

## **P. Thilagavathi**

Born on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1990

First woman co-founder of a Kattaikkuttu Theatre company

### **Sri Krishna Kattaikkuttu Company**

Thilaga is a founder-member of one of the highest paid Kattaikkuttu companies, with highly acclaimed performances and a fan base across Tamilnadu.



*“Kattaikkuttu as an art form has been the exclusive property of men for centuries; that history has been rewritten by Thilagavathi”*

V.Neelakandan,  
Kunkumam  
magazine,  
1 Feb 2016

### **Wind Dancers**

Thilaga is a part of the NGO, Wind Dancers Trust; an NGO which works using the arts for social transformation. She designs projects using Kattaikkuttu in the domain of education, empowerment and gender equality.

### **BACKGROUND**

Kattaikkuttu is a traditional form of Indian theatre, which has been the exclusive domain of male performers only. Thilagavathi, born in 1990, trained under Thiru Perungattur Rajagopalan at the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam, a unique theatre school founded by him and his wife Thirumathi Hanne M. De Bruin in Kanchipuram District. In 2010, Thilagavathi graduated from the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam as the first-ever female Kattiakkuttu performer, therefore breaking the stereotype that this theatre-form is in the domain of men only. She worked as an Assistant teacher at the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam till 2013. She then joined



Pictures from top to bottom:  
Arjuna (Abhimanyu),  
Make-up, Gypsy Woman  
(Kuravanchi), Surpanakai  
(RamaRavana), and  
Duryodhana [Subhadra  
Kalvanam]

the NGO Pudiyador in April, 2013 as a Kattaikkuttu teacher and office staff. In 2014 she founded Sri Krishna Kattaikkuttu Company along with 5 co-artists. In 2015, she joined the NGO Wind Dancers as a design team member and facilitator to use Kattaikkuttu for empathy based social transformation.

## EDUCATION

- Studied at the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam from 2002 to 2010
- Graduated as the first female Kattaikkuttu performer ever with a major in acting/singing and a minor in *mukavinai* (musical instrument that forms part of the Kattaikkuttu ensemble)
- Passed her S.S.L.C. Exam (Tamil Nadu State Board) in 2008

## ADDITIONAL ARTISTIC TRAINING

- Theatre workshop with **Mangai**, Chennai
- Theatre and Script-writing workshop at the Alliance Francaise, Chennai
- Contemporary dance workshops by **KS. Deepak**, Attakkalari, Bangalore and **Mira Rau**, Bangalore
- Story-telling and Theatre workshop with Craig Jenkins
- Dance workshops (Bharata Natyam, African dance, choreography) by Chennai-based dancer **Sangeeta Isvaran**
- Carnatic vocal classes as part of the outreach programme of **Kalakshetra**, Chennai
- Acrobatics and juggling, clowning and pantomime by Katja Groll, Stefania Mariano and Dominique Huber from the **Dimitri Scuola**, Switzerland
- Voice training by opera singer **Liesbeth Riemersma**, Netherlands
- Photography workshop by **Marinde Hurenkamp**, Netherlands
- Acting by Netherlands-based actress **José Kuijpers**
- Workshop on expressing the basic facial emotions of Kutiyattam (the only surviving Sanskrit theatre tradition from Kerala) with Kutiyattam artiste, **Kapila Nagavallikkunnel**.

## PROFESSIONAL & MANAGEMENT SKILLS

(as part of the last 2 years of the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam professional development curriculum)

- A course in Basic Finance to look after the finances of a theatre company
- A course in Communication
- A course in Arts Management (running your own theatre company)
- A course on the History of World Theatre

## KUTTU REPERTOIRE

### Full-Night Performances:

Vilvalaiippu (Bending of the Bow)  
Rajasuyagam  
Pakadai Thukil (Dice and Disrobing)  
Kuravanchi  
Abhimanyu  
Thiripurakali  
Karna Mosham  
Thakkayagam

### Short Performances

Rama Ravana  
Maya Kuthiray (The Magic Horse)  
Parakadal (The Milky Ocean)  
Vilaiyttain Vilaiivu  
Azhiya Sothu  
Ulagam Ullangaiyil  
\* All full-night performances can be done as short plays

Veriyattam (Sacrifice Play)  
Subadhra's Marriage

### **PERFORMANCES**

Thilagavathi has performed since the age of 11, first with her father's company and later with the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam in her youth. She is a prolific performer with more than a 1,000 performances to her credit and is currently a highly sought after performer along with her group Sri Krishna Kattakkuttu Company at traditional village festivals. She adapts to both urban and rural platforms with ease and takes special pleasure in performing for and teaching in marginalised communities, performing in orphanages, shelter homes and institutions for the differently abled.

She has performed and taught at many other venues, both national and international.

### **NATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- **2016** 3 Performances for Iyal Isai Nataka Manram [the Tamilnadu State Government branch for Culture]
- **2016** Performances at the institution of Vidhyasagar for differently abled children
- **2016** Performances for the SOS Orphan Village Mother's Day
- **2015** Performance of 'Nanga Ready', a performance created about transgender issues by Director Mangai, Chennai
- **2015 Co-choreographer** in the reation of 'Lorry Lolaakku', an Indo-French production creating performances on top of a lorry celebrating the local histories of the kuppam-s or fishing villages along the coastline of Chennai for the celebration of Madras Week
- **2015** Performance at IIT, Madras
- **2014** Performance at Rukmini Devi Natyakshetra, Mogapair
- **2013** Performance for the NGO Pudiyador for communities in Vanandurai, Urur Kuppam, Ramapuram, Chennai
- **2012** Performing for the National School of Drama, Kuttu Festival at Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam, Kanchipuram
- **2010** Performance of *Subhadra's Marriage*, Kalakshetra, Chennai
- **2010** Performance at the Elliot's Beach, Chennai, on the invitation of the Commissioner of Department of Art and Culture, Tamil Nadu Government
- **2009** Performance for Nalanda Way, Chennai
- **2009** Special programme for the Indo-Dutch Business Circle Chennai
- **2009** Special programme for Elsevier International Publishing Company, Chennai
- **2009** Special programme for IGAR, Kalpakkam
- **2008** Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Programme of the Tamil Nadu Government
- **2007** Rabindra Utsav, Kolkata
- **2006** Prithvi Theatre Festival, Mumbai
- **2005** Rangayana Festival, Mysore

### **INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- **2015** Performance of 'Siryamma Siri', at the Kuala Lumpur International Festival, a production of The Aseema Trust showcasing the folk arts of southern India

- **2015** Participant in an Artistic Exchange programme between the Wind Dancers Trust and the Association Les Poussieres, in Aubervilliers, France
- **2010** Indo-French Production 'Mayakkam-Oxymore' combining live and digital arts performed at Festival Les Bains Numeriques, Enghien-les-Bains, France and in Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Mumbai as part of Bonjour India – the Festival of France in India. This Indo-French co-production combined live and digital arts and was performed in
- **2008** Participant in Get In!, a young people's led international theatre event organized by the Arts Council of England, and in Contacting the World 2008, an international youth theatre festival organized by Contact Theatre; both events took place in Liverpool, UK

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

Thilagavathi has been teaching kuttu since 2010 both in Tamilnadu and outside. She has also created many innovative kuttu modules in the domain of education, empowerment, gender equality and social justice.

- **2016** Training in kuttu and kuttu make-up for renowned poet and actor Snehan for the forthcoming film, Bommi Veeran
- **2016** Facilitator of a unique curriculum to help children be critical thinkers and look at the past, question their history for Dakshinachitra Museum, Chennai
- **2015 – 2016** Collaboration between the NGOs Wind Dancers and Schools of Equality to create and facilitate a unique series of classes talking about gender stereotypes, equality, and social justice using the arts in 4 schools in Chennai and 1 in Pollachi. Creation of a unique performance at each school.
- **2015** Facilitator to create performance with children at AIR kuppam Government School, Chennai
- **2015** Kuttu workshop at American International School, Chennai
- **2015** Kuttu workshop at S.S.Jain College, Chennai
- **2014 - 2015** Facilitator at Bridging the Gaps Youth Camps, using art and sport to bridge the gaps of gender, poverty, caste and economic status.
- **2014 – 2015** Teaching kuttu at Child Children's Home 5 afterschool programmes of the NGO Pudiyador across Chennai. The classes were designed to reduce aggression, build confidence, self-expression and positive social skills
- **2014 – 2015** Teaching kuttu at Vaanavil, Nagapattinam, a shelter home. The classes were designed to build confidence, self-expression and positive social skills
- **2014** Creating a performance with 9<sup>th</sup> Std students of Harishri Vidhyalaya Matriculation School, Chennai on the theme of Child Labour focusing on the children exploited in the fireworks industry
- **2013 – 2015** Teaching kuttu for underprivileged children at 5 afterschool programmes of the NGO Pudiyador across Chennai. The classes were designed to build confidence, self-expression and positive social skills
- **2013** Global Girls Workshop, Kattaikkuttu Sangam, Kanchipuram
- **2012** Assistant Facilitator with Hand-in-Hand Bridge School for underprivileged children creating a performance on the theme of Gandhi and Ahimsa [non-violence] for The Aseema Trust
- **2012** Shell Company Corporate Workshop (2 workshops in August and December), Chennai
- **2010 – 2013** Assistant teacher in Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam

## **EXTRACTS OF REVIEWS**

***V.Neelakandan, Kunkumam magazine, 1 Feb 2016***

Under the glare of the lights, 1,000s of people and seated around, with impressive costume, Dushasana springs into the centre stage ... the body language is entirely masculine but the voice is feminine ... At the age of 11, Thilagavathi donned the male character's *Kattai* costume ... [and today] she says," my dream is to be a Kuttu actor and director like my guru."

***Special Feature, Dinathanthi, Kudumba malar, 24 Jan 2016***

"The best performer of the Mahabharatham character Draupadi is Thilagavathi. More than the dance and the singing, the emotional delineation of the character was impressive."

***Anbu Velayudham, Jananam [Magazine], Dec 11 2015***

Thilaga along with other graduates studying in Cheyyar Taluka started the Sri Krishna Kattaikkuttu Company ... A Founder-Member of this company, she explains, "People do not understand what is Kattaikkuttu ... Masilamani Thangavel was the first to write the lyrics and script. Even now that is what we use ... All of us [from the Sri Krishna Kattaikkuttu Company] learnt this art form from Thiru Rajagopal in Kanchipuram, at the Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam. "

***Lakshmi Subramanian, The Week [Magazine], Dec 6 2015***

"Her eyes display a range of emotions – valour, hatred, love, grief and despair ... She reappears a few minutes later speaking to the children about the dangers of sexual harassment ... She says, "My relatives and neighbours have always bad mouthed my parents for letting me perform Koothu. But my parents had confidence in me . They believed I would bring them respect." ... Along with her colleagues at Wind Dancers Thilaga has created several compositions and has choreographed theatre plays to give voice to the underprivileged. She spent 3 days dancing in an open lorry recreating the history of old Madras. "

**LINKS**

Kattaikkuttu Sangam website: [www.kattaikkuttu.org](http://www.kattaikkuttu.org)

Kattaikkuttu Young Professional Company: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cv3C5XBzn3I>

Urban Buzz- Mayakkam Oxymore: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN7qITtdgM>

Bonjour India Festival: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlfmpsmGTtE>

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