

kalakshetra

F O U N D A T I O N



Kalakshetra Foundation
Thiruvannmiyur
Chennai - 600041



Kalakshetra F O U N D A T I O N

"It will be my greatest happiness to know that in its own humble way, Kalakshetra is helping to make more beautiful, more artistic, the lives of all - that in the education of the young, creative reverence for that spirit of the beautiful which knows no distinction of race, nation or faith has a pre-eminent place..."

Rukmini Devi Arundale



INTRODUCTION

RUKMINI DEVI COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

BHARTANATYAM

REPERTORY

CARNATIC MUSIC

VISUAL ARTS

MAP OF KALAKSHETRA

PART TIME COURSES

SCHOOLS

MUSEUM

LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES AND PUBLICATIONS

PERFORMANCE SPACES

CONTACT DETAILS

ABOUT OUR FOUNDER

RUKMINI DEVI ARUNDALE 1904 -1986

Rukmini Devi was born in the temple town of Madurai in the erstwhile Madras Presidency, now in Tamil Nadu. She spent her early years there along with her eight siblings. Her father Neelakanta Sastry who was very “forward thinking” initiated the family into the philosophy of the Theosophical Society, which freed religion from superstition.

She grew up in the environment of the Theosophical Society, influenced and inspired by people like Dr. Annie Besant, Dr. George Sydney Arundale, C. W. Leadbeater and other thinkers and theosophists of the time.

In 1920, she married Dr. George Sydney Arundale. Although they faced a great deal of opposition from the conservative society of Madras, they stayed firm in their resolve and worked together in the years that followed.



KALAKSHETRA'S ORIGINS

In August 1935, Rukmini Devi along with her husband Dr. George Sydney Arundale and her brother Yagneshwaran met with a few friends to discuss a matter of great importance to her – the idea of establishing an arts centre where some of the arts, particularly music and dance, could thrive under careful guidance. On 6 January 1936, the International Centre for Arts (as it was initially known) was founded within the campus of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, in Chennai (then Madras). Rukmini Devi headed the institution with the



active support of Dr. Arundale and their mentor Dr. Annie Besant. It would later come to be known as Kalakshetra.

The centre began under a tree in the Theosophical Society campus with one student, Radha – Radha Burnier as she was later known. She was Rukmini Devi's niece who went on to become the President of the Theosophical Society. Soon, two other students, G. Leelavati and A. Sarada (Sarada Hoffman), joined Radha in a classroom with thatched roof and three mirrors – the famous *kannadi kottagai* of Kalakshetra. Encouraged by her husband, Rukmini Devi acquired land in the village of Thiruvannamipur, a short distance from the Theosophical Society. In 1951, a sapling of the banyan tree in the Theosophical Society was taken and planted at Thiruvannamipur. The new campus of Kalakshetra was consolidated in the years that followed until it covered one hundred lush acres besides the sea.

Rukmini Devi and her associates undertook the herculean task of finding the funds to build the institution. They built roads, planted trees and found committed architects, engineers and building material, during a period of shortages, to create a sylvan oasis for art and education. Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer laid the foundation stone of Kalakshetra on 27 December 1961. By 7 May 1962, Kalakshetra had moved into its new home, a campus with a unique identity that reflected its founder's dream. Rukmini Devi's vision spread like the roots of the banyan tree and even today continues to grow, imparting the true values and spirit of art to the present generation.

Kalakshetra Foundation was recognised by the Government of India as an Institute of National Importance by an Act of Parliament in 1993 and is now an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

RUKMINI DEVI COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

The teaching and learning of Bharatanatyam started with great expectations and has become synonymous with Kalakshetra.

The need for holistic learning necessitated a good knowledge of music, musical instruments, visual arts, languages, heritage and history. The Rukmini Devi College of Fine Arts, is the prime institute of the foundation, established on the lines of a *Gurukulam* (the ancient training tradition in the house of a guru). Here, only students with a deep passion for the traditional arts with a commitment for learning, are admitted.

The two main disciplines offered are - Performing Arts and Visual Arts. Although dance, music and visual arts belong to different disciplines, they address the same sensibility. Therefore, it became important that they grow together in a cohesive environment of learning. The natural beauty and richness of the Kalakshetra campus became the ideal setting for this.

Students from across India and abroad live in the hostel buildings amidst trees spread over an area of five acres beside the sea. They are housed in dormitories/rooms on a sharing basis. Healthy vegetarian food, cooked in the South Indian style, is provided in the dining hall for the students at regular timings. Fresh fruits, raw vegetables, milk and a variety of grains are part of the daily diet.

PERFORMING ARTS : BHARTANATYAM

The intent of the institute has been to create a consummate performer, an adept dancer, with a thorough understanding of the theoretical, literary and musical basis of the traditional art. Therefore, language, music and theory are subjects that support the main subject of study.

The Kalakshetra dancer is renowned for his/her impeccable form. One of Rukmini Devi's most far-sighted inputs to the dance was in the method of teaching the basic steps or adavus of Bharatanatyam. She classified the various adavus, and refined many of the movements, giving them a geometric precision and grace based on some principles of the Yajur Veda.

A four year Diploma course in Bharatanatyam is offered by the college as well as a Post Diploma of two years for those who have completed the diploma at Kalakshetra.



THE REPERTORY

The performance wing of Kalakshetra is an intrinsic part of the institution. It comprises of the staff, students and guest artists from among the alumni. A few senior teachers from the staff are chosen to form a panel that heads and runs the concert section. Its repertory includes all the dance dramas choreographed by its founder, as well as individual Bharatanatyam pieces, the Tanjore quartet's traditional works, and the choreography of senior teachers. Often, students who learnt directly from Rukmini Devi are invited to help revive and teach the present students. Rehearsals commence a month prior to the shows, to ensure finesse, synchronization, and perfect on-stage performance.

The concert section is supported by the music wing, which provides the sound technicians and orchestra that participates in the rehearsals. The costumes section takes care of backdrops, props, costumes, etc. The visual arts department works hand in hand with the costumes section and the backstage crew. The concert section strives to maintain a level of perfection and beauty in Rukmini Devi's choreography, before presenting it to the public.

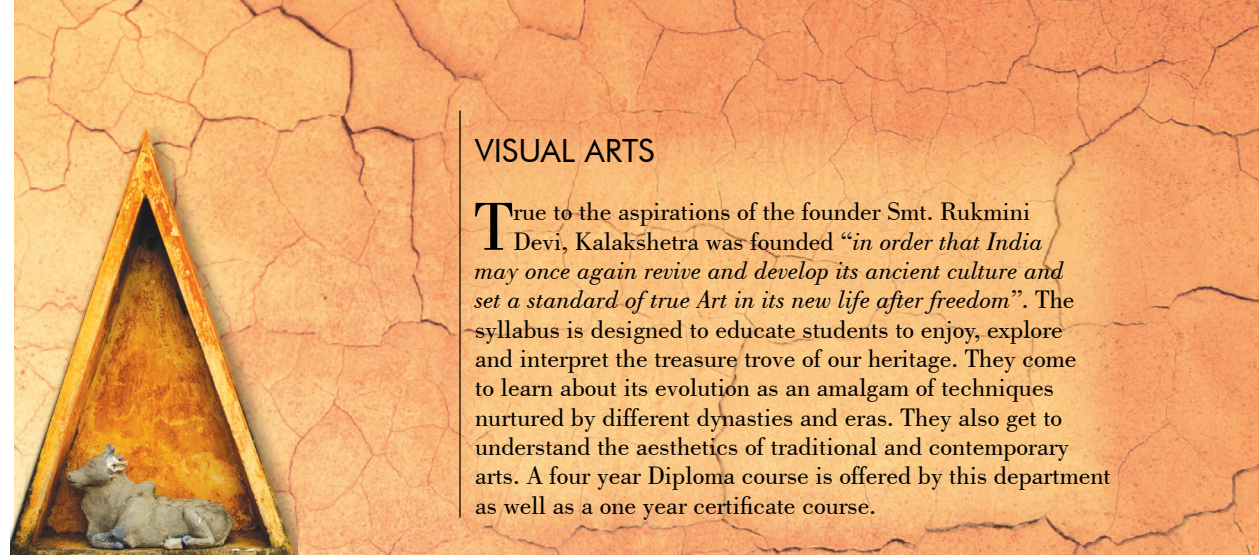
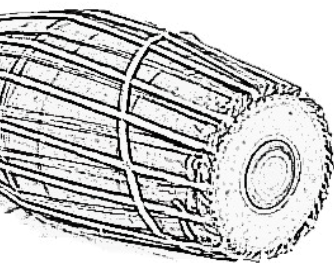




CARNATIC MUSIC

Nature was inclusive in Rukmini Devi's vision. The chirping of birds, rustling of leaves, rippling waters all had a rhythm and music of their own. The students and the faculty are expected to enhance their perception, absorb nuances and fine-tune their music in the natural setting of the campus. The near-perfect kutcheris (recitals) at the end of their gurukulam vouchsafe their commitment to music. The intent of the institute is to equip students to become performers with strong foundations which will enable them to develop on their own.

Diploma in Carnatic Music is offered in Vocal, Violin, Veena, Flute and Mrindgam for a course period of four years and a Post Diploma of two years.



VISUAL ARTS

True to the aspirations of the founder Smt. Rukmini Devi, Kalakshetra was founded “in order that India may once again revive and develop its ancient culture and set a standard of true Art in its new life after freedom”. The syllabus is designed to educate students to enjoy, explore and interpret the treasure trove of our heritage. They come to learn about its evolution as an amalgam of techniques nurtured by different dynasties and eras. They also get to understand the aesthetics of traditional and contemporary arts. A four year Diploma course is offered by this department as well as a one year certificate course.

KALAKSHETRA MAP*

MAIN CAMPUS

- 1 - Kalakshetra Main Gate
- 2 - Central Office
- 3 - Rukmini Arangam
- 4 - Dance and Music Cottages
- 5 - College Office
- 6 - Toilets
- 7 - Banyan Tree
- 8 - Instrument Cottage
- 9 - Padma Pushkarini
- 10 - Costume Department
- 11 - Ayyanar Shrine
- 12 - Visual Arts Department
- 13 - Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium
- 14 - Vishnu Statue
- 15 - Tagore Hall
- 16 - Santhi Office
- 17 - Museum (Restricted entry)
- 18 - Besant Arundale Secondary School
- 19 - Golden Gate

OUTSIDE MAIN CAMPUS

- 20 - Besant Theosophical Higher Secondary School
- 21 - Kalamkari and Weaving Unit cum Sales centre
Craft Education and Research Centre

*This map is not to scale.





PART-TIME COURSES

Part-time classes (evening classes) are conducted for Bharatanatyam, Carnatic Music and Visual Arts.
Age Criteria : 7 - 18 years



SCHOOLS

BESANT THEOSOPHICAL HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Besant Theosophical High School was started by Dr. George Sydney Arundale on 27 June 1934. The school was founded at the express wish of Dr. Annie Besant. It was a school where education without fear would be imparted to children. The school stands as a memorial to Dr. Annie Besant. The founder of Kalakshetra – Smt. Rukmini Devi – took immense interest in the development of the school. In June 2006, the school was upgraded as a higher secondary school. The school is affiliated to the Tamil Nadu State Board and is a government-aided school up to 10th standard. The higher secondary sections – 11th and 12th standards – are run on a self-financing basis.



BESANT ARUNDALE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

Besant Arundale Senior Secondary School was started as an adjunct to Kalakshetra in 1973 and is affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). It imparts education with love, provides an environment where fear does not cast its shadow during the process of learning and encourages children to question. The mission of the school is to teach in an atmosphere where learning is a pleasure. Students are taught to be sensitive to the environment, strive to make the school campus an entirely plastic-free zone and learn socially useful and productive skills to enhance the quality of their lives.

The school is unique as it offers Dance (Bharatanatyam), Music (Carnatic) & Painting as electives in the senior secondary level as the Fine Arts stream. During the 44 years of its existence, thousands of students have benefited from the exposure to the finest traditions of Indian fine arts along with good academic training.

MONTESSORI SECTION

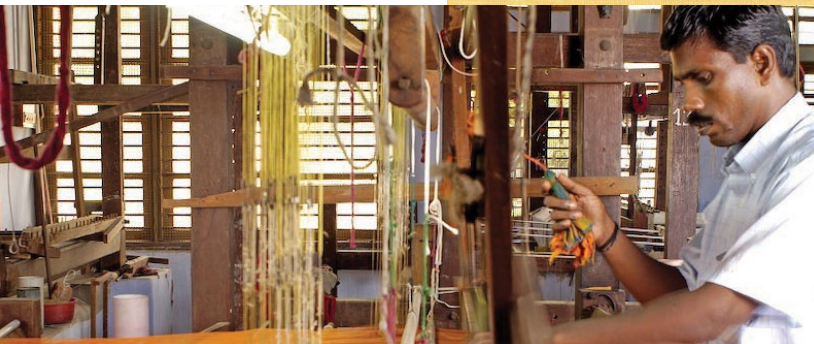
The first Montessori School in India was started when Dr. George Sydney Arundale invited Dr. Maria Montessori, the founder of Montessori system of education to start a course at the Besant Theosophical High School in 1939. Montessori Section is now functioning at Besant Arundale Senior Secondary School and is named as Kamala Nikunj. It is open to children in the age group of 2½ to 5½ years of age.



CRAFT EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTRE

The Craft Centre at Kalakshetra was inspired by the ideal to “permeate the land with beauty of spirit and form”. At a time of intense national awareness, when people in India were seeking the neglected and forgotten treasures of the past, Rukmini Devi extended her interest in dance and music to the crafts, making each dance performance an aesthetic experience. Textiles were central to the costumes and backdrops of the dance dramas she was creating. For this, she sought the weavers, dyers and designers of traditional textiles. In September 1937, just one year after the founding of Kalakshetra, assisted by a grant from the government, Rukmini Devi set up a weaving centre.

Patterns were collected from saris and garments owned by Rukmini Devi and her friends. Old designs were revived, and Rukmini Devi herself chose the colour combinations and motifs. The saris from the weaving centre quickly became famous. With their striking borders, unusual motifs and vibrant colours, a Kalakshetra sari was a coveted possession.



The Centre also produced the exquisite costumes for Rukmini Devi's dance dramas. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, a close friend of Rukmini Devi and a renowned advocate of crafts in India, initiated the centre's experiments with natural dyes in the 1950s. Due to lack of funds, the dye research laboratory was given over to the Handicrafts Board.

It was not until 1978 that the Kalamkari unit was re-established, in order to revive the ancient craft of hand painting and printing of textiles with vegetable dyes. Traditional craftsmen from Machilipatnam were employed to train local women in the craft. The dyes used in Kalamkari today follow the old traditions of extracting colours from plants, roots, leaves and other vegetable matter. They are combined with mineral salts of iron, tin, copper, alum, etc. which are used as mordants. With the revival of interest in India's traditional arts after independence, the art of Kalamkari has also acquired a new lease of life. The Centre runs Kalamkari courses of one month and two months duration.

Visitors can buy handloom fabrics, Kalamkari paintings and handicraft items at the sales counter in the CERC campus of the Foundation. Cotton handwoven sarees and dance practice sarees are also available for sale. Pure silk sarees woven in traditional Kalakshetra designs can be ordered at the weaving centre. Visitors can also buy publications brought out by Kalakshetra and DVDs of the dance dramas at the Central Office, Kalakshetra Foundation.





MUSEUM

After the demise of Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, her personal collections were housed in a small museum on the campus. Over the years, the interest in Rukmini Devi's monumental works and her personal collections has increased. About 5,000 artefacts are in the museum, which includes objects in metal, stone, wood, fabric and porcelain, as well as paintings, prints, photographs and furniture. For want of a proper museum, it has not yet been thrown open to the public.

LIBRARIES

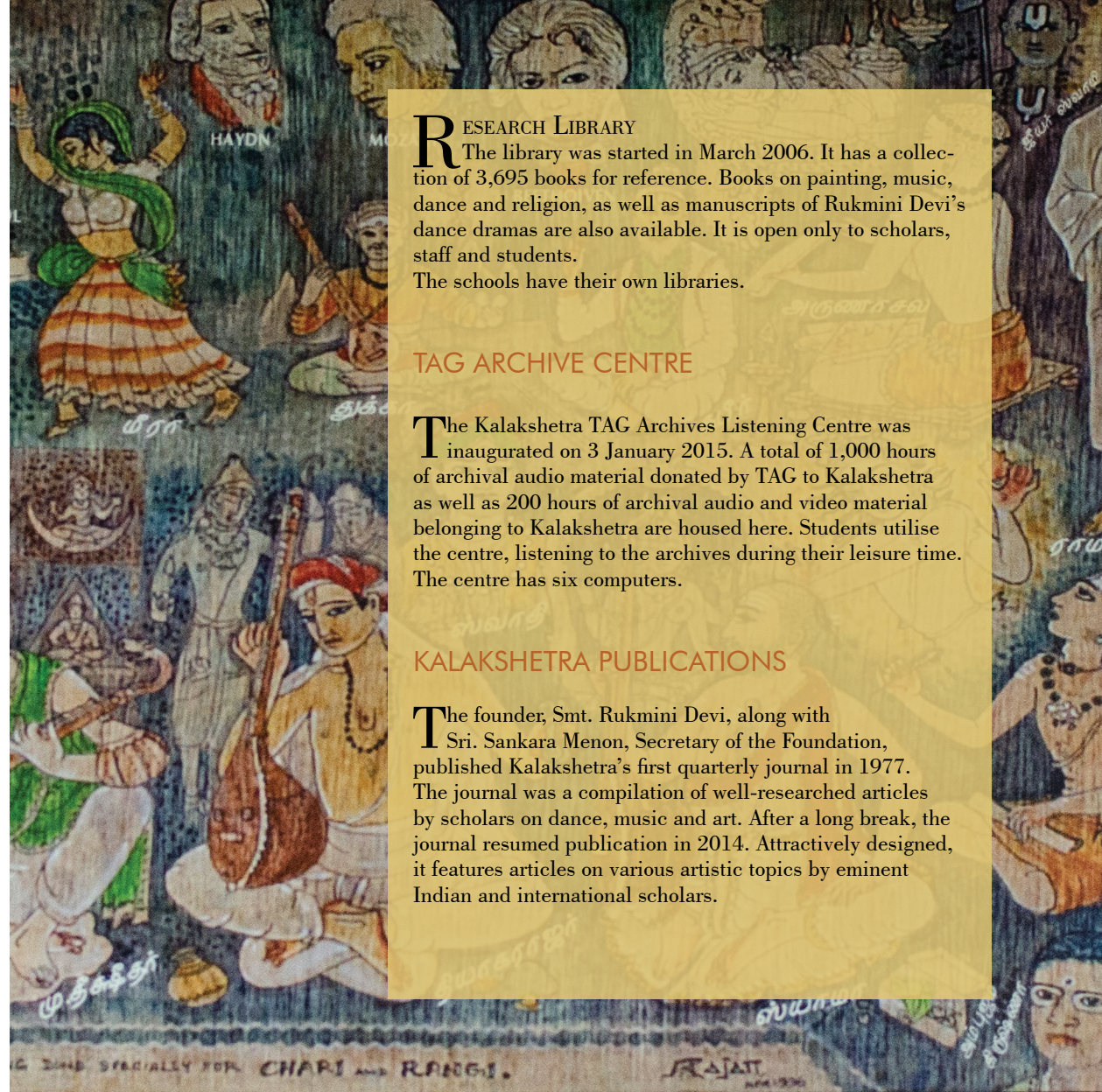
RUKMINI DEVI LIBRARY

The library has a collection of 5,219 books from Smt. Rukmini Devi's private collection. It is not open for public.



SANKARA MENON LIBRARY

Sankara Menon library was started in March 1958 with a small collection of 1,040 books. At present, there are 10,830 books related to dance, music and fine arts. These books are available in various languages like English, Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Sanskrit, Hindi, Malayalam and Grantham.



RESEARCH LIBRARY

The library was started in March 2006. It has a collection of 3,695 books for reference. Books on painting, music, dance and religion, as well as manuscripts of Rukmini Devi's dance dramas are also available. It is open only to scholars, staff and students.

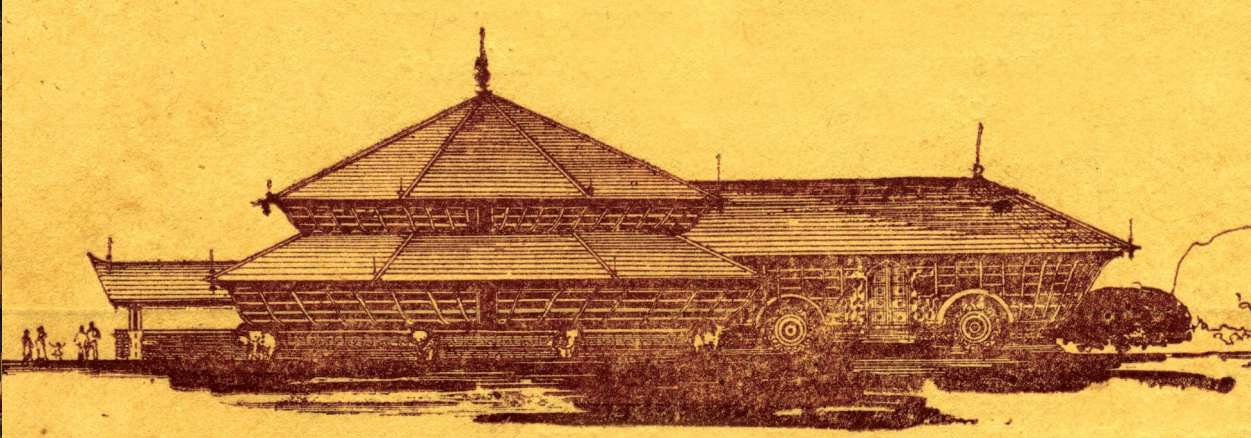
The schools have their own libraries.

TAG ARCHIVE CENTRE

The Kalakshetra TAG Archives Listening Centre was inaugurated on 3 January 2015. A total of 1,000 hours of archival audio material donated by TAG to Kalakshetra as well as 200 hours of archival audio and video material belonging to Kalakshetra are housed here. Students utilise the centre, listening to the archives during their leisure time. The centre has six computers.

KALAKSHETRA PUBLICATIONS

The founder, Smt. Rukmini Devi, along with Sri. Sankara Menon, Secretary of the Foundation, published Kalakshetra's first quarterly journal in 1977. The journal was a compilation of well-researched articles by scholars on dance, music and art. After a long break, the journal resumed publication in 2014. Attractively designed, it features articles on various artistic topics by eminent Indian and international scholars.



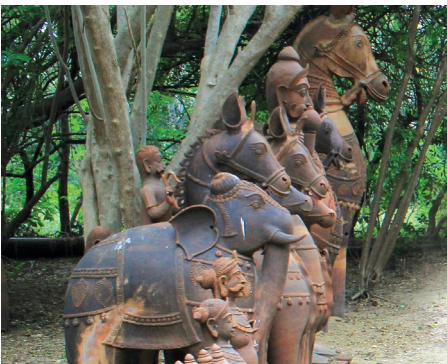
PERFORMANCE SPACES

RUKMINI ARANGAM : This is Kalakshetra's first theatre, designed and constructed by a renowned architect Laurie Baker. The theatre was built to suit Indian ambience and the culture of traditional dance drama. Its unique beauty was the beautiful proscenium stage with side entrances which are still preserved.

BHARATA KALAKSHETRA AUDITORIUM : Rukmini Devi's idea to build a beautiful Indian theatre with a spiritual ambience, incorporating advanced sound and lighting technology, became a reality when it was completed in 1982, in time for the golden jubilee celebrations of Kalakshetra. It was formally inaugurated in December 1985 by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India .

PADMA PUSHKARINI: an amphitheatre constructed around a lily pond, was opened on 29 November 2010. It has granite pavilions and steps. Thiruvannamiyur was once home to several natural ponds that helped to maintain ground water level in the area. The pond at Padma Pushkarini is Kalakshetra's effort to preserve the natural resource. The amphitheatre is named after Padmasini, a caretaker at the hostel four decades ago. She was like a mother to the students and a big support to Rukmini Devi.

TAGORE HALL : It was inaugurated by the Maharaja of Mysore in 1962. Initially, it was an L-shaped studio which was used as a prayer hall. Small dance & music programs and lecture demonstrations are often conducted here. It was renamed Tagore Hall after the bust of Rabindranath Tagore was installed at the entrance.



ANIMAL WELFARE

Animal welfare was one of the foremost interests of Smt. Rukmini Devi. The Animal Welfare Board of India was set up by her in 1962. She was the first Chairperson of the Board and remained on the Board till her demise in 1986. She was also instrumental in getting the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act enacted. Following the principles of the founder, about 55 dogs are taken care of by the Foundation in its premises. A few volunteers help the Foundation in this effort.

A traditional temple dedicated to Ayyanar was constructed at Kalakshetra in 2011.

CONTACT DETAILS

Booking Performance Spaces and Repertory
+919445029046; email - theatre@kalakshetra.in

Booking spaces for Exhibitions and Events
+919444066369; email - em@kalakshetra.in

Kalakshetra's Guided and Non-guided Tours
+919444334407; email - outreach@kalakshetra.in


College Office 044-24521169; email - registrar@kalakshetra.in


Kalamkari and Weaving Department
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Besant Arundale Secondary School
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