

FAR EAST DOCUMENTARY CENTRE

presents

GALA PREMIERE

September 10th 2017 | GSC Pavilion, KL

TEACHER

the tradition bearer



AN **INDRANI KOPAL** FILM

A FAR EAST DOCUMENTARY CENTRE PRODUCTION | EXECUTIVE PRODUCER TANJAI KAAMALA INDIRA DANCE SCHOOL | DISTRIBUTOR RADHIKAL FILMS
PRODUCER MARAN PERIANEN | DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SENTHIL KUMARAN MUNIADY | EDITOR INDRANI KOPAL
CAMERA NAVIN PERIANEN | SOUND MIX JESON GWANAPNEGASAM | SOUND AND MUSIC TANJAI KAAMALA INDIRA DANCE SCHOOL | CHOREOGRAPHY & DANCE INDIRA MANIKAM



#tinktank



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Synopsis



When Indira Manikam boarded the Sithambaram ship in 1965 with her sister and grandfather, unbeknownst to her, a major turning point was waiting for her on Malayan shore.

The formative years of TKI hardened Indira in many ways, as she met the harsh realities of life, more glaringly the perception towards India classical dancing communities in Malaya, back then. While departing from the major stigma of Bharathanatyam being branded as a culture practiced by Devadasis in India, she realised that a similar perception lingers on Malayan shores.

Nevertheless, she danced through the barriers, breaking the stereotype, dismantling old beliefs but sadly, her passion for dancing took an unfortunate turn upon her marriage, as her mother in law barred her from performing. Undeterred, she taught, choreographed and mentored many young Indian women by shaping them to break the barriers set forth by their forebearers. She exuded knowledge and inspired them to live their dream.

Teacher: The Tradition Bearer intimately documents Indira's role as the a long time tradition bearer, one who kept this sacred tradition alive, vibrant and relevant, for the past 50 years. This documentary will capture her journey, explore the power of art, and above all, the courage and resilience of a woman's spirit through various shades and vignettes that represents her feelings of joy, fear, powerlessness, courage and triumph, and reflect on how she came to be the tradition bearer she is.

Director's Note

In 2014, I completed a very successful film called *The Game Changer*, a film about a woman Susan Slotnick who taught dance in prisons in Upstate New York. This short film went on to be in 17 film festivals and took me to the Cannes film Festival. What made this film successful was that it was about a person and the effect on the lives of these men who were in prison and who came out to form a dance troupe.

I have been making documentaries for many years and after graduating from Hofstra University in New York I came back home to make more films. I realized that there was someone here in my country that was important in my own life, my dance teacher Indira Manikam (Teacher) instilled confidence in me at a crucial time when I needed it. Teacher taught me through dance how to be a strong woman in the world, how to be confident. These lessons saved my life in some ways and I wanted to make this film about teacher as a way to show the world who she is, what legacy she created through 50 years of teaching dance to hundreds of students and to people who have gone on to teach.

As a documentary filmmaker I believe that the lives of people are important, that their stories are important. While filming *Teacher* I spent time in her house, sitting in her kitchen, roaming through her bedroom, seeing these normal everyday things that she would use to dress in for her dance performances, the simple silver tumbler that she uses to drink from, lying on her bed with her daughters laughing at the antics of her husband making jokes. All of these things, normal things, the things that we all do in our own lives allow us to see our similarity and yet we all have our own unique stories.

As a filmmaker I want to take the ordinary lives of people and show the world how extraordinary they really are. I believe we are all extraordinary people. *Teacher* is just an ordinary woman who started a dance school, brought up two beautiful girls who also became dancers and a woman who had the most extraordinary influence on many students. But most of all teacher changed my life and to this end I made this documentary to show you the extraordinary life of Indira Manikam.

Indrani Kopal
September 5, 2017

Cast



**Guru 'Nattuva Thilagam'
Mrs. Indira Manikam**

Director & Principal of
Tanjai Kamalaa Indira
Dance School

Guru "Nattuva Thilagam" Mrs. Indira Manikam is the younger of the two sisters. Mrs. Indira was educated in Convent Sentul Primary and continued her primary education in India. She later finished her secondary education in High School, KL and CIMA College until Lower Six-Science. Besides excelling in studies, Indira Manikam is also an outstanding Indian classical dance graduate from Tanjavur, India. She is also lucky to be blessed with a supportive husband, Dr. Manikam, three beautiful and talented children. Mrs. Indira Manikam who started dancing from a tender age of two, learnt Bharathanatyam from Tanjore Pichaiya Pillai Bharathanatya Vidyalaya. From a mere talented dancer, she finally established the Tanjai Kamalaa Indira Bharathanatya Vidyalaya in 1966 which has now become one of the leading dance schools in Malaysia.

For the past 51 years, Mrs. Indira Manikam has been greatly committed to inculcating traditional values to the youths by promoting and developing Indian dance and culture. The dance school has catered to a variety of dance enthusiasts in the society regardless of their age, creed or religion. Many have come to learn not only the divine art but also the culture and language. In addition to that, the school also conducts Veenai, Carnatic vocal and Thevaram classes. This indirectly enables and provides the students with opportunities to diversify and amplify their classical talents. The school has established various centres in Jalan Ipoh, Petaling Jaya, Seremban, Kajang, Serdang, Rawang, Batang Berjuntai and Kuala Kubu Baru. Mrs. Indira Manikam has successfully produced her own Bharathanatyam graduates. These dance graduates were tutored and nurtured to become dance teachers and have taken over many of her classes. As a result, Mrs. Indira nowadays mainly concentrates on the main branches such as Jalan Ipoh, Kajang and Sungai Buloh.

Mrs. Indira Manikam has staged many dance dramas and dance recitals. Many of these dramas were organised with its main aim to raise funds for the needy. Mrs. Indira has been awarded with several titles such as 'Narthana Peroli', 'Gnanaoli Thiruchudar', 'Natiya Sudaroli', 'Natiya Kalai Arasi', 'Natiya Kala Devi', 'Natiya Kala Rani', 'Nattuva Thilagam', 'Kalaimamani', 'Natiya Nadaga Thilagam' and several Lifetime Achievement Awards in recognition of her dancing and teaching skills.

Mrs. Indira has always devoted her time to teaching dance as well as culture and moral values. She has conducted many lecture-demonstrations and workshops on dance and also lectures on the art of dancing and its contribution to character building. She has travelled to many towns in Malaysia as a judge for competitions; among them were those organized by the Tamil Nesan newspaper, Nestle Company, Cine Fashion Magazine and Kuyil magazine.

Mrs. Indira Manikam's students have undergone not only dance training in her dance school but have also learnt about the culture. She has guided many of them towards the right path therefore contributing a great deal to the betterment of our Malaysian Indian youths. Most of her students have been privileged to be counseled by Mrs. Indira not only in dance but in personal and social matter as well. Mrs. Indira was also the Chairperson of the Women Section of the Silambam Organisation (Indian Martial Arts) from 1995-1998.

During this period, she encouraged young girls to learn this martial art and she managed to raise funds for the organisation. She was also the cultural leader for Wilayah Persekutuan state and Selangor state (MIC) branch in 1976. Under her leadership, she promoted and sustained a reputable standard for Indian cultural performances.



Mrs. Indira Manikam has held a prominent position the Council of Yasi Cultural Association under the distinguished Chairmanship of Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu. Mrs. Indira is also a council member of the Tamil Artist Association. In 2009, she founded the Malaysia Bharathanatya Dance Association, with its main aim to congregate all the Malaysian dance teachers and students under one roof for their development in the dance field. Apart from being the Founder and President of this Association, Mrs. Indira Manikam is also one of the Directors in the NLFCS (National Land Finance Society) Arts and Cultural Foundation. She is also the Financial Director of KM Vet Pharm Sdn. Bhd., a Veterinary pharmaceuticals business which was founded by her husband in 1991.

Mrs. Indira Manikam, has no doubt been able to contribute towards the betterment of our Malaysian youths of today. Through her dance dramas and classes she has managed to encourage students to realize and appreciate their inborn talents and skills plus being involved in worthwhile activities. From a dancer, teacher and choreographer, 'Nattuva Thillagam' Mrs. Indira Manikam has elevated herself to a much respected and prominent figure in the Indian society. Her contributions will certainly be great asset in the character building of our younger generation.

Awards and Titles

‘Natya Kalai Arasi’ & ‘Aadal Nangai’:

In 1965, both the founders were awarded the titles by the Senior Prince of Tanjavur, Sreeman Rajashree Rajaram Raja Saheeb Charthapathy, during their Arangetram.

‘Nattuva Thilagam’:

On 13th June 1990, this prestigious title was conferred to Mrs. Indira Manikam by the Bavu Pillai Bharathanatya Academy, Tanjavur, for her excellent mastery and magnificent skill on the Nattuvangam (Indian cymbal).

‘Natya Kaladevi’ & ‘Natya Kala Raani’:

In 1997, Mrs. Indira Manikam was honoured by the World Tamil Sangam and World Tamil Federation, for her untiring devotion and dedicated service to propagate the divine art in Malaysia.

‘Gnanaoli Thiruchudar’:

On 10th September 2006, in conjunction with the school’s 40th Anniversary celebrations, Mrs. Indira Manikam was honoured by Dr VG Santhosham, Chairman of VGP Group of Companies, India, for her contribution towards social service, religious harmony and humanity.

‘Narthana Peroli’:

On 14th January 2007, during the celebrations of the 31st Thyagaraja Arathana, Sangeethalayam conferred the title to Mrs. Indira Manikam, for her meritorious service in dance.

‘Best Costume Design’ – BOH Cameronian Award 2008:

‘Spectacular Sivagamiyin Sabatham’, the 1st Tamil dance drama in Bharathanatyam genre to be staged at the National Theatre (Istana Budaya) bagged this prestigious award.

‘Natya Sudaroli’:

On 2nd July 2008, Mrs. Indira Manikam was awarded for her service towards the art, in conjunction with the launching ceremony of the book, ‘Dance in Tamil Cinema’ by the author, Mr.V.K.Sundarasegaran

Awards and Titles

‘Lifetime Achievement Award’:

On 5th September 2011, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Tan Sri Dato’ Hj Muhyiddin Hj Mohd Yassin presented this award to Mrs. Indira Manikam for her relentless services in the field of Bharathanatyam, which was organized by The Malaysia Nanban.

‘Kalaimamani’:

On 15th April 2012, the organising committee presented this prestigious award to Mrs. Indira Manikam during Thamilar Thirunaal 2012 celebrations at Stadium Melawati attended by more than 10,000 spectators.

‘Lifetime Achievement Award’:

On 15th December 2012, Astro Vaanavil presented this award to Mrs. Indira Manikam during the grand finale of ‘Yutha Medai’ dance competition.

‘Natya Nadaga Thilagam’:

On 4th January 2014, The Tan Sri KR Soma Arts & Culture Foundation awarded Mrs. Indira Manikam for her achievements in directing & producing dance dramas.

‘Audience Choice Award’- BOH Cameronian Award 2014:

Kannagi: The Wrath of a Chaste Woman, which was staged at 7 locations throughout Malaysia, became an audience favorite thus winning the award in 2014.

‘Longest operating dance school in Malaysia’:

On 10th of June 2016, the Malaysia Book of Records recognized TKI as the longest operating dance school in Malaysia on the occasion of TKI’s Golden Jubilee Celebration.

‘Thanjai Kala Rathna’:

On 10th of June 2016, the Thanjavur Heritage Arts & Cultural Academy conferred Mrs. Indira Manikam with this prestigious title on the occasion of TKI’s Golden Jubilee Celebration

Tanjavur Late Veteran Guru Shri K.P.Kittappa Pillai’s Memorial Award:

On 21st April 2017, Mrs. Indira Manikam was awarded by Senior Prince of Tanjore, Rajahsri S. Babaji Rajah Bhonsle during the Tanjavur Sri Brahadeshwarar Temple Brahmotsavam’s Chinna Melam Festival.

Cast



Dr. K. Manikam

Founder and CEO
KM VET PHARM Sdn Bhd

The unassuming Dr. Manikam has been described by his wife, Mrs. Indira Manikam, as her pillar of strength and the reason for her success. Having been married with Mrs. Indira Manikam for almost four decades, Dr. Manikam remains as enthusiastic as ever when it comes to Bharathanatyam and the arts.

Dr. Manikam, graduated as a Veterinarian from the Madras Veterinary College in 1976. He travelled extensively in India and has worked with the farmers practicing traditional veterinary medicine. After returning to Malaysia, he joined as a tutor in University Putra Malaysia. Having given the opportunity to join the banking industry, Dr. Manikam worked as an Assistant Manager – Animal Husbandry Loan Department, for 15 years in United Asian Bank Berhad (CIMB). As it has always been his dream to provide quality healthcare and nutrition for animals, Dr. Manikam left the banking industry and founded KM Vet Pharm Sdn Bhd in 1990. KM Vet Pharm emerged as the largest supplier for herbal supplements for livestock and pet animals.

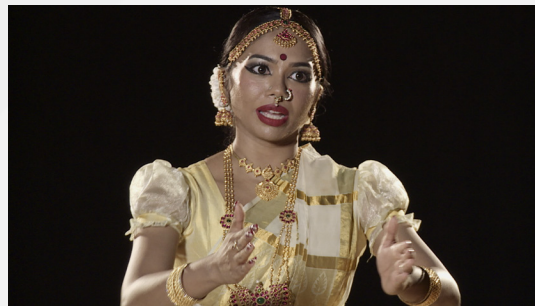
Dr. Manikam is the number one fan of Mrs. Indira Manikam. Though being a Veterinarian and an entrepreneur, he has never shied away from Tanjai Kamalaa Indira Dance School's productions. He goes to the extent of sourcing and procuring materials from India for the production. Dr. Manikam can be seen at every rehearsals and productions of Tanjai Kamalaa Indira Dance School guiding the students and giving advice to his wife.



Shamini Manikam

Shamini is the eldest and the first dancer in the family after her mother. At the tender age of 4, Shamini completed her Salangai Poojai with much adoration and admiration of many. She has performed in various roles in TKI's productions and television advertisements. Shamini has also performed in Mauritius, India, Australia, UK and Singapore.

Graduated with Masters of Business majoring in Marketing, she is the brains behind TinkTank Training Sdn. Bhd., a training house that provides customised digital learning programmes and training workshops as well as certifications for various industries. She works with leading organisations such as Microsoft, BlueScope, MDEC, MediaCorp and etc. Shamini is also the Director of Corporate Affairs of KM Vet Pharm Sdn. Bhd.



Kamini Manikam

Born in a milieu enriched with arts and pets, Kamini Manikam is an accomplished Bharathanatyam artiste, Choreographer, Producer, Executive Director, Imagineer and Educator. She has so far performed more than 350 shows since embarking on the dancing journey at the age of 3. From thematic productions to international showcases, her performances have bagged awards and accolades from Malaysia and abroad. Among those are 'Nrithya Vilasini', 'Natya Kala Vedhika', 'Aadal Nangai' and 'Nattiya Sironmani'. She has performed extensively in Malaysia and abroad such as India, Spain, Turkey, Japan, Mauritius, Australia and Singapore.

For her service to the veterinary industry, she won the MIEC Young Entrepreneur Award in 2015. A candidate for PhD in Business, Kamini recently founded WOWGA Creativarium, an edutainment platform for both artistes and audience to educate and elevate together through arts community projects. Realising her responsibility to the family tradition, she also conducts dance classes at the Tanjai Kamalaa Indira Dance School and assists in TKI's management and artistic productions.



Posyanganapathy Manikam

Poshyanganapathy or better known as Poshyan is the youngest in the family and always been the most pampered one in the house. He started his Bharathanatyam at the age of 7 under the tutelage of his mom.

His passion for music is commendable; he is versatile in playing the percussions such as Mridangam, Gaddam, Ganjira, Dholak etc. He has also founded a musical band called KYK Fusion, with his friends. He is the Lighting coordinator for most of TKI's productions.

Poshyan graduated as a Pharmacist from Bandung Institute of Technology 2010. He was appointed as Clinical pharmacist in Hospital Sultanah Aminah Johor Bahru and Assistant Director of Pharmaceutical Enforcement Agency of Johor Bahru. Currently Poshyan is the Managing Director and Veterinary Pharmacist of KM Vet Pharm Sdn Bhd.

Tanjai Kamalaa Indira Dance School



The Tanjai Kamalaa Indira Dance School, pioneers of Indian classical dance schools and the most popular school of the Tanjavur style of Bharathanatyam in Malaysia, was established in 1966 by two sisters, Ms. Kamala and Ms. Indira. Mr. Azhli Arul Dass, a famous dramatist, known as the “Protector of Drama”, officially inaugurated the school on the 2nd of September 1966. The school initially had its classes at Thambusamy Pillai Tamil School, Sentul and gradually spread its wings to Gombak, Jalan Ipoh, Brickfields, Petaling Jaya, Kepong, Klang, Kajang, UPM Serdang, Seremban and Johor. Due to the growing number of students and adherence to quality training, classes are currently conducted at the Main centre- Jalan Ipoh, Kajang and Sungai Buloh.

TKI Dance School is undoubtedly the first Indian classical dance school in Malaysia to introduce and emphasize the importance of Salangai Poojai, in regards to motivate students and encourage more people to pursue this divine art during the 1960's. To date, the school has conducted Salangai Poojai for more than 1000 students, 57 Arangetram, 21 thematic production and numerous dance recitals. The school continues to generate excellent dancers and choreographers. Some graduates from the school are now conducting their own dance classes successfully all over the country and overseas.

The school has carved a niche in the annals of Indian classical dance institutions in Malaysia by being the longest established Indian classical dance academy spanning 51 years in propagating this ancient form of dance. TKI Dance School received the Malaysia Book of Records award for “Longest Operating Dance School in Malaysia” during its Golden Jubilee Celebration on 10th of June 2016.

The Director



Indrani Kopal is an award winning Malaysian documentary filmmaker. She is a former video journalist at Malaysiakini.tv with over six years of experience in online media production. In 2010, Indrani attended the International Emerging Documentary Filmmakers Fellowship program at The Documentary Center at The George Washington University in the US. This fellowship eventually led her to end the career in video-journalism in 2012 to study documentary storytelling full-time. She received Fulbright scholarship in 2012 to pursue Masters in Fine Arts (MFA) in Documentary Studies and Production at Hofstra University in New York.

Her short documentaries have been screened at various venues in the United States. Her documentary “The Game Changer” has been accepted into seventeen film festivals and won the best documentary award at the prestigious Cannes’ American Pavilion Emerging Filmmaker Showcase in Cannes, France.

Indrani founded Far East Documentary Center out of a passion for documentary film. This project has been in works since 2011. She wants to develop, produce and eventually distribute documentary films and also to raise the awareness of the role of the documentary genre itself in creating significant impact in the region.

Awards & Honors



- 2016 AGNI Youth Icon Award.
- 2015 Kalai Payanam Award, Certificate for International Achievement.
- 2015 Great Women Of Our Time Award for “Arts & Media” by The Malaysian Women’s Weekly Magazine.
- 2015 Best Student Documentary Award at The American Pavilion Emerging Filmmaker Showcase Presented by American Express at Cannes, France.
- 2014 Bustle’s Annual Upstart Award.
- 2014 Best Short Documentary at 9th Annual Harlem International Film Festival, New York.
- 2012-2014 Fulbright Malaysian Graduate Study And Research Scholarship Award.
- 2010 George Washington University 2010 International Emerging Documentary Filmmakers Fellowship.
- 2008 Most Outstanding Asian Youth Ambassador (AYA) Award, Runner up.
- 2007 Justin Louis Award in Freedom Film Festival, Film ‘She’s My Son’.

The Producer



Maran Perianen started his career as a video editor. He joined now defunct MITV in 2004 and eventually made Senior Producer tasked with managing content production. He has been actively involved digital content production for television and web after leaving MITV.

In 2007, he joined Malaysiakini as Program Director to develop Citizen Journalism and Video content. He is also a regionally acclaimed video journalism trainer and has assisted many media and non-governmental organisation through out Southeast Asia to identify and roll out digital content for online publications and social media initiative. He has been actively involved in providing distinctive ideas in creating contents which appeals to the online masses.

Maran also has been involved in various documentary production as Producer, Executive Producer and Director. Currently he runs his content production studio, Pravda Studio and also co-founded Far East Documentary Centre.

Crew - Key Figures



SENTHILKUMARAN MUNIANDY
Director of Photography

Senthilkumaran is an upcoming Director of Photography in Malaysian cinema field. He won the Best Cinematography during the Malaysian Film Festival for the movie Jagat. Apart from lending his expertise to others, he has also directed few telemovies and shortfilms for local channels.



NAVIN KUMAR
First Camera Assist & Second Camera

Navin Kumar completed his technical studies at Finas Film Institute in 2009 and began his career as assistant cameraman, working his way up through the ranks while focusing primarily on various documentary projects. In 2012, he directed and edited a short documentary titled "Here to Help".



JESON GNANAPNEGASAM
Sound Designer - Soundniverse

Jeson's forte has always been the passion he had for sound and audio from his schooling days. Started as song writer, beat producer and composer back then, Jeson had made his way into the industry from just a talent interest into an accomplishing career.

Production stills



Crew

Director
Indrani Kopal

Producer
Maran Perianen

Executive Producer
Tanjai Kamalaa Indira Dance School

Director of Photography
Senthilkumaran Muniandy

2nd Camera
Navin Kumar Perianen

2nd Camera Assistant
Joshua Gunasegaran

Sound Design & Mixing
Jeson Gnanapnegasam

Subtitling & Transcript
Gana Prakash Subramaniam

Post Production Support
Prem Nath (Merp Film Factory)
Kino-i Pictures

Editor
Indrani Kopal

Story Consultant
Derek Burrows

Production Support
Pravda Studio

Final Sound Mix
Soundniverse Studio

Music

Orchestra

Nattuvangam
Kalaimamani Guru Herambanathan
Sreerag Sajeev

Vocalist
Bavani Logeswaran
Thiepaan Raaj

Violin
Sriram Seshadri

Flute
Kuzhal Kesavan

Mridangam & Kanjira
Prathap Sharma

Keyboard
Giri Balakrishnan

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