

Guru Govindan Kutty Founder of Kalamandalam Kolkata

Guru Govindan Kutty (79), the doyen of Kathakali dance passed away peacefully in the early hours of 5th January in Kolkata. He leaves behind his wife Guru Thankamani Kutty and three sons Mohan, Somnath and Sukumar, and a host of students and admirers.

Govindan Kutty was born on the 13th November 1927 in the little village of Kuruvattur in Palghat, Kerala. His maternal grandfather Kandappa Kurup and his father Kuruvattur Meletil Kunhan Nair were both established Kathakali artists. At the persistent request of Vallathol Narayana Menon (famous poet and founder of Kerala Kalamandalam), Govindan Kutty was allowed to enroll in Kerala Kalamandalam at the age of 13. He stayed in Kalamandalam for seven years and graduated in 1949. There he was fortunate to learn Kathakali from stalwarts like Pattikamtodi Ramunni Menon, Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, Kadampur Gopalan Nair, Mani Madhava Chakyar and Kavalappara Narayanan Nair.

He became a member of dancer-actress Tara Chowdhury's troupe in



Madras and later joined Mrinalini Sarabhai's troupe Darpana in Ahmedabad. For five years he performed with them and travelled extensively, performing in Sri Lanka, Egypt, Lebanon, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Equador, Columbia, Panama, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico, Japan, Thailand [Bangkok], U.S.A., France, England, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, East Germany, and Italy.

In July 1955 Govindan Kutty went to Calcutta. His roots in Kolkata became stronger when he joined Rabindra Bharati University in 1962 as a teacher of Kathakali. He retired as a Reader in 1992. His achievements are numerous. Along with his wife Thankamani Kutty (an exponent of Bharatanatyam and Mohini Attam), he established Kalamandalam – Calcutta (a school for South Indian classical dances) in 1968, and brought about a change in the classical dance scene in the metropolis. In 1976 he launched the Kathakali Club of Calcutta which periodically organised traditional performances of Kathakali in the city. After some years the Club grew into the Kathakali Art Centre with Guru Govindan Kutty as Founder-Secretary.

Govindan Kutty was a nimble and agile dancer and had a sensitive and theatrical flair for dramatic communication. His innovations, within the framework of the classical form, added colour and variety to his dancing and choreography.

The Government of West Bengal conferred the "Uday Shankar Life Time Achievement Award" on Guru Govindan Kutty.

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