

Kurathi Folk Dance

By Unknown

This photograph of Dr. Jayanthi Raman (on left in purple) and Kunjan Raval (on right in red) was taken in 1996. At the time, Raval was studying Kurathi Attam, a traditional folk dance from southern India, with Dr. Raman as part of the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program of the Oregon Historical Society Folklife Program.

Dr. Jayanthi Raman was born in Madras (recently renamed Chennai), Tamil Nadu, in southern India. She began studying both classical and folk dance at the age of four, performing at eight, and teaching at thirteen. By the time she turned seventeen, she was co-managing her own dance school (with her sister, Radha). However, in the spirit of honoring her father, who hoped that both his daughters and his son would enter the field of medicine, Jayanthi gave up dancing to pursue a medical career.

Raman earned an M.D. in Madras before moving with her husband, Raman Srinivasan, to Portland, where he took a job with Intel, Corp. in Washington County in 1989. Once in Portland, she earned a master's degree in medical informatics from Oregon Health Science University, passed her boards, completed her residency requirements, and gained her license to practice. By that time she had decided to shift her focus from medicine to family and ultimately did return to the world of traditional dance.

In 1993, Dr. Raman founded the Natya Academy for the Dances of India, in Portland, and has been teaching, performing, and choreographing classical and folk dances of Southern India ever since. According to her, "Indian dance is a vital part of life in India....Learning dance and performing to portray the various Gods and Goddesses of India is an important medium for children/youth here to learn about the rich cultural heritage of India."

Kurathi Attam is the traditional folk dance form of the Kurathi, sometimes referred to as mountain gypsies, of the state of Tamil Nadu. The culture of the Kurathi is endangered and the Indian government is taking steps to protect the tribe and encourage the continuation of their arts. Dr. Raman is a proponent of the effort to preserve their songs and dances. Kurathi Attam is known for its energetic movements and the beautiful songs which speak about the natural riches of the Kurathi's homeland.

Written by Joshua Binus, © Oregon Historical Society, 2005.

Oregon History Project

<https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/kurathi-folk-dance/>