

Note from the Producer:

Ekaantha Seetha....a lonely furrow is a celebration of women from epic times to the present, whose extraordinary strength of character comes to the fore under the very circumstances that would cause others to wither. The women we have chosen to portray in our production, when faced with crushing challenges, realize their innate potential and become independent thinkers, without forsaking their culture and worthy traditions. Vaidehi, of the great epic Ramayana, forms the foundation of our production. She had the courage to make her choices, yet continued to uphold the grace and dignity of womanhood appreciated even today. Rani Lakshmi Bai, at a very tender age, chose to stand up and fight for her people's freedom rather than be a vassal to the invader. Aparajitha, India's 'everyday' woman has all those extraordinary qualities of Vaidehi and Lakshmi Bai - latent, yes, as do so many others. They too rise to today's challenges and make bold choices, all the while respecting tradition. They epitomize dignity, grace and courage. They have ploughed those lonely furrows. We salute them.

We have endeavored to maintain this thread, the suthra in the logo, of deeply rooted culture and grace, enlivened by the independence of spirit that renders a person, or a production, noteworthy. Our choreographers and our composer, steeped in tradition and classicism, have used their creativity to communicate with today's varied audiences. They, together with our author, worked to develop a keen understanding of each character as well as the essence of the production, and have provided a framework for presenting them effectively. Dance and music, costumes and colors, scenes and script have all been created with that bonding thread in mind.

Aparajitha, our contemporary heroine, shows that many, if not all of us, men and women, have what it takes to face the skirmishes and battles that deserve to be confronted and emerge triumphant - provided we refuse to let ourselves be defeated by ourselves.

Note from V.P. Dhananjayan:

CCA and its President, Uma Ganesan, have presented Shantha and me with yet another challenge. We have been associated with CCA since its inception, having flagged off its very first presentation fifteen years ago.

Ekaantha Seetha was a challenge - an evolution of thought and action through epic, historical and modern times. The concept depicts human psychology and behaviour, and the evolution of art itself. The past is the foundation for the present to build a future. The choreography is relevant to the era being depicted, with threads that bind the three episodes. Given the international audience, we have minimized the lyrics, focusing on body language with facial expressions, which is the vital power of Bharatha Naatyam.

Choreographing *Ekaantha Seetha* was like choreographing three separate productions simultaneously. The challenge before me was made considerably easier by the theatrical inputs given by Ranjitha Ashok, imaginative choreographic suggestions from Uma Ganesan and our brilliant dancers, the seniors among whom have contributed greatly to this choreography. Rathna Kumar, an articulate and renowned dancer/choreographer becomes the bridge between stage and audience. Her role is unique as she moves in and out of the episodes as narrator and performer with sensitivity and humor.

Choreography is easier when it follows music. Our practice has often been the other way around. The music composer has then to meet the challenge of the twists and turns of the choreography. T.V. Gopalakrishnan, a multi-talented maestro, rose to the challenge, creating music in various genres to fit the moods and movements - truly an asset to this production.

Shantha's is a success story that bears both similarity and dissimilarity to the story of *Ekaantha Seetha*. We work together, unlike the characters in the production. Her crucial role reflects the truth in Thyaagaraaja's composition, 'Maa Janaki' where he says Sri Rama owes his fame to his wife, Vaidehi. I must acknowledge the contributions of our senior disciple, Sreelatha, in the choreography, the recording of the music and the rehearsals. Shantha and I are truly proud of her.

Note from T.V.Gopalakrishnan:

When I first heard the theme of *Ekaantha Seetha*, with a common idea linking three eras, I realized I needed a clearer picture of the vision behind this production before even thinking of music composition. When Uma Ganesan described her vision in detail, in particular the *Vaidehi* episode forming the foundation, music and musical phrases began to flow through my mind. The virtuosity of Shri Dhananjayan and Shrimathi Shantha played a very crucial role in this process. The violin became the central instrument, providing the foundation and creating a musical link through all three episodes.

Looking at Sri Rama through Vaidehi's greatness - for me, this was the greatest challenge. I found it a new and fascinating approach to Sri Rama who is, after all, a divine hero. In *Vaidehi*, the lyrics were motivational, leading to spontaneous compositions. The phrases, both musical and/or lyrical, determined the ragas I chose - not the scenes, characters, or the moods traditionally associated with each raga.

In *Lakshmi Bai*, I looked at shading, feelings. The visuals and the ballad led me to ragas such as Jaijaivanthi, Kapi and Gorakh Kalyan. In *Aparajitha*, the varnam for her awakening is in Hamsadhwani, a raga associated with commencements.

Classicism is maintained throughout - Carnataka Sangeetham for *Vaidehi*, Hindusthani for *Lakshmi Bai*, and a more contemporary mode and the use of pentatonic ragas such as Mohanam for *Aparajitha*. It is tempting to use several instruments in such productions, I have restricted their number to keep the focus on the theme. Balance, as always, is important. At times, Music becomes secondary to Dance; at other times, Music and Dance are equal.

Cast and Characters:

	<i>Vaidehi</i>	<i>Lakshmi Bai</i>	<i>Aparajitha</i>
V.P. Dhananjayan	Valmiki	Gul Mohommed	Teacher
Shantha Dhananjayan	Narrator	Bard	
Rathna Kumar	Narrator	Bard	Mother/Praalochaki
Sreelatha	Vaidehi	Ensemble	Ensemble
Sujatha Srinivasan		Lakshmi Bai	Ensemble
Pavithra Srinivasan	Ensemble	Ensemble	Aparajitha
Seetha Karippath	Ensemble	Ensemble	Little girl
Krishnakshi Sharma	Ensemble	Ensemble	Maid
M. Suhasini	Ensemble	Young Lakshmi Bai	Ensemble
Anusha Natarajan	Urmila	Ensemble	Ensemble
R. Swarna	Ensemble	Ensemble	Ensemble
Thiruchelwam	Bhadra	Major Ellis	Drunk
Madhusudhanan	Kusa	Nana Saheb	Little boy
Narendra Kumar	Rama	Ensemble	Bully
Renjith Babu	Lava	Ensemble	Ensemble
Gopukiran	Lakshmana	Tantia Tope	Mithran (friend)
Venkatakrishnan	Ensemble	Gangadhar /Hugh Rose	Husband

Introduction to episodes:

All the episodes – *Vaidehi*, *Rani Lakshmi Bai* and *Aparajitha* – have defining moments of Truth, Realization, Determination, Transformation and Resolution. Strength and character are inherent in all of us, and when life presents a crucial turning point, it triggers an awakening in some, leading, not to blind emotional responses, but to very deliberate action, supported by those who, in turn, have the capacity to recognize and the will to stand by such intrinsic worth.

Vaidehi

“Sitaayaah Charitham Mahath” – ‘Sita’s Saga is Sublime’ Sage Valmiki

This episode is drawn from the Ramayana, one of the two great epics of Hinduism, first written by Sage Valmiki.

Vaidehi is one of the names of Sita, the princess of Videha, discovered as a baby in a furrow by her father, King Janaka. Vaidehi is King Rama’s consort and the Queen of Ayodhya.

The protagonists in this episode view situations and choose specific courses of action and reaction based on the then prevailing code of ethics and their individual perceptions of duty and dharma. Rama believes that his first duty, as befitting the descendant of the royal race of Ikshvaku, is towards his people, his kingdom.

Lakshmana, Rama’s younger brother, obeys his King when ordered to carry out Vaidehi’s punishment, disregarding his own views and beliefs. Lakshmana’s wise and perceptive wife Urmila, asks the single disturbing question, which, persisting through millennia, remains unanswered.

Vaidehi has a distinct vision and understanding of her role. She handles false accusations and banishment with dignified restraint. With grace, courage and supreme belief in herself, Vaidehi raises her two sons to be warriors and future kings, fulfilling her responsibility on Earth, making conscious choices at all times. Being purity personified, she is beyond having to prove herself over and over again.

Voices: **Vaidehi** Vasundhra Rajagopal

Valmiki Vidyabhushan

Rama Vidyabhushan

Lakshmana Sankaran Namboodiri

Bhadra Krishnakumar

Urmila Sridevi Nethiya

Sources: Srimad Valmiki Ramayanam, ‘Sitayana’ by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Tulsidas’ Ram Charitha Manas

Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi “Khoob ladi mardhani, woh tho Jhansiwali rani thi”- Subhadhra Kumari Chauhan

Even today, villagers in Jhansi, and school children all over India, sing: “*She fought brilliantly, in manly fashion; she was the Queen of Jhansi*”.

India’s history abounds with examples of local kings and feudal chieftains who, driven by blood feuds and self-interest, allied themselves with conquering invaders. There were, however, some brilliant exceptions - Rani Lakshmi Bai, the accidental monarch of Jhansi, was one.

Over a hundred years ago, says Mahasweta Devi, “The British trampled the heart of India with their booted feet. India let out a cry of pain from her broken ribs” As the cry grew louder, Rani Lakshmi Bai became “an expression of what India felt....”, a symbol of conscious rebellion. Appreciating her ideals and her resolve, Major Ellis, the deputy political representative, argued on her behalf with his superiors – in vain. Rani Lakshmi Bai, rooted firmly in tradition, demonstrating her inner strength and will, chose her people’s freedom over meek surrender. In death, she gave birth to India’s march towards freedom.

Voices : **Bard:** Bonnie Chakraborty

Ballad: Shruti Jawhari

Hugh Rose: Phil Crook

Sources : We are indebted to Mahasweta Devi’s “The Queen of Jhansi” translated by Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta as the initial source of information, and to Amar Chithra Katha for providing additional visual resources.

Lyrics: from the ballad ‘Jhansi Ki Rani’ by Subhadhra Kumari Chauhan

Aparajitha

A-para-jitha: Not-by-others-vanquished - one of the names of Parvathi.

Away from the grand sweep of epic and history, this is the story of awakening, of quiet courage and conviction, and of latent strength and character that exists, often unacknowledged, in the small canvases of life. The circumstances and events that pepper daily living also require resolution and grace under fire. And, sometimes, the most profound of society's changes are brought about by the most unlikely of heroes among us.

Aparajitha, a young, idealistic girl, is the apple of her teacher's eye. Her astute guru imbues her eager mind with lessons, ideas and ideals, values and vision, history and heroines. Soon, Aparajitha is gently but firmly 'forced' to walk the common path, like many before her, away from the dangerous effects of thinking and learning. Mithran, her husband's colleague and friend, shares her interests, and becomes her friend. Life then begins to unfold in a series of events that bring disaster, discordance, and disillusion into her life. Riddled with self-doubt, she lashes out at her teacher, chastising him for not teaching her how to live in "their" world, which "they" control. The wise man gently reminds her of the meaning of her name, Aparajitha, not-by-others-vanquished, and asks her if she is going to be beaten by herself.

Doubt turns into determination. In that moment of truth, she is awakened to a sense of her true self and potential. With the courage to embrace her destiny, and the help of those who have always believed in her, she motivates her people into overcoming the fatalism that robs people of their own sense of worth.

Voices: Teacher: T.V.Gopalakrishnan & Sankaran Namboodiri

Aparajitha: Sridevi Nethiyar

Story Concept & Development: Ranjitha Ashok

Tamizh Lyrics: Subramania Bharathiyar, S. Raghuraman

'Aparajitha' Jathi - composed by Narendra Kumar

The Creative Team

Choreographers - V.P. and Shantha Dhananjayan: It is almost impossible to think of a couple who have contributed as much to Indian classical dance as performers, teachers, choreographers and champions - as the Dhananjayans. From their start as leading student-performers in the legendary mythological productions of Kalakshetra almost five decades ago, to the establishment of their excellent institution, Bharata Kalanjali in Chennai, they have indeed been an extremely hard act to follow. Their institution trains some of the best professionals in classical dance and music. Audiences around the world, particularly in North America, have been enthralled by many of their wonderful productions Sita Rama Katha, Sanghamitra, Mahabharatam, the multi cultural productions, *Jungle Book The Adventures of Mowgli* and *The Twain Shall Meet*, (commissioned by CCA and Cuyahoga Community College) being among the best known.

Music Composer - T.V. Gopalakrishnan: TVG as he is popularly known, is a rare blend of scholarship, artistry and versatility. He is a highly respected singer of both South Indian classical (disciple of Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar) and North Indian classical music (disciple of Pundit Krishnanand) and a doyen among mridhangam players. As a percussionist, he has the distinction of having performed along with Pundit Ravi Shankar, the incomparable Ustad Alla Rakha, George Harrison, Pierre Favre and John Handy, among others. TVG was a professor of music at the Birla Institute of Technology, Pilani and has established an institute of classical music in Chennai, India.

Concept Development & Script - Ranjitha Ashok: Ranjitha is a freelance writer and columnist. She coauthors a bi-weekly humor column for a Chennai periodical, "Madras Musings." A compilation of the columns was recently published as a book titled 'Chennai Latte A Madras Brew'. She has worked with historian and journalist, S. Muthiah, on several Chennai based biographical and historical book projects. Her book of mini biographies for young adults was published by Penguin India. Ranjitha worked closely with CCA on developing the English translations and the informative booklet for the previous production, *Silappadhikaram... a story of women of substance*.

Costume Designer - Lakshmi Srinath: Lakshmi's specialization in Fine Arts and training under eminent artist A.V. Ilango gives form to her desire for artistic expression through her paintings and her garment creations. Earthy, culture related creativity pervades the expanse of her work, in vivid colors and decorative elements. Her paintings have been shown in France and the UK and have won

awards and critical acclaim. Her well researched period costumes for *Silappadhikaaram.. a story of women of substance*, had been acclaimed for their authenticity and elegance of colors and designs. Lakshmi now rises to the challenge of creating costumes for *Ekaantha Seetha*, spanning multiple millennia.

Set Designer - Lakshmi Krishnamurthy: Lakki, as she is better known, is a gifted alumna of and a visiting professor at the College of Fine Arts, Kalakshetra, Chennai, specializing in Tanjore paintings, Cochin murals, Jaipur frescoes and temperas and other classical and folk Indian art forms. Her work has been exhibited widely, both within India and elsewhere. She has researched and presented papers on South Indian temple architecture, mural paintings and folk art and sculpture. Her artistry also extends to designing and executing decors for major events such as conferences and weddings.

Other important contributors:

Dr. K. Prashanth - a Professor at Vivekananda College, Chennai with a scholarly passion for Sanskrit, India's classical language, wrote those verses for *Vaidehi*, that had to be translated from the English script prepared by Ranjitha. He followed the same sloka metre as the verses of Valmiki and has given us evocative and thoughtful translations that have been musically set for dance.

Dr. S. Raghuraman - a Tamizh language Professor at A.M. Jain College, Chennai, has written the Tamizh lyrics for *Aparajitha*. A scholar of Tamizh, he has a great interest in Bharatha Naatyam and works with several artistes who wish to choreograph fresh works in Tamizh.

Rajny Krishnan - who has designed the masks for this production, is a sculptor based in Chennai. She has a passion for form and line and has associated with Bharatha Naatyam from childhood. Her sculptures represent life's inherent rhythm and harmony. She says “creating these masks was a pleasant creative extension for me.”

Principal Artists:

Rathna Kumar a dancer, choreographer, musician and teacher. Artistic Director of Samskriti and Anjali, the center for performing arts that she established in Houston in 1975, has trained over 2000 students. Rathna has received numerous honors, both for her excellence as a dancer and for her pioneering contributions as a teacher and promoter of classical performing arts. An articulate and expressive communicator in English as well as several Indian languages, she brings to this production a creative new dimension. She is a member of UNESCO's International Dance Council.

Sreelatha Vinod, a Bharatha Naatyam dancer of exceptional elegance, subtlety and grace, is fast gaining repute as a creative choreographer. Her production, Poornachandrika, was staged at Singapore's prestigious Victoria Theatre in 2004. Sreelatha has performed widely in North America and is remembered fondly by the CCA's audiences for her major roles in *Abhyaasa* and *The Jungle Book*. Sreelatha is the premier disciple of the Dhananjayans.

Sujatha Srinivasan, a dynamic Bharatha Naatyam dancer, is known for her classicism and creative choreography. Her thematic and collaborative productions such as Triveni, Swagatham Krishna, Pibare Krishnarasam and Shadripu have been staged to support social and educational causes. She is a disciple of Chitra Visweswaran, S. K. Rajarathnam Pillai, U. Laxminarayan and Kalanidhi Narayanan. Based in Cleveland, USA, she is the director of Shri Kalaa Mandhir, a center for Indian performing arts.

Pavithra Srinivasan is an aptly named classical dancer, for the hallmarks of her dancing are purity and sensitivity. She has performed extensively in India and in other countries. She has recently established the Institute of Dance and Vedic Heritage Teaching in Plainsboro, New Jersey and continues to teach at the Arsha Vidhya Gurukulam in Pennsylvania. She is a disciple of Arvind, Radha, Nirmala Ramachandran, Seetha Rama Sharma and Kalanidhi Narayanan.

The company:

Suhasini Muthukrishnan is an alumna of Kalakshetra and continues her advanced training under Professor C.V. Chandrasekhar. A well appreciated, sensitive and expressive dancer, she has worked with CCA in its previous productions.* She is an active member of Samskrita Ranga, a Sanskrit Theatre organization.

Krishnakshi Sharma is a disciple of the Dhananjayans and is also a staff member of their institution, Bharata Kalanjali. She has studied Manipuri and Kathak, dance forms from North India. She has performed in India and abroad. She is an elegant dancer and has received critical acclaim in CCA's past productions.*

Swarna Radhakrishnan is a graduate of Kalakshetra and has participated in several of their dance dramas. She is now under the advanced training of Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar. She has performed in India and abroad with her Guru and has also taken part in dance festivals. She has performed in CCA's earlier production.*

Anusha Natarajan is a disciple of the Dhananjayans and is well known as an excellent exponent of Bharata Naatyam, and a visual artist. She won critical acclaim in CCA's earlier productions.* She and her husband Narendra Kumar run a dance school, Anusham. They conduct workshops and assist dancers abroad in choreography.

Seetha Sasidharan is a graduate of Kalakshetra and has participated in several of their productions. She had her advanced training with the Dhananjayans. She has established herself as a senior Bharata Naatyam performer and teacher in Kerala. She has received critical acclaim and awards for the purity and elegance of her dance.

T.K. Thiruchelwam, a graduate of Bharata Naatyam from Kalakshetra, 'Thiru' has played lead roles in many of its dance dramas. He has worked with well known dancers and dance companies in India and abroad. Thiru is a senior and internationally recognized performer, choreographer and teacher. He has been an integral part of the CCA family.*

Narendra Kumar - an early student of the Dhananjayans, is a skilled Bharata Naatyam dancer and choreographer. He has studied martial arts such as Kalaripayattu, Silambam and Tai-Chi. He and his wife Anusha run the dance company Anusham. He has collaborated on several productions with dancers/choreographers in America.

K.B. Madhusudhanan is a graduate of Kalakshetra and has performed in several of their productions. He has worked with leading artistes and dance companies in India and abroad. He is well versed in the South Indian martial arts of Kalaripayattu and Silambam. He performed with CCA in its 2004 production.*

Renjith Babu is a graduate of Kalakshetra. He joined Kalapradarshini as a lecturer and has choreographed numerous dance productions. He teaches Yoga and is proficient in the ancient martial art, Kalaripayattu. He has performed in CCA's earlier productions.* Internationally recognized, he assists choreographers in the United States and elsewhere.

Gopukiran is a disciple of the Dhananjayans. He performs with them in their productions and has traveled with them to South Africa and the Middle East

M. Venkatakrishnan is a disciple of the Dhananjayans. He is skilled in Bharata Naatyam and now works as a teacher at the Dhananjayans' Bharata Kalanjali. He has performed in several of their productions and is appreciated as a strong and sensitive dancer

Technical Support: K. Nambu Kumar is the stage manager and technical director for this production. Skilled in lighting and sound requirements in India and abroad, he worked with CCA in its past production.* He has worked with the Dhananjayans and most recently, was the stage manager for the Kalakshetra dance company tour of Reunion.

* CCA productions *Living Tree* and/or *Silappadhikaaram.... A story of women of substance*

Wardrobe Assistant: **Kavitha**

Costumes executed by: **Aiyvelyu**

Other Recording Artists:

Mridhanganam: T.V. Gopalakrishnan, Vedakrishnan, D.Kannan, Karthick, T.V.Vasan **Other Percussions :** Madhusudan, Suresh, Venkatasubramaniam **Veena:** Punya Sreenivas, Ananthanarayanan **Violin:** Varadarajan Flute:R. Thyagarajan, B. Muthukumar **Keyboard:** Biju Paul **Orchestration:** G.Ramnath **Jathish:** Shantha Dhananjayan, Narendra Kumar, Sreelatha, Pavithra, Madhusudhanan