

PANCHALI SABADAM: A REPORT

The Panchali Sabadam dance drama premiered by Yoganjali Natyalayam, under direction of Ammaji was 100% perfect and I am at a loss for words to adequately appreciate its grandeur” said Dr A Arivunambi, Dean, School of Tamil, Pondicherry University. “The only regret I have” he continued “is that the author of this masterpiece Mahakavi Subramania Bharatiyar is not alive today to witness his poetry come to life though Yoganjali Natyalayam. He would be so happy to see this performance where all artistes did their parts to perfection bringing every character to life. I was really afraid that Dr Ananda would also come onto the stage to pull Darudpadi, so effective was his vocal rendition of Dushshana’s words to the hapless Panchali” said he amidst thunderous applause of approval from the audience.

Under the aesthetic, artistic and dynamic direction and co-ordination of Ammaji, Bharatiyar’s version of this important segment from the Mahabharata came fully alive in front of nearly a thousand strong and appreciative audience who had assembled on 11th October in the New Auditorium of JIPMER. The Panchali Sabadam dance drama was Yognat’s way of paying tribute to its visionary founder, Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj on the occasion of his 102nd Jayanthi (birthday) celebrations. The lyrics were adapted from Bharatiyar’s original play by Mutthamizamani Kalaimamani Pulavar I Pattabiramane while the music was composed by Kalaimamani Nada Yoga Shironmani SV Jagadeesan. Dr Ananda Balayogi and Smt Devasena Bhavanani choreographed the initial dance compositions that were then tweaked into perfection by Ammaji’s magical hands. As Dr Ananda was to say later, “Ammaji has that amazing magical touch that can make even the lifeless statues come to life and dance with grace and beauty”. No wonder all the children and young adults performed their roles to perfection by merging themselves into their stage characters. “They were so real that I wanted to get up and beat up Duryodhana, Shakuni and Dushshana” said Venkatesan, a senior student of Yognat as he came out of the hall. Many others echoed his sentiments as the three young ladies, Selvi G Kanimozhi (Dushshana), Selvi I Krishnaveni (Duryodhana) and Selvi S Ghayathri (Shakuni) seemed to have been totally transformed into their characters. Krishnaveni deserves a special mention for her excellent help in organizing the songs for the drama. She and Selvi G Kanimozhi were also part of the initial choreography team with Smt Devasena and Dr Ananda and put in many hours to get things together when they seemed to be all in pieces at the beginning. “If not for Krishnaveni’s initial efforts in response to my challenge, this drama may not have occurred this year!” said Dr Ananda in his thanksgiving speech as it is the pride of Yognat to see its students become all-rounders in life and this is part of that training too.

The respected Director of JIPMER Dr KSVK Subba Rao praised the spectacular performance and exclaimed that Yoganjali Natyalayam is a treasure of Pondicherry. He complimented both Ammaji and Dr Ananda on putting on such a performance in the JIPMER auditorium that was the purpose of creating such an auditorium for not only JIPMER but for all people of Pondicherry. Yognat used nearly every facility of this new ‘state of the art’ auditorium to make the programme a grand success with cooperation from all the departments involved in the management of the auditorium. “Dr KSVK Subba Rao is a true lover of the fine arts and deserves special praise for developing

JIPMER in so many ways and this auditorium is one of the feathers in his illustrious cap” said Ammaji as she honoured the Director on the occasion.

Right from the first scene where Bharatiyar receives blessings from Lord Brahma and Goddess Saraswathi, to the grand ending with Bharata Mata the audience was totally transfixed to the edge of their seats. “No loose ends at all - we were totally glued to the drama and its unique dynamism” said Srini (Thiru E Srinivassan), Director of Yatra Arts Foundation in Auroville who was also in charge of the excellent lighting for the drama. “Bharatiyar would be so proud of you and your love for Tamil culture” he continued as he expressed the view of so many who had tears in their eyes from many emotional scenes that were expressed musically by Dr Ananda, Sri SV Jagadeesan, Smt. Devasena and Smt. Vineshwari. Smt Devasena conducted the performance with excellent Nattuvangam and dynamic vocal support. Thirumudi S Arun gave excellent rhythmic support on the Mridungam along with Sri Al Ramasamy (Mogarsing) and Sri S Gopal (special effects). The costumes were organized by Smt Lalitha Shanmugam with make up by Shri E Somu. Shri C Shanmugam, Sri C Kulandaivelu, Sri Keshavan Giri and others organized the stage management in an excellent manner without any major hiccups. Shri P Mutthamizvaanan and Selvi D Reena Joseph gave an excellent overview of each scene in Tamil and English respectively helping the audience to enjoy better every nuance of the drama.

The main characters were played by Dr Padma Prashanthini (Draupadi), I Krishnaveni (Duryodhana), G Kanimozhi (Dushshana), Shreya Agrawal (Yudhisthira), J Sanghavi (Krishna), S Ghayathri (Shakuni), S Samyukta (Bharatiyar), R Varalakshmi (Bhima), S Devasena (Arjuna), K Nivetha (Karna), A Anjana (Nakulan), S Shanmathy (Sahadevan), G Sarulatha (architect of the palace), M Keerthana (Goddess Saraswathi and Gandhari) and Geethakala (Dritharashtra and Brahma). Able support was given by K Kalavani, S Manju Priya, N Poonghuzhaly, Pradepa Narayanan, Reshma S Kumar, Debolina Pal, S Samyukta, S Vidya Shankari, S Valli, A Rajeswari, Dhivya Priya Bhavanani, S Sahana Sankari, K Swathi, S Preethi, R Sumitra Thillaikannu, R Keerthana Devi, A Priyadarshni, KR Kanagalakshmi, S Anurupa, J Nivedha, R Parkavi, N Ajayraj, S Marcelin, R Pavithra, P Preetika, S Vijayalakshmi, S Pavithra, G Swarnamalya, D Darni Josephine, A Thamizhmalar, Sabarishree who put in great effort to make every scene a great success. No pin was out of place and no one missed a cue!

Four of the Yognat families who have been with the institute right since its inception were honoured as **FOUNDING MEMBER FAMILIES** on the occasion. The families of Shri CK Manoharun and Smt Mangala Gowri (Dr Padma Prashanthini and Thribuvan Vijay), Shri K Manickam and Smt Meenakshi Manickam (M Niraimathi and M Ilaval), Shri R Narasimmamurthy and Smt Chitra Narasimmamurthy (N Ramya and N Divya) and Shri V Dhanaraj and Smt D Malathi (D Vimala and D Lakshmi) were thanked for giving Ammaji and Dr Ananda so much assistance at all times as well as producing torchbearers of the highest Yognat standards. One member from each family gave thanks and appreciation on behalf of their family and appreciated Ammaji’s love for the children and their welfare at all times.

The important points in the story were highlighted by having Bharatiyar appear and sing his view of the action as when Yudhisthira loses his kingdom and Bharati (S Samyukta) roars, “How can one who is a mere custodian, wager the kingdom in the dice game,

shame on you King Dharma”. Similarly the finale with Bharata Mata (S Haritha) being on stage to bless all was a really striking image that left an indelible impression in the hearts of all.

One of the highlights was the scene where Dushshana attempts to pull off Draupadi’s sari and Lord Krishna saves her by making it a never ending one. Great thought and discussion went into the creation of the scene with 20 small dancers running around Draupadi with three saris stitched together to create a magical feel of the never ending sari around Draupadi. Kalaimamani K Rajamanickam, Director of Sangeetha Salangai Natyalaya was effusive in his praise for the drama and especially that scene. “A great amount of thought must have gone into that scene and it was executed to perfection making us all feel that the saris were really coming in a continuous manner from Lord Krishna himself. The music was perfect, the characters were perfect, the dramatic elements created by Ammaji as King Dharma lost his Kingdom and his brothers were so great that we all lost ourselves in the drama and thought we were in the days of the Mahabharata itself” he said echoing the statements of so many others who had tears in their eyes from the intense emotions of many scenes.

“For the first time ever, I have seen the Nava Rasas (nine emotions of dance and drama) on the faces of not only the performers but also on the face of each and every one in the audience” said Srini, film maker and Director Yatra Arts Foundation. He continued, “Ammaji is doing such a great service for the cause of our Tamilian culture that we are all so lucky to be part of her yoga and cultural family”. Srini has worked with Dr Ananda in producing many Yoga Videos and is a drama artist and director himself who has great sensitivity to the nuances of the fine arts.

“All the knowledge of Tamil I have gained in my 78 years of life is not sufficient to give apt praise for the efforts of Dr Ananda and Amma towards propagation of Indian culture worldwide” said Kalaimamani Pulavar I Pattabiramane who also presented the title award of **Pannaya Natiya Sezhunchudar** to Dr Padma Prashanthini for her great talent in the ancient art of Bharatanatyam. Padma is doing her internship at the Pondicherry Government hospital and often came for practices right after many hours of grueling duty. As Dr Ananda put it, “Finally Yognat has a dancing doctor, and such an excellent one too!”

Dr BM Sundaram, the renowned musicologist appreciated the great efforts in putting together such an impressive production and said that it was the best depiction of Panchali Sabadam he had ever witnessed. He had many years ago composed music for a production in New Delhi and has been witness to so many performances that those words take on a greater meaning for us all at Yognat who have such great regard for him as a special well wisher at all times. He further appreciated Ammaji’s untiring efforts in taking the great Indian culture to all the youngsters of the next generation in such an artistic and pleasing manner.

Shri A Muralidharan, an eminent Chartered account of Chennai was honoured on the occasion with the title of **Karma Yoga Shironmani** in appreciation of his efforts of the Indian society. He has been a well wisher of Yognat for many years and is a source of constant guidance for the institute in its development. He and his family have been

regular witnesses to the dance drams of Yognat in the past few years and they appreciate and enjoy the productions even more as his daughter Aishwariya is a dancer herself.

Yogarani Dr Nalini and Yogacharini Shobana represented the International Gitananda Yoga family on the occasion and paid tribute to the yeoman service to the world community that has and is being done by Swamiji and Ammaji. Thavatthiru Velu Swamigal of the Rengaih Madam in Karaikal was also present on the occasion with special blessings for all.

The eminent Tamil scholar Prof ML Thangappa later wrote, “The drama was so impressive that one is easily drawn to say that none has achieved such a perfect rendition of the Panchali Sabadam till date as Yognat has now done. Congratulations to all involved in the creation of this grand success.”

All in all a night of great artistic fulfillment that could occur only because of the potent blessings of Pujya Swamiji and the unparalleled efforts and stimulation of Ammaji who continues to motivate us to achieve the highest possible standards in our attempts for spiritual perfection through Yoga and the performing fine arts of India.

May we always be worthy of such blessings in all our Yogic and artistic endeavors.