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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT S R NATHAN AT THE

SINGAPORE INDIAN FINE ARTS SOCIETY'S

50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER AT THE

MANDARIN SINGAPORE ON WED 27 OCT 99 AT 7.45 PM

1. Indian Singaporeans are inheritors of an old civilisation and with it much traditions. These have been preserved to this day. From wherever the ancestors came, be it from the India of today, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or Nepal, all share in each other's culture and tradition. It is therefore important that Indian Singaporeans do not choose to be separate communities, because of the political divisions in their ancestral lands or because of their differences in religion, culture or language.

2. Over the years, Indian classical dancing, as performed in Singapore, has traditionally been predominantly in the form of Bharata Natyam. In promoting this form of dances, the Indian Fine Arts Society has been in the forefront. Bharata Natyam, which had its origins in religious ceremonies, and a form of worship, is now

more a form of entertainment.

3. Besides the Bharata Natyam we are also exposed to a variety of classical styles of dancing of South Asian origin. Some came out of the traditions of the Moghul Courts. Others like Kathakali are peculiar to Kerala. There are Kuchupudi, Kathak, Manipuri and other dance forms peculiar to particular traditions or geographical origins. All these enrich our heritage in Singapore

4. In the enjoyment of such dance performances, one well-known exponent of Baratha Natyam has said "Our Eyes must see; Our Ears must hear; Our Bodies must utter" whether it be for dancer or the audience.

5. While the Indian Fine Arts Society must be complimented for its role in promoting traditional South Asian dance forms and music through its teaching programmes and performances, there are many young Indian Singaporeans who find greater enjoyment in other forms of musical entertainment. They find modern film-songs or dance-forms much more to their liking. Perhaps they are less inclined to take up classical dancing and singing for other reasons. The long and difficult road one needs to travel to master them, by the traditional methods, could be one reason. Such young people who are not inclined to participate in the Society's activities, must be encouraged to have a basic knowledge of their particular areas of interest. The Society could assist these people by arranging special classes which will provide them with the necessary grounding and foundation in the basics of music and dance. That should help them develop their talent and interests more fully. They could have for example: specially tailored one to two-year programmes instead of the full five or eight year courses that the Society now has. This would be a further widening of the scope of work for the Society. It will show recognition for those young people, who are less than fully dedicated to classical music and dance.

6. Apart from those Indian Singaporeans, outside the mainstream of the Society's present day activities, the Society has also an obligation to promote the appreciation and enjoyment of South Asian performances by Singaporeans of other ethnic origins, traditions and faiths. Since there is the telling of a story behind each dance form and performance, the Society need also find ways to help Indian Singaporeans from different linguistic and ethnic origins, as well as those of non-Indian origins to enjoy your programmes. A more elaborate narration of what takes place on stage could help. The laymen will then understand the performance better and be entertained and educated at the same time. That should help everyone know better the rich heritage of Indian Singaporeans.

7. The Society should also search for additional avenues to reach out to all Singaporeans, whether it is through Community Clubs, schools or similar institutions. Only then will it be said to have fulfilled its obligations and achieved its objectives.

8. My wife and I are happy to be with you on this occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Society. I wish the Society many more years and much greater success in its efforts to promote the Fine Arts of South Asia for all to enjoy.

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