



Encounters of the dance and drama kind

ARTHUR J PAIS

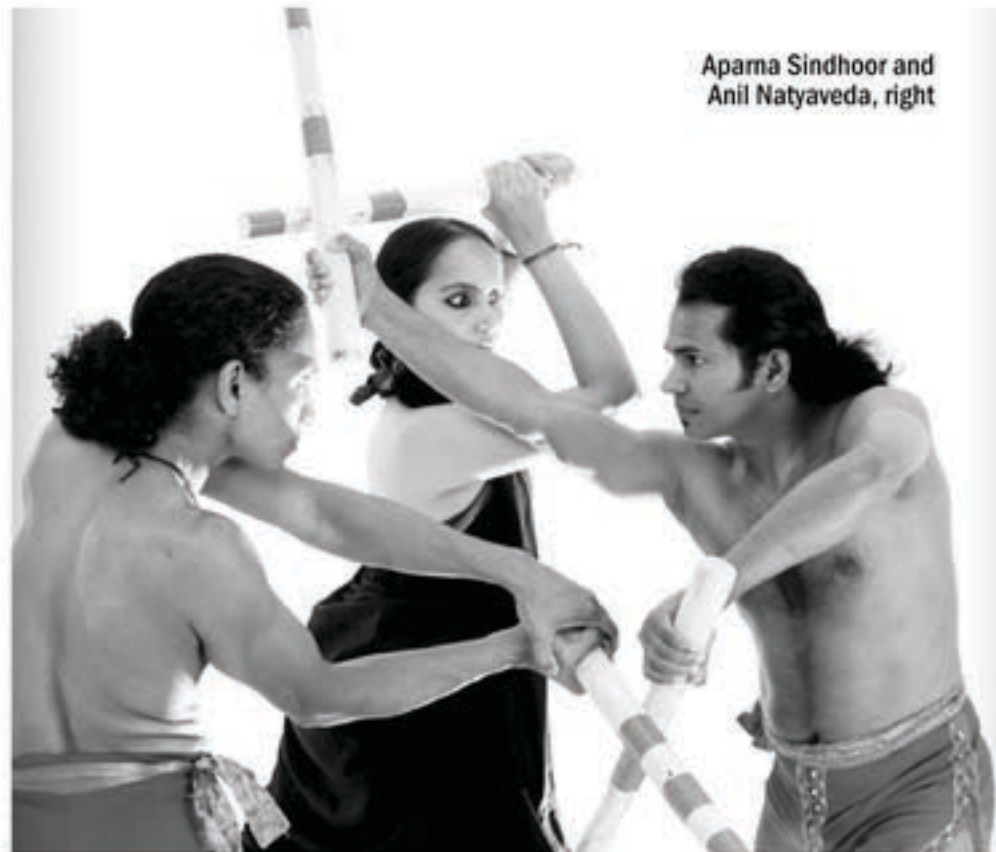
It is quite possible to come out watching *Encounter*, a curious mixture of songs, dance, martial art and drama, admiring one of its most amazing feats: A dance up and down a 10-foot tall wooden column. But there is much more to this smart and political-ly alive production.

"In the first half of the show, there are all kinds of encounters, from encounter with the divine to gravity," says Aparna Sindhoor, actress, choreographer, dancer and writer, who collaborated with Anil Natyaveda in creating the two-hour show. "In the second half we have a musical dance play inspired by a story by (Bengali writer) Mahasweta Devi about a woman who cannot be put down even after being raped."

The story unfolds against the backdrop of a tribal rebellion against injustice and the brutal repression by armed forces. The staging uses folk and spiritual songs made famous by the likes of Kabir and Akka Mahadevi.

Sindhoor's dance and drama acts have been performed in more than 15 cities including Mysore, Berlin, Hanover, New York and Montreal.

"The story of *Encounter* is set in India, but it



Aparna Sindhoor and
Anil Natyaveda, right

GANESH RAMACHANDRAN

could be anywhere in the world where indigenous people are denied their rights," she says.

Sindhoor has been running the Navarasa Dance Theater (along with a dance and martial arts studio) near Boston for over 15 years along with her husband S M Raju (Rajendran Sivasankaran), a computer scientist who recently turned filmmaker with *Varnam*. The Tamil film, to be released this month, has choreography by Sindhoor.

When *Encounter* was shown as part of the South Asian Theater Festival at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center recently, the veteran Indian actor Dr Mohan Agashe was one of the guests.

"It is a powerful piece," he said. "It is gorgeously staged. The dances are beautiful, and the impact of the show makes one think about it for a long time."

Sindhoor, who received a master's degree in English literature from the University of Mysore in 1993, has been learning and performing Bharata Natyam for nearly 30 years. She obtained her masters in women's studies at the International Women's University, Hanover, Germany, and last year, a doctorate in dance from Boston University.