

KERALA

Zurich-based Indian Kathak maestro's Gita Govinda documentation being realised in Kerala

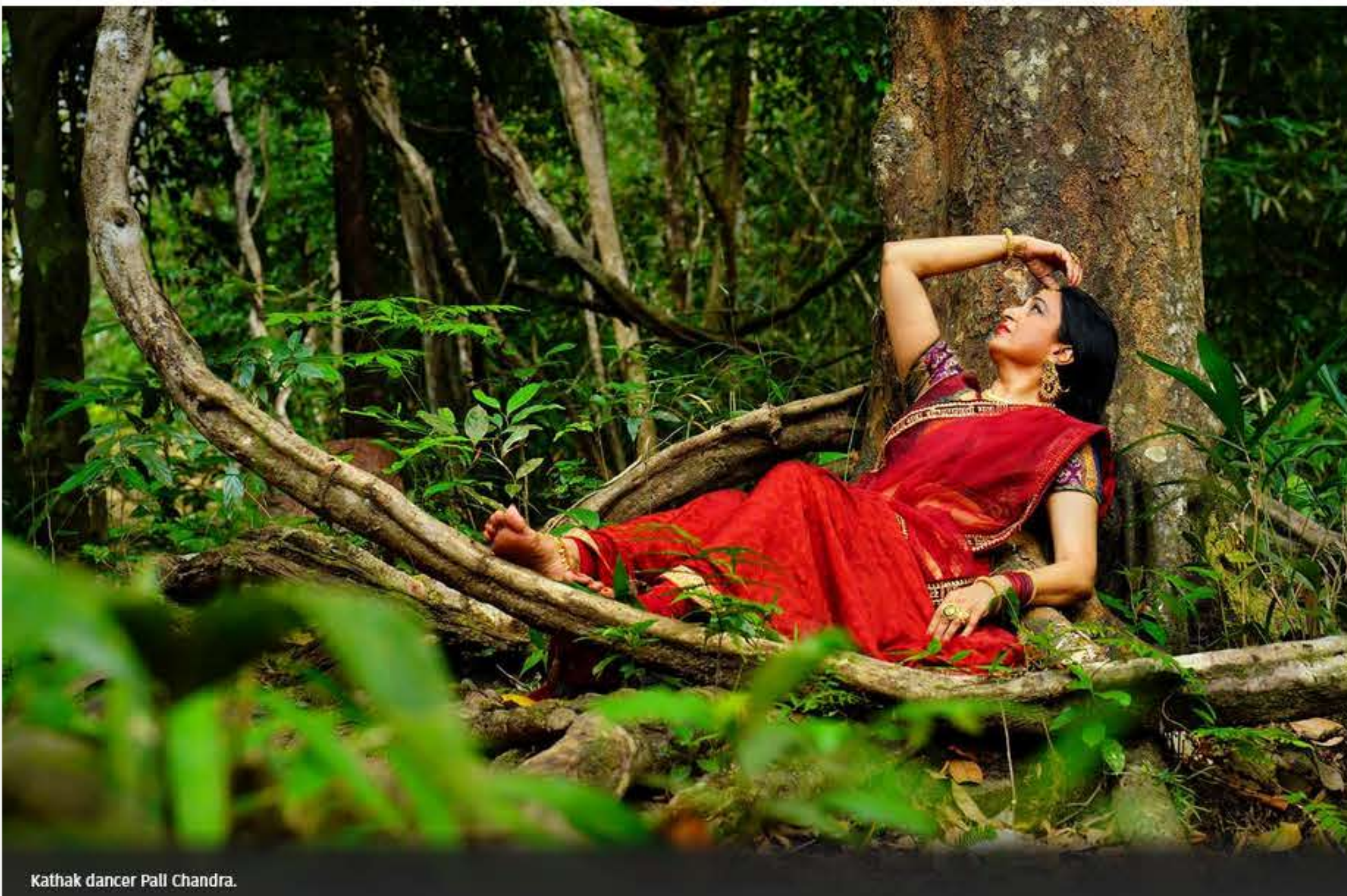


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Kathak dancer Palli Chandra.

Kathak is set to be enriched with a complete portrayal of the Gita Govinda, as its senior exponent Pali Chandra is currently composing and choreographing all the 24 songs of the 12th century Sanskrit poem to record them as performances in the classical north Indian dance.

Switzerland-settled Chandra has been working for five years on the pioneering endeavour in her native country's heritage, aiming to fulfill the mission by next September, according to a release here on Wednesday.

Roping in 150 people, the artiste's project is being realised in Kerala with the cooperation of disciples from her gurukul with units in India as well as abroad, it said.

A highlight of the unique initiative is its exclusive stage: a forested location off Thiruvananthapuram using the famed model of Japanese botanist-ecologist Akira Miyawaki (1928-2021).

The Miyawaki forest has been grown in association with ICT consultant and service provider Invis, a culture-documenting multimedia company founded in Kerala back in 1995.

The recordings are being shot on a green 120-square-metre plot at suburban Puliyaarakonam, also considering that poet Jayadeva's Gita Govinda mentions around 40 plants.

"Most of these in the vegetation are in the vicinity of our stage," Lucknow-born Dr. Chandra is quoted as saying in the release.

"Just six years ago, the entire area was barren. Today, we have groomed in it more than 400 species," says Chandra, now settled in Zurich.

The project by Dr. Chandra, who received training under the illustrious Vikrama Singha and Kapila Mishra, will host detailed online teaching sessions for students.

"The idea is to continue the guru-shishya parampara through a platform named Natyasutraonline," she says about the 2017-initiated series with Kerala-based Invis founding Managing Director M.R. Hari as the creative director.

Natyasutraonline.com is the classical dance platform of Invis.

Dances such as Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi besides Kathakali and subsequently Mohiniyattam employ Gita Govinda compositions – popularly in the format of eight-line Ashtapadis that are a chief feature of the work.

"No dance in our country has presented all the stanzas and songs of the Gita Govinda. This persuaded Invis to take up the task in Kathak," says 55-year-old Chandra, who has associated with prestigious international festivals for the past three decades.

Her gurukul has organised workshops for research, choreography and training in no less than three continents. Chandra notes that choreographing and composing Gita Govinda in Kathak has been tough.

"For one, we face difficulty in identifying a single text of the classic," she says about visualising its aesthetics in the dance that got a major impetus in the 16th century during the Mughal era (1526-1857).



Kathak dancer Palli Chandra.

"There are several authors – Indian and foreign – who compiled, interpreted or translated the poem, resulting in variations, however minor. Hence, we chose to take different songs from different books, estimating their proximity to the original text," Chandra says.

The music is being recorded with a team of singers from various parts of India, led by composer B. Sivaramakrishna Rao and keyboard and rhythm arranger Venky D C.

The production and post-production assignments are being undertaken by an Invis team of 100 members.