Paying tribute to the Navagrahas through Nrittya and Abhinaya

IN PERFECT ALIGNMENT: Students of Yoganjali Natyalaya perform a dance drama to pay homage to the Navagrahas in Pondicherry. Photo: T. Singaravelou

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Bharathanatyam production featured 50 dancers and 10 musicians

PONDICHERY: For astronomers removing or adding a few planets to the Solar system may be just a matter of definitions. But, the (formerly) nine planets hold great significance when it comes to reading people's horoscopes.

People do all kinds of things to appease the Surya (sun), Chandra (moon), Chevvaai (Mars), Budhan (Mercury), Guru (Jupiter), Sukran (Venus), Shaneeswaran (Saturn), Rahu and Kethu. They wear rings, visit the Navagraha shrines, chant slokas, sing the Navagraha songs by Muthuswamy Dikshitar, wear specific coloured clothes (yellow, black, blue, red etc.) and do pradakshana of the Navagraha sannidhi.

Students of Yoganjali Natyalaya recently paid homage to the Navagraha through a dance drama on the occasion of the 99th Jayanthi of Swami Gitananda Giri. The students danced to Saivaite Nayanmar Thirugnana Sambandar's famous hymn `Koloru Thirupadhikam', which says that the Navagrahas will not harm those who surrender to Lord Shiva.

The 90-minute-long Bharathanatyam production featured around 50 dancers, who moved to the music provided by 10 musicians. "We wanted to make a tribute to the Navagrahas through Nrittya and Abhinaya, so our director, Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, composed and choreographed the dance drama," said Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani, chairman, Yoganjali Natyalayam.

The dance drama began with devotees worshipping the Navagrahas. The second scene showed the Nayanmars writing the 10 verses. In the first verse of the `Koloru Thirupadhikam', which starts with "Veyuru tholi pangan vida munda kandan", Thirugnana Sambandar says that, "Lord Shiva, who shares his body with Parvathi, who plays the veena, who wears the moon and Ganga on his head, has entered my heart. Therefore, all the nine planets will present a faultless demeanour and benevolent aspects to the devotees."

The dance drama had 14 scenes, and each of the planets were portrayed individually along with the stories associated with them. The fourth scene from which the nine planets were individually portrayed was about the glory of the Sun God. The dancers depicted the celebration of Pongal. The ragas were chosen according to the characteristics of the grahas. For the sun it was the Atana, an active raga.

The narration explained each scene. "Many people don't understand the story behind what is happening on the stage. Though they like to watch Bharathanatyam performances, as it is a beautiful art with good music in the background, they don't understand the tale. Also, the accent is more on Tamil songs and stories such as Karaikal Ammayar and Meenakshi Kalyanam. The Navagrahas were chosen because many people pray to appease them," said Dr. Ananda.