensembles, Minneapolis-based Ragamala Dance seamlessly carries the Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam into the 21st century. Artistic Directors Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy retain roots in the philosophy, spirituality, mysticism, and myth of their South Indian heritage, while using their art form as a rich language through which to speak with their own voices as contemporary American choreographers. They see the classical form as a dynamic, living tradition with vast potential to move beyond the personal and spark a global conversation.

Ragamala has a unique & compelling story, with deep local roots & broad international branches. Yet the origins & early history of the company have never been formally documented. As Ragamala celebrates its 20th anniversary, it is vital to document its history & prominent place in the life of the Indian community, the dance community, & the broad fabric of people & cultures that make up our state of MN. Thus a key goal of the project is to digitize video recordings of the early years of Ragamala’s productions (1991-2002), which are currently stored in antiquated analog formats that are in danger of being lost as the technology becomes obsolete and to preserve them at the Minnesota History Center for posterity. This will enable all Minnesotans, not just people of Indian origin, to reap the benefits of the very highest quality of Indian classical dance presented in Minnesota over the years, into the future generations. The archive will also serve as a resource for historians and scholars of Indian music, history and culture in MN.

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The Interview

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Narrator

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GN: I am Godan Nambudiripad. I am a resident-resident of Burnsville since 1981 and the question posed to me was, “How did I get involved in... with Ragamala?” What happened is in 1981 or ’82, probably ’82, and Raneer became our neighbor. She had come here for lunch and saw a house on the way and her husband at that time was working in Burnsville, so she ended up buying the house, and so, we were neighbors since then and at that time she was getting into the dance and showing the dance to the public. I was involved in many of those programs, helping her in-in whatever way I can, everything, including probably setting up lights at times and all that. In 1983 I bought a video machine and I was probably one of the first videographer for her too. I remember seeing her first performance that I saw was at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, if I remember right. So, and in ’92, she started Ragamala along with David Whetstone. I was not in the Board but I was aware what was going on since she was our neighbor and friend. And ’95 or so, she invited me into the Board and that is how I got involved directly with Ragamala.

DR: In those early years, you were just helping out as a friend. She was ... she hadn’t formed Ragamala yet, and she was out there doing dancing and it sounds like she roped you in to do a number of things, as a friend.

GN: Yes, there are two things here. One is that, you know, she-she is a very friendly person. She had many friends, but I was neighbor, close by, so it was easier, handier or at the same time I had grown up in a family where there was a dance company (yeah) my grandfather had and so have seen dance being taught and performed, so this gave me joy, or, you know, I felt very much at home with dance and music, so I was interested in that when Raneer asked me, that was that was something in my background or that probably prompted me to accept it without questioning. One other part of the whole story is that, in-in those days the Indian population was very small here. Most of us had come probably in 1970s and 80s, so I felt that Indians are establishing a community here in America, felt like the Pilgrim Fathers who came over many centuries before to establish a community here. So, in my own mind I was thinking “What can I do to make this country

a better place for everybody, especially for the Indian immigrants? So, I was involved in the India Association and School of India for Languages and Culture, and so I thought this is another opportunity to bring such a rich ancient dance form to enrich the cultural (pause) you know, life of this country. So that also, you know, I...was a conscious effort on my part to make that thing, to help that thing happen.

DR: Yes you've helped to celebrate your culture and you know what ... how big the population was at that time ... of the Indians?

GN: The Indian population in the 1980s was probably three thousand or something like that.

DR: So pretty sparse?

GN: Very- very small community, you know, from that perspective.

DR: So then (pause) you-you saw the dance and-and your involvement in these activities, as ...well actually (rich) enriching the American, you know, cultural landscape?

GN: It's both, in a sense that if Indians are going to be here, and we were thinking it will be there, so it helps that Indian community as well as the larger American community and you can see that, you know, the last Miss America had a Bollywood dance as her performance [laughter]. So you can see how, along with people culture also immigrates, if you want to put it that way.

DR: Yes.

GN: And you know, the previous immigrants had... have brought their own art and made this... the cultural landscape of this country very rich. So this is... I felt like we are adding something on, along with that.

DR: Hm...Hm...

GN: And the other thing that I always thought and this maybe for a future because I can look at this thing historically, if you look at how the-the interplay of the Africans sensibilities and the West-the Western Europe sensibilities brought together, created Jazz. So I thought hey, you know, this maybe, for the future generations to create something even different, greater – all that.

DR: Hm...Hm...

GN: So, those are - those are all the thoughts that went through my mind as I was getting involved with Ragamala.

DR: Ok.

DR: And then [clearing throat] when you became a Board member, so how did things change then? Your-your involvement obviously changed.

GN: You know, I think, you know, if you, the... kind of a...from a historical perspective, I will go over the overall history that I can recollect after so many years.

DR: Hm... Hm...

GN: If I take the history before '92, it was Ranee finding her place and testing the waters, if want to call it, trying to see whether this kind of an art, which she was very - very much (in) interested in, whether there is an audience here, whether, you know, how will it fit with the - with the landscape here and all that. And by '92, it was pretty well established. She had pretty good, reasonable audience and all that, so that probably made you know, made for establishing a-a theater company, along with David Whetstone, at that time, he was into music and Ranee was into dance - that's why the original name, official name was Ragamala Music and Dance Theater. Music was David Whetstone, dance was Ranee. So, then around '95 or so, I joined and the Board, even at that time we were still establishing and refining the by-laws, you know, making sure these are legally and artistically correct, all those kinds of things. So, that's the area that we worked quite a bit in the early years. I know the dance was going on its own, in a sense that Ranee was, with the help of others, writing for grants and getting money and all that. We were helping little bit on that too, but it was mostly on the administrative side of setting up. That - that time I can say that's say from '95 to say '98 or so was, kind of the growing (way) (a) time and the Board was very informal, if you would say. The... so, that got us into some trouble in around '98- around that time. We don't know exactly when it started either. One of the employees kept some of the information, financial information, not that public and our auditing procedures and all the administrative procedures were not still in, probably where it should have been. So if you want to call it, it was an amateur Board, if you want to call it. We would get together at Ranee's house or some place, have some food and talk about things, and talk about the issues, talk about what we can do... all that. But, some of those paperwork and accounting was probably not as - as thoroughly looked into at that time. '98 we found that there were lot of taxes that we haven't paid and many other things and that particular employee had left, and it was for us to dig and find out where things were. That was not a very happy time. There was even talk about, one of the Board members, the more analytical type of people, looking at this said, "you know this maybe the best time to do is to close the company". How could even be - be out of this mess. But, I think the artist and the artist won over the analytical people. I think Ranee's passion and our support to, no matter what, this should work, this should thrive, Ragamala should thrive. That...there was some very hard discussions as to how to make that happen and develop a plan, so we had some kind of a plan, but even then the company was so much in debt, if you want to call it, money that we hadn't paid Uncle Sam. So, it took a while to setup a - a plan to get out of that mess, if you will. And almost

... and some of those analytical people thought this probably, because they thought probably wouldn't happen, they left too [laughter]. But the artists thrived.

DR: Well, there is this something you said for the passion of the artists because it... the art has to thrive.

GN: Art has to thrive, yes, and so this is a perfect example of that. I didn't think about it at that time, but looking back, gee, we were, if you want to call it, if you look at analytically all the things, you would say that we were foolish to do this [laughter]. This is a big hole; we cannot ever get out of this. And we were begging for money. I had gone with Ranee to people and see if we can raise some money to you know, to keep Uncle Sam happy [chuckles]. But, I think she got some good advice, not just, not from me, [chuckles] but others and managed to get out of that mess, had a plan, talked to the IRS, they gave us some time. We took a loan, I was one of the co-signees of the loan and even at that time I wasn't sure how we will repay, but we thought we would somehow have to repay. At the same time the company was growing and there were more money coming in from foundations, because artistically they were doing a great job, and the community, Bush Foundation, I think was one of the major ones, and other people were recognizing that here is some ...a-a-a community wealth that has to be supported. That's the only way I can look at it, because ... yes, you can write good grant proposals, but unless you deliver on it the community will not support in the end. And just after these events, we had a ... one day Board retreat. I think Martha Johnson led that and there we really looked at ourselves, at Ragamala, the Board members, our passion. How do we take this company, which is still very small to the next level, and there was a roadmap made. So in a sense you can say that this particular event was a wake-up call and from then onwards the path was trying to make the Board more professional, have a proper plan, and execute against those plans. And then we setup auditors, we setup proper accounting procedures, on and on what should have been done at the first place, but you know, we were more involved in the art to start with.

DR: Well, it starts somewhere. It never starts perfect, so....

GN: Yeah, and you know, somehow or the other, I think the community support, Ranee's passion, all those things put together made the company, Ragamala, thrive. Otherwise they would be gone [laughter]. If it were not for Ranee's passion, I don't...I think it would have probably yeah...

DR: Uh...huh

GN: Gone by that time.

DR: Yeah, yeah.

DR: Here you bring up a good point; you know the community now... How have the audiences changes over the years?

GN: You know, the Indian community at that time was very small and, you can say, if you look at when you have a very small community and also a ... something like (classical) ... this is Bharatanatyam I didn't even talk about before [laughter]... this is Ranee's form of dance, particular type of dance, is you know, that the-the following for something like that, the people who appreciate classical dance like that is very small part of the community. You know, it's like classical music here, certainly a small percentage of the people who actually enjoy and support that. It's not one of those popular dance forms. So, to start with, the, you know, first few times, the community came together to support, quite a few times and quite often the performances were on community events or [chuckles] you can say we didn't have a choice but to watch it, but they enjoyed it. But on the ... at the same time Ranee was trying to communicate to the larger audience and she was very successful in doing that – project like Canticles of May-Mary and I think, (uh) what's that the Minnesota Poet ...

DR: Robert Bly.

GN: Robert Bly's poetry. Things like that. So that, even, you know, this is a dance form, this is a ... not just a dance ... actually an *abhinaya* form, which is dance and acting together, along with music and you can interpret, you can interpret any poetry, any story, any-any of those things through this type of dance or this type of art form. So she showed that and that opened I think the eye of many others, the larger community. Hey, here's something that is an interpretation by a different, you know probably people in a different dress, but something that they can relate to. So, to some extent I think Ranee found the type of things – you know, there are two parts to this dance, if you want to call it, there is a pure, what you call, orthodoxical dance form which typically Bharatanatyam is a... performed by one person, showing different aspects of that art. But that gets old very quickly to a larger audience, so she devised using this particular dance form to tell stories – instead of one person, you can have multiple people in the ... on the stage. You know, in India, in a sense dance is a kind of part of life. It's not necessarily something that you show on a stage. I think most art form, music, everything started like that, it's an individual performance or a small group performance. But now the way we-we perform it or (stage) you know present it is in a box called theater, on a stage, [laughter] and-and to an audience which is not used to this form. So, you know, but the art itself, Bharatanatyam itself, when is-has broad enough scope, and Ranee was able to- to-to-to find those aspects of this art which can be transformed into a stagecraft, in a sense [chuckles]. So, it's not a...the (theatre) you know, it's not just Ragamala itself changing, but it's changing the presentation and presentation techniques for ... to fit the-the theater , box in the theater, and you know which is really hard in-in a sense. I will give you some examples. The

Western Theater, the ballet or whatever the dance part of it is more about movement and expressing ideas through movement, expressing expressions through movement, but in Bharatanatyam it is much more by *abhinaya*, or acting along with dance and music. The ... so, when you have a ballet theater, you can have a lighting that is completely different from the needs of a Bharatanatyam dancer. Most ... in a few places I remember going and we're setting up that this Bharatanatyam dancing – dancer is showing *abhinaya* but all the lights are from top and the *abhinaya* does not come up, so we had - we didn't have any foot lights [laughter]. So-so we had bought a few foot lights, so that when we - when Ragamala performs they can put the clip on 100 watt bulbs [laughter]. You know so-so you need to do some innovation to bring this fully... present it properly. Ranees was saying the other day there was a performance in a small theater of 120 people and the reception that they got for Aparna's performance was completely different from what would have happened, what had happened when they perform in a 1000 seat theater. You know 1000 (theater) ... the-the person in the back cannot really see, appreciate all the *abhinaya*, all the acting that goes and all the body... all the graces, the body movement, as much as you could do that in a small intimate theater. So, anyway, that's a - that's a - a constant struggle that is happening and I think Ranees has ... Ranees knows that and Ragamala knows that and Ragamala knows how you can be successful in presenting this to a larger audience in a stage in the box.

DR: Right, continual adaption to make things work it sounds like.

GN: Yeah. Adaption to the particular stage, particular venue, particular audience, so all those things, so and I think Ragamala's success has been that - that adaptation without losing the authenticity of the-art.

DR: The original art form?

GN: Yeah. Yeah, the integrity of that art, keeping the integrity, yet adapting to the new environs...

DR: Hm...Hm...

GN: Just like, I think, we've all learnt how to live in Minnesota, when you came from India [laughter]. You have to adapt.

DR: That's right [chuckles]. No choice.

GN: No choice. I mean, even, you know, I have to say that even in India things are changing what was in small theaters and small audiences, now being shown in large theaters like here, so there also they are finding that - that you need to adapt. You need to evolve. You have to, you know, to do something different.

DR: Yeah.

DR: How've you seen the impact of the dance and its popularity – how have you seen it impact audiences in the community?

GN: I don't know how, you know, whether I am a good judge of that, but if you want to look at the-the people that I know who support Raneer, and the audience that I see when when I go to her performance and looking at the-the venues she has been asked to perform, looking at the type of commissioning that ,you know, that she is getting from, all that and along with, you know, that shows there is a public acceptance, at least in the, you know, in a small you know, probably small population of percentage of the population, but still for the people who are interested in art there is an appreciation of it. She has done workshops in schools and all that, to make people familiar with it from an early age, which is I think is very good. You know, kind of on the side, there is a School of India Languages and Culture, there is one-one or two Caucasian kids who had come and joined there because they were...they had seen Bollywood dances in movies and intrigued by the culture, and these kids wanted to learn more about India and Indian culture. So, art has that bridging ability. Art has the language which breaks certain barriers and probably all, you know, you can see that in couple of instances in the (even) in the whole the-the-the largest stage of United States, in a couple of a-a instances. One is Raneer has been, is now member of the Arts Council of United States appointed by President Obama, and like I said before, the Miss USA contestant won along with a Bollywood dance. So, it's a ... you know, it (is) becoming more mainline, if you want to call it, or more people are appreciating it ...

DR: More non-Indians as well.

GN: More non-Indians, yeah more people with not necessarily Indian background.

DR: But they see the importance of the dance form and the beauty of the art.

GN: The beauty of that art and if you look at the you know two thousand... year 2010, three years ago, I traveled with Raneer and her troupe to Kerala and that was an eye-opener for me, in the sense how that worked. First of all there were seven dancers, Raneer, her two daughters, and the other-other four were not of Indian origin. They had no connection to India [chuckles]. Tamara Nadel, Amanda Dlouhy, [inaudible] and a couple of other people. They were they were attracted by this dance and joined and they were very good dancers and I remember some comments that I heard while I was there, because after the show usually the organizers or somebody comes and gives some comments. And at the last venue, in Thrissur, the person who commented was the head of that organization who sponsored the show there, but she herself is a trained dancer, along with other things, you know, an educator and said you can... and I also had some professional dancers with me that had done Kathakali dance for forty years, said they were amazed at the amount of effort these dancers have put into their dance – I am talking about Ragamala, and so, one

of the things I noticed along - along the tour is that, when two or three people were on the stage, the people who were not on the stage, was on the sidelines looking at what they were doing and trying to see how they can improve each movement. So the eight days that I was ... eight performances they did, all the seven ones at least, they were each time looking at how they improve. So I think that, you know, the Ragamala has a - has a- has a culture of improvement, making it perfect, perfectionism, and that I think is appreciated by the audience, and you know any art performed with that amount of care, that amount of insistence on performance, almost anybody can appreciate, even if you don't know much about art [laughter], at least my that's my [laughs] that's my take on art.

DR: Uh huh. Sure.

GN: So, I think, that is you know being shown and that's actually Ragamala's is a good example of that I think.

DR: Yeah. Now...

GN: I don't know, did I answer your question?

DR: Yeah.

GN: It is not a straight answer to that question, but...

DR: Sometimes there aren't straight answers. Yeah.

GN: [Laughter] that gave me an idea about what areas I can talk.

DR: You know, yeah it-it talked about the impact that the dance has and how, you know, what we have talked about that ... but I am curious now ...

DR: How have you seen the - the dance school, because you briefly mentioned, you know, her going on doing workshops, but she also does the dance school...

GN: Hm...Hm...

DR: As well as a part of Ragamala as well? How have you seen that grow and change over the years?

GN: I don't know I am not that close to the school. But I have known Raneer and you know, and I have been to their venue quite a few times. One other thing, because of all the travel, you know, there are people who, other dance-dance companies where teaching is the more important part of their - their existence, if you want call it.

DR: Hm...Hm...

GN: But Ranees is a creative person and her insistence was more on creating new shows and showing that.

DR: Hm...Hm...

GN: So, I am not ... and the other part of it is that she is very ... Ragamala is known for very strict -very strict adherence to traditional you know, movements and everything a-and the whole art. So it's not easy for lot of people to adhere to that. So I think that Ragamala has not really tried to grow as a school ... tried to teach hundreds of students, but take only a few and teach them well.

DR: Hm...Hm...

GN: That's what I, from an outside, without really getting into a whole lot of details, that's what I ... you know, that's what I have (s) – felt, was happening.

DR: Hm...Hm...

DR: Sure, and [pause] so what do you see, is some of Ragamala's major successes was the traveling to India, in Kerala, a part of that?

GN: Well I can ... let me tell you a couple-couple of instances in the comments that I got, if I can call it that way. One is the organizer, there is a Soorya Festival, which is a ... in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala and that one person, Krishnamoorthy, (Soorya Krish)... called, he is called Soorya Krishnamoorthy. That's not his real name, but he has been supporting artists for many-many years and - and he takes ... even though as a trained engineer – he was working as an engineer, but art was his passion, and it is one of the most prestigious place, because (eve) ... you know that the, even the great ... the best dancers would like to present things to the venues that he organizes in the-in the state, and they have some of the largest audiences in India too, and he first said that, you know he is a very busy person, they have that festival going 365 days a year, ok? Not all of them dance, but many other art form also. So he said I may not be there for all the time because I may have ... but he came and he stayed for the whole-whole performance. Not only that, he-he almost immediately said I want Aparna to come and dance here – alone, and not only that, there is a thing called *paramapara*, which is, we have the teacher will be there and the teacher presents the student that *paramapara* is kind of how art goes from one generation to the other. So he calls up Valli and says that I want you to come here and be the teacher for Aparna to perform. So-so I think that shows the-the quality of the company and people like Aparna and Aparna is again going for a solo performance in three or four places in Kerala, this year again. So, there in India, you can get the best dancers and you know he is- she is now at that level and being in Minneapolis, small town and to get to that level and for Ranees to get the Arts Council job, I think, that shows

a whole lot of effort and work and artistry - artistic ability, all, you know speaks for all those things.

DR: Do you have you know, anything you'd like to add that we haven't touched upon – because you sort of touched upon things you know, the impact Ragamala has had on Twin Cities and Minnesota audiences? [Pause] Where do you see, you know, the future for Ragamala?

GN: Ah! You know it's a ... that's a [Laughter] that's a difficult question! Who can what is the future is, but ... if you can look at the quality and the creativity that they have so far shown, I think a – a... at least the ... Aparna's time I can see that continuing in different ways probably, but artistically and creatively, (ahem) both ways and being able to communicate to the audience those- those things in a ... it's going on strong and I- I believe that it can sustain for many more years.

DR: So you obviously see the communication going on between the art form and the audience?

GN: Yes, I see that, and when you go to the...their performances and how the applause and the genuine a-and the comments that we get from afterwards really reflect the-the-the you know, the-the audience appreciation of it and the fact that when they re-did the Cowles... and did call it Cowles Auditorium, Raneer was asked to..., Ragamala was asked to... as the opening act. So for Cowles... and I was there, Cowles Auditorium, that is the most prestigious dance venue that Minneapolis recently opened. So, that shows a very clearly that the-the local audience...and it was a fully sold out performance - performance also. So that was the acceptance-the acceptance of the audience and also the-the theater community, that invited her to be the opening act. And... but ... and she did a similar thing in an opening for the what's Ar-Art Institute on the other side of the town ...the ...

DR: The Ordway?

GN: No- no- no, the, you know that's where the spoon ... [chuckles]...

DR: It's in Minneapolis or Saint Paul?

GN: Yeah.

DR: Minneapolis.

GN: Near Lyndale- Lyndale and ...see at the moment I don't get the name.

DR: Oooh, [pause] yeah, I am blanking out.

GN: Not-not Baker.

DR: [Pause] Yeah, I am blanking...

GN: Anyway, when they- when they reopened, and-and I think it was 2005, and Walker Art Center reopened after that...

DR: There, after remodeling?

GN: Remodeling. They asked Ranee to bring in an outdoor event and her collaboration...

DR: Yeah,

GN: Huh?

DR: I remember it, go ahead.

GN: Yeah, her collaboration with the-the troupe from Bali, I thought was a great success, probably quite a few, four-five thousand each night or – I don't know it was...

DR: It was packed.

GN: It was packed. Yeah!

DR: I was there one night.

GN: Yes [chuckles].

DR: Yeah, you know.

GN: Yeah, I-I tried out for a few days but then I-I ... with my travels I didn't-I didn't have enough time to you know to do, to be [chuckles]...

DR: Sure.

GN: To be on that. But I had a... actually I had been on the stage with her couple of times, doing some odd parts.

DR: Ok.

GN: In the - in the ...

DR: So she involved you even in that too, eh?

GN: Yes. Yeah, that's right, not just Board. There was one story – the - the story, the end was a product of –of showing almost - showcasing almost all the major art forms – dance, theater forms, in India. So, the-the story is that the God Brahma created the dance and taught Shiva and Shiva teaches other people and they teach others. That's how the origin of dance. It's kind of nice story. So I was ... I ended up being Brahma, the Creator, and

created the dancing give to next [chuckles] next person. So I was on the stage for a short time to do that.

DR: So Ranee ...

GN: I've never danced [Laughter].

DR: Yeah! But she involved you, right?

GN: Yes, and then... and for more interesting was she had ...David-David Whetstone who wrote an Opera on Ashoka and Ashoka, after , you know, the story is that after the war he got converted to Buddhist philosophy and denounced war. So I was the Buddhist monk who advises Ashoka to [chuckles]... how he should treat the world [chuckles]. So bringing the Buddhist idea into ... on the stage, so I was involved in that. Those couple of shows at O'Shaughnessy, ok?

DR: Ok. That's great.

GN: Yeah, but again I didn't have to dance. I just had to stand there and [chuckles] do a few hand gestures.

DR: Ok. Ok.

GN: And one of my sons was also involved in some of the dances, she ... he had to... did some... a year or two with her and then performed on some of the early dances she did – that was before the Ragamala time.

DR: Ok.

GN: So whole family was involved in a sense.

DR: So is there anything else you would like to add, Godan?

GN: Cannot think of anything else right now. You know, I don't know where that-this will take, but you know today I was discussing with Ranee, you know that you know for ... in India, you know it's not theater; it's actually part of life. Art is part of life. Art is not separate from life. It's not to be shown in a box called theater. (Laughter) (Ha) It's, you know, how... and even in a theater, when you bring to a theater, the ... you know the proscenium type of theater, is a very difficult one to present all the aspects of an art, like Bharatanatyam. So these are struggles, that ... and one you know... so- so-so we said we should discuss this, you know, how do we make this more part of life, more ... and on one side, and then how you make the presentation more accessible on a proscenium stage; all the subtleties of this dance which is lost in a large - large box auditorium.

DN: Hm...

GN: So it's nice to ruminate on, nice to discuss, but I don't know I will leave it for you to discuss and discuss will probably come up some ways. Even if you don't come up with some ways but its nice thing to discuss [Laughter], I guess!

DR: Hm... Hm... Yeah, I agree.

GN: The other aspect is that one of the things that working with Ranee is that she is person with many-many ideas. So ideas you know every few minutes new ideas come. It's-it's an almost like exciting to work with her, discussing all these different ideas, and she will ... she has a sense of humor too, so-so that helps working with her easy, working with her go smooth, even with all the insistence on doing it right and you know adherence to all the-the-the-the main principles, but on the other side she can be fun and fun you know in a fast paced, fun atmosphere. So I ... last time I-I visited her when she was creating a new dance. So, it was very interesting how she collaborates and how the ... you know she-she had brought ... I had helped her to bring a Kathakali drummer from India and there was a Taiko drummer so here and then there is the Bharatanatyam dancers and then the musicians, South Indian Carnatic music – so how do you collaborate all those things. So it's a ... so this is creating with all these different forms – like I said, but first, the... you know, how did we create Jazz in this country? It's the various art forms being come together. So it's kind of a exciting thing to see this happen. I don't know whether this could have happened say like in places like India, because India is much more traditional. But here we are much more open, much more accepting of differences – so that probably tells something about our country too – that you can have this creativity thrive and form and transform, but, without losing the integrity of some of these things.

DR: Seems like a good place to end.

GN: Yeah, [Laughter], yeah!

DR: I mean who could ask for much more, you know.

GN: Yeah, you know, this is a-this is a... has been an interesting part of my life for many years, and-and I enjoyed it as I said since I as... started as a...when I was a boy I was involved in it and still I can enjoy, I am involved in some way or other. What else can I ask?

DR: Yes, yeah.

GN: For my own satisfaction [pause] and still friends with Ranee [chuckles], and Aparna and Ashwini too...

DR: Yeah.

GN: And Tama-Tamara and all those people.

DR: And you are still enjoying it all.

GN: Enjoying it, yes.

DR: Yes, well, thanks so much Godan.

GN: Ok.

DR: Thanks for sitting down.

GN: Ok.

DR: Yes.

GN: Good.

DR: This is an extension of the first interview, and so there is a couple of things you wanted to address again Godan. Maybe you can talk a little bit about the collaboration between Aparna and Ranee.

GN: Yeah you know, I had watched that develop over the years and it has really matured quite a bit. They respect each other and they take from each other, and I-I don't know [clearing throat] actual instance in watching them...I have watched them over the years, a few times, but last time I watched was when they were creating a-a piece which had a Taiko drum - drums from Japan and an Indian Chenda, Kerala Chenda artist...

DR: Hm...Hm...

GN: And here is a piece they were trying to create with the-with the integration of these two artists, and Aparna and Ranee were working together ... and the - the ... I can see how they ... that works very good, they had very good, I have very good, working relationship and creating something new like that with a collaboration, I think and the really exciting, you know ...see that them ... very exciting and also they are both perfectionists, so they-they moved they test each moves and-and also in-include the other artist in-artist in creating something new.

DR: So, a [clearing throat] part of it too is ... so they ... because Aparna, you know, I remember seeing early on, she was just the dancer early on, but as she aged and matured, is that when the collaboration started coming in?

GN: Yeah, yes, the collaboration started coming in and then you can even see their literature – Aparna was listed as Associate / Assistant Artistic Director. I think now they are both on equal footing, so over the years it has come from (this) ... Aparna has progressed from being just a - a dancer to assisting in creating things to equal collaboration with Ranee.

DR: Hm...Hm...

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- DR: You also talk about the insistence on perfection.
- GN: Yeah. One of the things that I noticed is that every time they do any performance or any, even practice, they give attention to little details. One of the stories that I can say is that, when I was accompanying them to India, there the people who were on the stage, they were not all the people who were not on the stage all the time, but, the ones who were not on the stage were on the wings looking at how each movement was taking shape and then later discussing, when they get home, discussing, “oh, the hand could have probably raised a little bit more, a little bit low.” So ev-every time they performed, they tried to make it a little better one, and I haven’t seen that kind of , you know, that-that great insistence on perfecting as they grow every time.
- DR: Hm...Hm... So yeah it’s a... it seems like it’s an ongoing process, as the performance goes on it’s still...they’re-they are perfecting it.
- GN: Yeah. Right, perfecting even though this is probably their hundredth-hundredth time doing the same show, maybe not hundredth, but literally you know they-they have done some of these, you know, many-many times and still they try to make it a little better next time.
- DR: Hm...Hm... Hm...Hm...
- DR: I know another thing, the ... you were concerned about the - the innovation, while sticking to tradition.
- GN: Yeah. You know, [clearing throat] it’s a - it’s a fine balance between innovation and traditions, always in any art I think. One of the things that I noticed them, is that , even though they are using different types of drums, different types of stories, different types of other devices, but still, they stick to the traditional movements, *bhavas*, the... you know, all the aspects of traditional dance - dance form of [clearing throat] of Bharatanatyam. I am not an expert on that, but what I could see, when again, when traveling to India where there were many people who had good training in this kind of art, at our the last venue, the person who was presiding over that venue, after-after the show, was somebody who had done, learned the dance quite a bit and she-she kind of addresses-addresses the crowd, the audience and say “Without you moms and your dancers here, see how much these people have worked and how much they kept the traditions and even in their make-up they made sure they don’t overdo it, they do it the right way.” So I could see that even people steeped in tradition admired what Ragamala was doing.
- DR: Hm...

DR: Well I know both - both Raneer and Aparna, don't they go back and regularly with Valli, the-their-their teacher ...

GN: Right ...

DR: Their master?

GN: they are always in touch with their master Valli and they... and I think they take a time whenever they get a chance to go and learn, visit, talk, all that.

DR: So they-they're - they're even though they're here; they are firmly connected with the tradition?

GN: Yes.

DR: Yeah.

GN: And they respect Valli's ideas very much, so they are always in contact with that.

DR: Ok.

GN: Ok. That's all I think I have.

DR: Ok, so, great. Well, thanks a lot Godan.

GN: Thank you, Dan, for accommodating me.

DR: Yeah.
