

ÁHUTI

**The Nrityagram Dance Ensemble in
collaboration with the Chitrasena Dance
Company**



PROJECT REPORT

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

“Chitrasena and Vajira are not only great dancers and artists, they are legends and they are a Sri-Lankan tradition.”—Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy

Founded by Guru Chitrasena with a vision to inspire and exhilarate through the traditional dances and drums of Sri Lanka, the Chitrasena Vajira Dance Foundation has always been at the forefront of transforming the traditional arts landscape in Sri Lanka. Guru Chitrasena founded his dance company in 1943, pioneering the way for Sri-Lanka’s traditional dances, confined to the village rituals and perahera’s, to be carefully adapted to meet the standards of the world stage. By reviving and refining elements of ancient rituals, he was able to present a unique and highly acclaimed dance-art to contemporary audiences; while the Chitrasena Kalayathanaya (School of Dance) was a first in the country with a primary focus on training professional traditional dance artistes for the stage, through a homegrown robust syllabus that sets the Chitrasena style apart.

As the Chitrasena Dance Company celebrates 80 years of impactful work, the Foundation planned to present a globally acclaimed production, “Āhuti”, — a dance collaboration between India’s and Sri Lanka’s premier dance companies – Nrityagram and Chitrasena.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

India and Sri Lanka, as member nations of various regional and multilateral organizations, have strived for years to bolster their cultural and commercial ties. Recognizing the deep-rooted historical bond between the two countries spanning over 2500 years, the staging of Āhuti aimed to further enrich the understanding of their shared culture and history.

- 1. Promotion of Ancient Dance Forms:** The project aimed to foster a greater appreciation for two ancient dance forms, Odissi and Kandyan, and present them to modern audiences in a relevant and compelling manner. By showcasing the beauty and intricacy of these art forms, we sought to preserve and promote cultural heritage.
- 2. Unity Through Art:** At the Chitrasena Dance Company, we firmly believe in the unifying power of art, transcending differences in race, religion, ethnicity, and geographical setting. Despite the diverse evolution of dance in India and Sri Lanka, the project aimed to highlight the common cultural roots shared by both countries and deepen bilateral bonds through meaningful collaboration.

3. **Exposure to International Standards:** Āhuti presented a rare chance for Sri Lankan audiences to experience art and artists of global acclaim. By bringing together Nrityagram and Chitrasena, both recognized worldwide for their excellence, the project aimed to expose local audiences to international standards of artistic expression and performance.

PROGRAMME OUTLINE

Building on the creative bond forged between the world renowned Nrityagram Dance Ensemble of India and the Chitrasena Dance Company since 2011, *Āhuti*, is the second international collaboration between the two companies. This production seamlessly melds the traditional beauty of Odissi and Kandyan dance styles, set to exquisite rhythms from both countries. *Āhuti* was conceptualized and choreographed by Surupa Sen, Artistic Director of the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble, a recipient of the prestigious Nritya Choodamani award. Heshma Wignaraja, Artistic Director of the Chitrasena Dance Company is the Assistant choreographer and created the production's Kandyan Dance sections and the Kandyan Drum compositions were set by Prasanna Rupathilake, one of the most senior traditional drum exponents of the island.

Āhuti

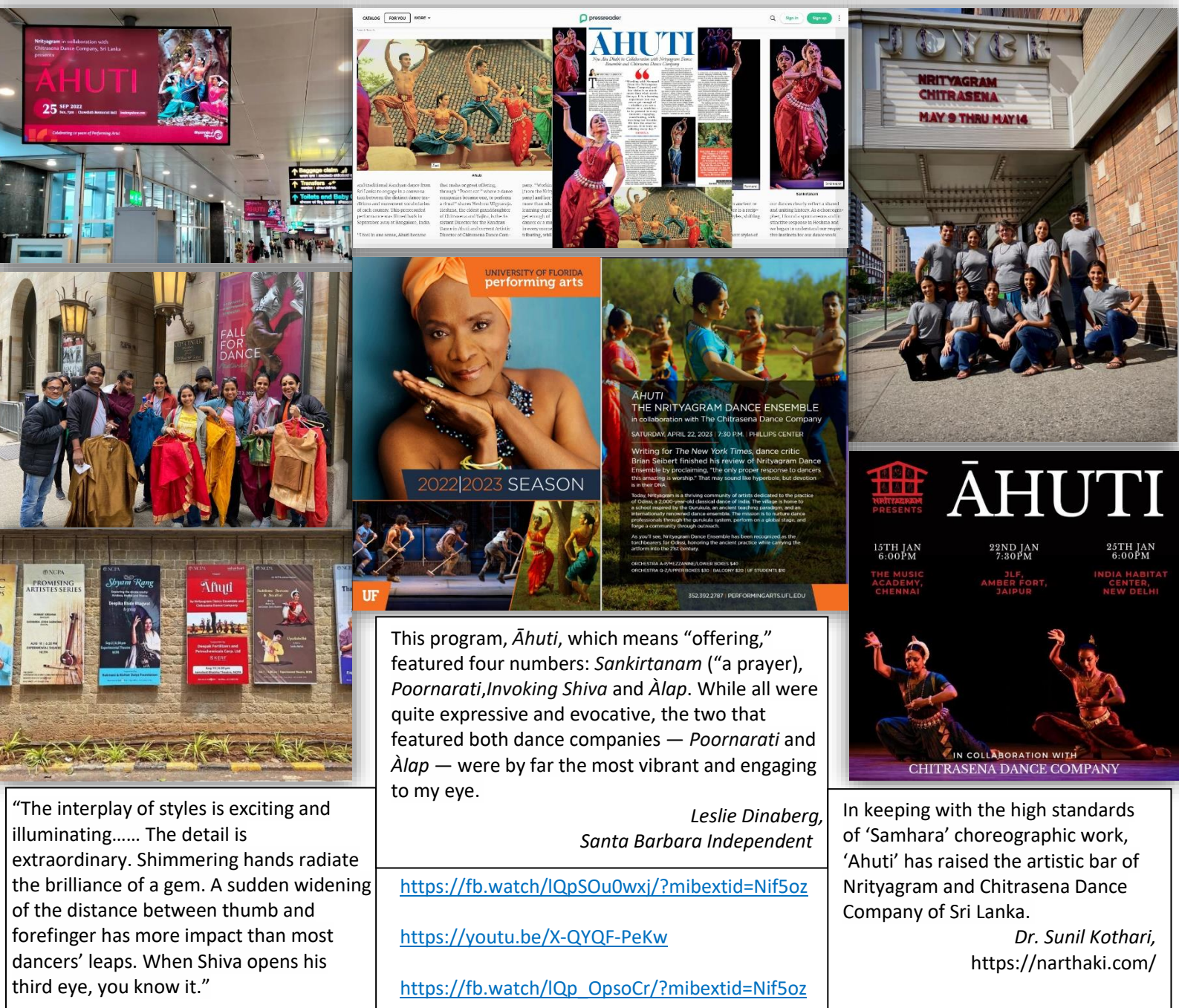
{Sanskrit: Invoking | Pali: Offering}

Accompanied by a live orchestra, the performance runs for 90 minutes including a 20 minute intermission
The team included 8 dancers, 5 musicians/percussionists and 1 technical personnel



Following the premiere of *Āhuti* at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore back in September 2019, this production has been performed across India and USA and continues to be performed at prestigious venues and festivals:

- Āhuti* is a captivating and inspiring production that has received rave reviews from critics and audiences alike.



PROJECT OUTCOME

JAFFNA- THE JAFFNA CULTURAL CENTRE 21ST OF 2024

Āhuti captivated a highly receptive audience in Jaffna, where the performance was open to all without ticketing. Free passes were distributed to those interested, resulting in an audience of approximately 500 attendees. The resounding standing ovation that concluded the performance served as a testament to its remarkable success.

COLOMBO- THE BISHOP'S COLLEGE AUDITORIUM 25TH AND 26TH OF APRIL 2024

The magic of Āhuti, which brought together the traditions of Odissi and Kandyan dance from two countries across the Palk Straits, touched many hearts and showcased the power and possibilities of true cultural collaboration. The audience's response has been overwhelmingly positive. One patron described the event as a rare and perfect blend of art that uplifted their spirits, praising the mastery and discipline of the dancers and describing the performance as "world-class" and a rare delight in Colombo. Another praised the blend of traditions, highlighting how culture could triumph where politics and economics might falter, creating an equitable meeting ground through art. These responses illustrate the profound impact of bringing such productions to Sri Lanka, and your support helped make these moments of joy and cultural pride possible.

The two performances held in Colombo received standing ovations on both days, with the team performing to an almost packed theater. The following quotes will illustrate the success and impact of bringing a world-class collaborative production between Sri Lanka and India to Sri Lankan audiences.

"The mastery of art, discipline over the bodies, colours etc... – everything was to a perfection! And THE world class performance which is hard to come by in Colombo. Congratulations and sincere thanks for bringing this experience to us in SL. And please convey my many thanks to the dancers, artists and all those involved. It was truly a delight"

Ms. Azusa Kubota

UNDP Resident Representative in Sri Lanka

To say I enjoyed Āhuti would be an understatement. I feel the production would have run for longer – to more standing ovations, and full houses. The dance, as Sri Lanka's prima ballerina Vajra always says, is sacred. Āhuti was the best of, and featured the best from two countries. What more can one ask or pray for?

<https://sanjanah.wordpress.com/2024/05/18/ahuti-late-reflections/>

Dr. Sanjana Hattotuwa

Ashoka, Rotary World Peace and TED Fellow

"It was great to see that culture could provide an example of where different traditions could meet as equals and produce something combining the best of both, the curvaceous Odissi dancers so sensuous and the Sri Lankan dancers with their fiery energy and strength, and everyone seeming to enjoy the collaboration. The choreographers, teachers, musicians as well as the dancers should be congratulated for their skill and dedication. I have always looked askance at gurukulas as being isolated from the people but clearly there is a need for dedication, practice and perfection. I must have missed many of the little stories around the dances but enjoyed every moment and had a rare great evening. Congratulations for making this possible, and with assurances of my continued support."

Sarala Fernando,

Former Diplomat

CONCLUSION

With the conclusion of the project, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the India Sri Lanka Foundation for coming on board with us to support us in our endeavour to promote bi lateral relations between the two countries through the sustenance of heritage and culture. At a time when traditional art forms are often compromised to suit commercial opportunities, and the few traditional artists who wait patiently and fight for the right opportunities are seldom seen, your belief in the vision of our dance company is invaluable.

Therefore, thank you for your generous contribution and unwavering support. We look forward to your continued support in fostering the work of the Chitrasena Vajira Dance Foundation, helping us to achieve more moments of artistic excellence and cultural pride.

RECOGNITION OF THE ISLF

Since the India-Sri Lanka Foundation Grant was confirmed a few days before our performances, our promotional campaigns had already been published with the information at that time. However, it was agreed that displaying banners at the event venue in Colombo and mentioning the organization by the compere would suffice under the circumstances. The banners were prominently displayed in the foyer area of the Bishop's College Auditorium. We welcomed an audience of 609 on the 25th of April and 689 on the 26th of April. During our opening announcement, we acknowledged the ISLF contribution towards our project. Images of the displayed ISLF banners, the audience, and the performance are attached below.

PICTURE GALLERY



Images of the ISLF banners displayed at the Colombo venue.



Audience at the performance held at the Jaffna Cultural Centre



Audiences at the performances held at the Bishop's College Auditorium, Colombo.



Images of the performances

APPENDIX 1- EXPENSE SHEET

ACCOUNT CODE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT - RS.
	JAFFNA	
	Theatre Rental (Jaffna Cultural Centre)	
E11.3	Rehearsal and performance charges, MEP Srvices, Lighting Services & Cleaning Services	423,750.00
	Hire of Technical Equipment (Unique Sounds (Pvt) Ltd)	
E11.1	Hiring of a professional sound system for Jaffna	395,000.00
	Total Expenses	818,750.00