



Centre for Comparative Literature
Bhasha Bhavana
Visva-Bharati
cordially invites you to

A Lecture-Demonstration on

**Courting Cultures: The Multicultural
Past of Performing Traditions in Early
Modern South India**

by

Dr Swarnamalya

Dance Historian , Performer, Educator
Director, Ranga Mandira Academy of World
Dance/ Performance and Indic Studies
Associate Professor of Practice, Global Arts,
KREA University

Date

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Time

12 PM

Venue

Room No. 40
Bhasha Bhavana

ABSTRACT

The popular histories of Karnatic Music and Bharatanatyam in post-colonial India have largely sought to establish an unbroken lineage rooted in Hindu-Sanskritic-Vedic traditions. However, when examined alongside political and social histories, the performing arts of Early Modern South India reveal a far more cosmopolitan past. These traditions were profoundly shaped by the intercultural encounters enabled by trade, travel, and settlement of diverse global communities across the region.

Drawing from my research of the rich cultural sources, including *Yakshaganamu-s*, *Caritramu-s*, and performance treatises from the Telugu Nayaka courts in Tamil country, along with the living cultural memory of hereditary performers associated with various *Samastanam-s* and *Zamindari-s*, that highlight the multicultural imprints embedded in Sadir (the precursor to the now classicized Bharatanatyam): influences of Islamic cultures, the infusion of Persian, Dakhni, Marathi and other linguistic compositional and cultural forms, and the engagements with West Asian, Dutch, English, and European cultures and communities.

In the courts of rulers such as *Raghunatha Nayaka* and *Vijayaraghava Nayaka*, and later within the diplomatic landscape of the places like the *Pudukkottai Samastanam*, performance functioned as a crucial medium of cultural negotiation. It served not merely as entertainment but as a sophisticated instrument for fostering commensurability between diverse faiths, languages, and political powers. Courtly Cultures, repositions South India's performance traditions as vibrant sites of multicultural exchange and shared cultural histories.

(She will be joined on this occasion by her disciples Padmasani, Smrithika, Rajita and Pavitra)