

Review

A delightful evening of Kathakali

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Uthishta, a voluntary organization based in Bengaluru recently organized 'Kathakali Sandhya', an evening of Kathakali. The program featured Muringoor Sankaran Potty's 'Kuchela Vrutham' and 'Dussasana Nigraham,' the latter being two selected scenes from the play 'Duryodhana Vadham' by Vayaskara Aryan Narayana Mooss. Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, the chairman of ISRO, inaugurated the event and shared his thoughts on the art form as well as the artistes who were going to perform that day.

Margi Vijayakumar, the present principal of Margi, performed the role of Kuchela in 'Kuchela Vrutham'. Though he is an actor with almost three decades of experience, it was his first on stage as Kuchela. The play started with Kuchela's walk to Dwaraka to meet Sri Krishna. Upon reaching Dwaraka, he finds Sri Krishna's childhood scenes being painted on the walls. If it is something which every actor used to perform, a welcome addition was, Kuchela finds himself in one of the paintings where he is portrayed along with Sri Krishna taking their lessons at Sandeepani's ashram. As he reaches the seven-storey palace of Sri Krishna, he gets a view of Krishna on the top floor of the palace.

The role of Sri Krishna was done by none other than Kalamandalam Gopi, who is considered as an actor made solely for the *pacha* characters. Krishna recognizes his childhood friend from afar and runs down to receive him. After offering necessary pooja, Krishna remembers their good old days at Sandeepani's ashram in the padam "*Kalayami Sumathe!*" The famous padam of Kuchela, "*Ajithahare Jaya...*" set in Shree raga followed. Margi Vijayakumar as Kuchela, took his time to act each line, providing an opportunity for the singers Pathiyoor Sankarankutty and Kottakal Madhu to excel. Both of them made good use of the opportunity and their rendering here turned out to be one of their best in recent times.

The rasikas always enjoy the duo combination of Kalamandalam Gopi and Margi Vijayakumar, be it Nala and Damayanthi, Kacha and Devayani, Bhima and Panchali, Rukmangada and Mohini or Karna and Kunthi. Their performance here proved that Sri Krishna and Kuchela also can be added to this list of their best combinations. In one instance, Margi Vijayakumar was about to act something which did not suit the character and the experienced Gopi saved the scene by wisely stopping him, making it less apparent to the audience. This kind of a rapport between the two actors was evident throughout the act and it made the performance even more enjoyable to the audience.

At the end of the padams, Krishna says he is feeling hungry and forcibly grabs the flattened rice that Kuchela brought for him and eats a couple of mouthfuls. As Krishna ventures to have a third handful of the rice flakes, Rukmini interrupts and reminds him that if he takes it one more time, she will become a servant of Kuchela's wife. Rukmini may not be a role befitting an actor of Kalamandalam Shanmukha Das's caliber. But, through his performance, he proved that even the role of Rukmini is good enough for a talented actor to make an impression. His interactions between the co-actors within the limits of his character, added more grace to the whole act.

The second act 'Dussasana Nigraham' saw youngsters like Kalamandalam Arun Warriar, Kalamandalam Hari R Nair and Kalamandalam Neeraj putting up an energized performance. Kalamandalam Shanmukha Das appeared again in the role of Panchali and enacted well the padam "*Paripahimam Hare!*" in Navarasa raga. Arun Warriar's Sri Krishna, with apt reactions to the worries of Panchali, was performed well in the short span of time which was available for him. Kalamandalam Hari R Nair's enacting of Raudra Bhima was the highlight of the play. He was full of energy and excelled in the role as one would expect from a talented actor like him. The actor who got the role of Dussasana did not have much to do in these last scenes. However, Neeraj tried his best to make his presence felt.

One cannot forget the efforts of the percussionists, Kalamandalam Krishnadas and Kalanilayam Manoj, who provided ample support to the actors in chenda and maddalam. When Vijayakumar acted the part "*Vijayasathe!*" Krishnadas produced the sound of the moving chariot in chenda to the delight of the audience. The work of *chutty* by Kalanilayam Saji and Erur Manoj was good, except that the use of two black strips for Raudra Bhima could have been avoided as it would only reduce the desired effect. Pallippuram Unnikrishnan handled the costumes provided by Sandarsan Kaliyogam. The program was presented by Kaliyarangu.

In limited time Kathakali performances, we often see actors doing it in fast forward mode, especially when the organizers include more scenes in a short time span. But here, even though the time was limited, the two plays were wisely chosen, providing enough time for the artistes to present them properly. Credit goes to the organizers for this thoughtful decision. Also they deserve appreciation for arranging good sound, light and stage facilities which is often neglected by the regular Kathakali organizers even in Kerala.

Hareesh N Nampoothiri is a visual design consultant by profession and a lover of classical art forms. Being an ardent follower of Kathakali, he conceptualized and directed a documentary on Kathakali titled 'Thouryathrikam', which introduces the nuances of Kathakali to the common man. Writing and photography are his other passions.



Kuchela & Sri Krishna



Raudra Bhima & Dussasana