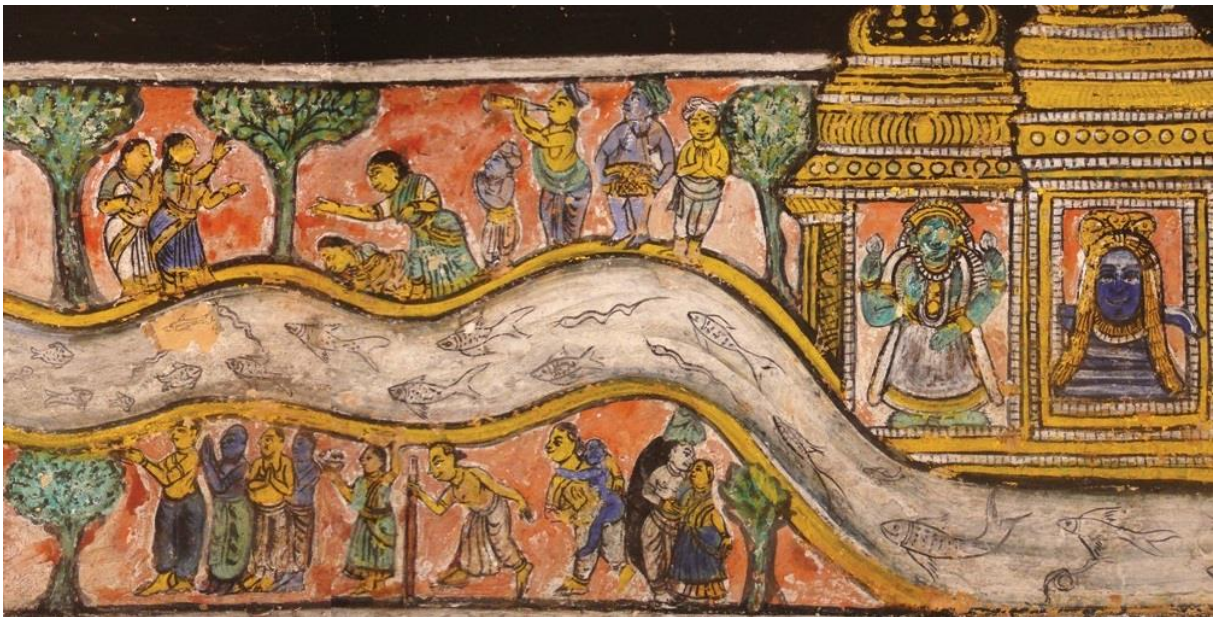


***YATRA - journey into the world of DEVADASI performing arts***  
***with Paramparai Foundation***  
<https://vimeo.com/140105118>

*The YATRA Residency in Tamil Nadu addresses those who are passionate about South Indian performing arts and their **living** history. This program situates the cultural heritage of **devadasis** in the continuing traditions of Hindu temple ritual, its music and dance repertoire.*

*Until the middle of the last century **devadasis** were also called **melakkarar** 'performing artists': their music and dance played a crucial role in Hindu temples and royal courts. (Post-)Colonial Indian developments transferred this artistic heritage to a new social group of leisured performers; a new name 'Bharata Natyam', a new secular stage and a new format came to reach out worldwide.*

*The **Devadasi Act** -an Indian Law of November 26,1947- forbade dedication of women to temples and religious icons. As a result, the relevance of these hereditary arts and artists became alienated from their traditional place in Hindu ritual and society.*



*YATRA connects remaining threads of devadasi heritage to their original, functional environment of the Hindu temple and royal court. It does so by observing, sharing, training, studying and travelling one month through Tamil Nadu while based in the Kaveri Delta; for an early experimental version of YATRA see the documentary 'The Smile of Tyagaraja (2003)': <https://vimeo.com/107884166>*

***Three devadasi/ melakkaran family repertoires inform the YATRA curriculum:***

**Week ONE:** first and foremost, the ritual heritage of **Smt.P. Ranganayaki** (1914-2005) - one of the last devadasis, dedicated to the Murugan temple in Tiruttani (North Arcot, Tamil Nadu). She was trained by her maternal grandmother Smt. Subburatnamma (1871-1950) who noted down her entire repertoire in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu script. Saskia Kersenboom received this manuscript and ritual praxis from Smt.P. Ranganayaki as her student and rightful heir. In **Tirupugalur** we will observe '**arcana**' in the local Shiva Agnishvara temple. These rituals form the natural context for Smt.P. Ranganayaki's daily, weekly and festival repertoire that we will study there.



**Week TWO:** Contemporary practice of temple music proves that the devadasi cultural heritage is not a thing of the past. Some twenty kilometres southwards, in the ancient town of **Tiruvapur**, we encounter the second family repertoire. Here, melakkaran musicians of the Shri Tyagarajasvami temple still perform songs that used to accompany devadasis in daily and festival ritual until 1947. Their dances are vivid memories of Shri T.K.**Selvaganapati** whose musical lineage goes back over eleven generations. Together with his family and colleagues Saskia works on reconstructing this 'living devadasi archive' into dance repertoire. YATRA will share this ongoing collaboration.







*EXCURSIONS* to historical sites trace the origin from where the devadasi arts of music and dance migrated to urban centres. The Kaveri Delta resounds with echoes of famous composers, choreographers and poets. Their lineages „**bani**” hail from towns like Pandanallur, Valuvur, Mayuram, Kumbhakonam - all in the vicinity of Tirupugalur.

**Week THREE:** YATRA travels westwards to discover the „royal dimension” of devadasi performing arts in the cultural epicentre **Tanjavur**. This city with its medieval Shiva Brihadishvara temple and Royal Palace was the home of sophisticated, courtly traditions of devadasi dance now known as „Bharata Natyam”. Choreographies of the legendary 'Tanjavur Quartet' and family heritage of Smt. Tanjavur **Balasaraswati** (1918-1984) date back to this temple and court of the 18th century.

Between 1975 and 1995 Saskia studied this royal heritage in Chennai with Smt. Nandini Ramani, a senior student of Smt. T. Balasaraswati. We will study (in part) a Tanjavur Quartet Varnam and hope to encounter living memories of this courtly lineage, aided by contemporary descendants. See “Bala” (1976) documentary on the artist and her world: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rCCoagZzUU>.



In and around Tanjavur it is clear that Hindu ritual encompasses all dimensions of the **Triloka**, that is, of the 'three worlds' where Gods, Mortals and Demons interact. Devadasis performed in ancient temples, in royal courts and in village shrines, emerging as **caladevi** 'living embodiments' of **Shakti** - the 'Powerful Goddess'. Their role in these three worlds shone brightly in **Tantra** traditions that spread all over Asia during the heydays of the Chola Empire (9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Cent.CE).

**Week FOUR:** *YATRA* follows this Tantric trail heading North for **Chidambaram** where a branch of the Kaveri river merges with the Indian Ocean. For over a thousand years, mystics, poets, devotees, singers, composers and dancers have been paying obeisance to **Shiva Nataraja** in this Golden Shrine. A Padam by Muttu Tandavar (16<sup>th</sup> Cent.) and poetry of Manikkavacakar (9<sup>th</sup> Cent.) evoke his **Ananda Tandava** 'Dance of Bliss'. Shiva performs this dance, with the lovely Shivakami at his side, during the month of Markali (December-January) under the star of Arudra. His grand procession can be witnessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXyfWOXn9GY> (German voice-over).

This Ananda, the ultimate union of **Shiva-Shakti**, holds the „secret of Chidambaram” as well as the secret of devadasis and their performing arts.



**References:**

*YATRA* revisits the field-work that underlies the Residency course book *NITYASUMANGALI...*; one (Pocket edition) copy will be handed out to each participant on arrival in Tirupugalur.

\* *NITYASUMANGALI - Devadasi Tradition in South India*, by Saskia Kersenboom, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, 1998, 2002, 2011;

\* or, its earlier PhD version (Utrecht University, 18 May, 1984) at [www.academia.edu/25304347](http://www.academia.edu/25304347)

\* and other related Essays at [www.amsterdam.academia.edu/SaskiaKersenboom](http://www.amsterdam.academia.edu/SaskiaKersenboom)

\* [www.paramparai.eu](http://www.paramparai.eu) for Paramparai Foundation



**GENERAL INFORMATION on YATRA Residency ( <https://vimeo.com/140105118> )**



**WHO:** YATRA forms part of the Curriculum 'Dasi Attam - dance of the devadasis' accredited by the International Dance Council-UNESCO, Paris [www.paramparai.eu/html/pdf/CID-DASI-ATTAM.pdf](http://www.paramparai.eu/html/pdf/CID-DASI-ATTAM.pdf) However, this **150hrs. Residency** is also accessible to students, teachers and *Rasikas* of South Indian performing arts in general who are interested in '*Devadasi Heritage*'.

YATRA is conducted in English by **Dr. Saskia Kersenboom** in collaboration with local partners.

**WHEN:** four weeks during the Tamil month of *TAI*: from January 17 to February 13, 2017

**CAPACITY:** *Devadasi Heritage* touches the inner core of Hindu worship. Visits to temples and working with priests and temple musicians will require a more intimate setting than the usual dance-course format. Therefore, the maximum number of participants is **four**.

**ACCOMMODATION:** *Mangala Heritage Home* in **Tirupugalur**, a traditional Tamil house in the countryside, 19 Km from Tiruvarur [www.mangalaheritagehome.in](http://www.mangalaheritagehome.in) : Board (breakfast, lunch, dinner, drinking water and laundry) and Lodge (double occupancy in Air Conditioned, large-size-bed Room).

**TRANSPORT:** Local transport: \*Chennai-Tirupugalur v.v., \*Excursions by air-conditioned car



**ALL-IN COURSE FEE** based on **four participants/ double occupancy** includes: \*Course (150hrs.) & Course materials, \*Guest Teachers from hereditary communities, \*Board & Lodge at Tirupugalur, \*Excursions, Entrance fees, Board & Lodge in Tanjavur ([www.hotelgnanam.com](http://www.hotelgnanam.com)), Chidambaram ([www.hotel-akshaya.com](http://www.hotel-akshaya.com)), \*Local Transport (see above).

**INFORMATION and APPLICATION:** [info@paramparai.eu](mailto:info@paramparai.eu)

**CHECK for updates:** [www.facebook.com/paramparai](https://www.facebook.com/paramparai)

**REGISTRATION by PAYMENT** of first half of Course Fee: on admission, or, at the *latest* 3 months prior to the start of **YATRA Residency**.