

It is indeed a privilege for me to participate in this inauguration of the "Vivekananda Sabhagar" at Kathak Kendra. I take this opportunity to congratulate Shri Mahesh Sharma, Minister for Culture, Shri N.K. Sinha, Secretary (Culture) and Shri Shekhar Sen, the Chairman of Sangeet Natak Akademi. Named after one of the greatest Indians in modern times, I am sure that this auditorium will host many a Kathak performances and programs that will foster the ideas and thoughts of Swami Vivekananda.

2. Swami Vivekananda embodied the ancient spiritual idea of India - an India that was open, assimilative and ever evolving. Kathak similarly, is a primary Indian dance form that openly embraced influences, assimilated them and evolved and perpetuated itself since its origin in the 4th Century BC and during the times of the Mahabharat.

3. From being a temple dance form to flourishing in the Durbars of Kings and Emperors, Kathak faced severe decline under the Colonial Administration. The job done by the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Kathak Kendra, since its inception in 1964 in reviving and propagating Kathak amongst the common people is truly commendable. It is also worth underlining that the Gurus that the Kathak Kendra trained, ensured that in propagating and democratizing Kathak dance, its finesse and classical richness did not get diluted.

4. It indeed makes every Indian conscious of our heritage and national character, when we see a Kathak dancer performing ode to Lord Krishna, Radha and Gopis in Vrindawan to the tunes of Hindustani Classical Sangeet, played on a Persian Sarangi, Mughal Dilruba and Bansuri. It is indeed heartening when Classical Indian 'Bhaav' and 'Ras' are expressed through the graceful movements of the Kathak Nartaki/Nartak adorned in the flowing costumes of the 'whirling dervesh's of Central Asia.

5. Swami Vivekananda had once observed, "...True Art can be compared to a lily which springs from the ground, takes its nourishment from the ground, is in touch with the ground, and yet is quite high above it. So Art must be in touch with nature — and wherever that touch is gone, Art degenerates — yet it must be above nature." In saying so, Swami Ji put an enormous onus of excellence on the artist. Such excellence of being grounded and yet elevate oneself above the ground can only be achieved through enormous-almost super human discipline, patience, practice and concentration. The Classical Indian art form, especially dance, I am proud, fully stands up to the standards of excellence that he expected.

6. Swami Ji himself acknowledged this when he says, and I quote, "Drama is the most difficult of all arts. In it two things are to be satisfied -- first, the ears, and second, the eyes. To paint a scene, if one thing be painted, it is easy enough; but to paint different things and yet to keep up the central interest is very difficult. Another difficult thing is stage - management that is, combining different things in such a manner as to keep the central interest intact." Even more difficult is dance which encompasses drama, like Kathak does. It is *abhinaya*, *nritya*, *taal* and *sur* all being played together by the performing artist in a symphony that keeps the audience focussed.

7. I am informed, that, in addition to providing instruction in Kathak, the Kathak Kendra offers diplomas in the tabla and the pakhawaj.

8. Swami Vivekananda, whose name adorns this beautiful auditorium that has been inaugurated today, was not only a good singer but was also an accomplished pakhawaj player. We talk so much about Swamiji's profound spiritual prowess, his singular erudition, elocution and charm, that his unquestionable musicality is often forgotten. Not only was he a performer himself, the very first book he wrote was on the subject of music. He was trained in Hindustani Classical music, and it is said that towards the latter part of his life, at dawn he would tune his tanpura and sing a dhrupad composition by Tansen in the Raga Ahir Bhairav to awaken the other ashram-dwellers of the Belur Math.

9. In carrying forward and strengthening this great artistic legacy of India, the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Kathak Kendra have done an exemplary job. I wish them continued success in their endeavours and exhort them to strive for greater reach. I dedicate this Sabhagar to all the *gurus*, students and disciples of Kathak and hope Swami Vivekananda will forever bless us with his vision of excellence. I hope that the compact and fully equipped Sabhagar will help the performing Kathak dancers with a keen and discerning audience.

Jai Hind.