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Review

Thyagaraja Bhagavad Anubhavam

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Kalabharathi, Visakhapatnam, is the cultural hub of the city of destiny, for the audience and artistes to come together to enjoy art. On the 4th of January 2010, Bharatanatyam dancer Divya Devaguptapu, a sishya of the Dhananjayans, presented Thyagaraja Bhagavad Anubhavam. Thyagaraja Aradhana Trust brought this performance on the eve of Thyagaraja Aradhana Mahotsavam.

What we normally get to see in the classical dance programs are dance dramas, arangetrams, or dance recitals with selected items. Divya presented a theme by way of bringing to the audience Thyagaraja compositions depicting the journey of the saint as she visualized it. Divya researched Saint Thyagaraja's compositions and placed them in three parts or three stages of the journey. The three parts thus constitute:

A devotee's "quest"

His total dedication and "yearning" for the Lord's acceptance, and
"Attainment" of the Lord's Divine Grace.

If the applause from the rasikas is an indication of success, she can be happy she achieved the purpose of presenting the theme. Her work is in progress and Divya makes it a point to improve her theme with any scholarly inputs that may come her way. The neat selection of the kirtanas were placed well to provide a sort of time line, story and narration to the program.



Part 1

Invoking Lord Ganesha with a sloka from Prahlada Bhakthi Vijayam and "*Sri Ganapathini*" in Ragam Sourashtra set to adi talam, Divya chose a pancharatna "*Sadhinchaney O Manasa*," giving an appropriate start to the devotional journey. The kirtana explains Krishna Leela and goes on to depict the adorable nature of Lord Rama. With "manas" chosen to be the bridge of the theme, it does justice to the artiste's exploration and journey to "Soham."

Part 2

In the "Anubhavam," the yearning and the frustration at not being able to accomplish Sri Rama Kataksham is brought about by choosing the three krithis, "*Kshirasagara...*," "*Chani Todi...*" (Bring Him along with you) and "*Nannu Vidachi...*" (Leaving me). Perhaps the third krithi could be in part three.

In "*Chani Todi*" where "manas" was assigned to bring the Lord, Divya suggestively incorporated Thyagaraja talking to his mind as he would to a sakhi by showing one hand, and then guiding "manas" not to wander and stay focused in "sending the message." As a Kuchipudi artiste, this reminded me of how Satyabhama in the pravesa daru narrates to "*lalana..*" her plight through relevant hasta mudra.

Part 3

"*Intakanna anandam...*" (what else can be more joyous), attaining of Lord Rama's grace provides the artiste an opportunity to peak and enact Thyagaraja in His presence. "*Sohamainadey Chalu*" (attaining Oneness is all that is needed) is the fulfillment stage and "oneness." What wonderful "transport" from praying to the Lord "not to leave" to "*Sohamainadhey Chalu*"! This subtle shift from "attaining" to "permanence" is entirely a God sent message.

Her jatis were crisp and efficient. Quick changes in the phases from the energetic pace of the jatis to the intense expression of *bhava* (demanded by *sahityam*) showcased her talent as a dancer and choreographer. A very innovative approach - repeated depiction of Lord Rama as He resides in our mind, holding the bow and arrow, invoked bhakthi. This image would remain etched in one's mind even after the program. A notable feature of the artiste was her expressive reach of eyes that connected her to even those sitting in the back rows in the hall.

Divya created space to show her versatility by the interpretation of "*Chani Todi*" from "bhakthi" to "romantic mission." Taking a cue from the pallavi that reads like a Padam, she explores the theme by engaging manas as the sakhi; a messenger to the beloved. The connotations of Madhura Bhakthi proved an ideal opportunity to show her mettle.

Divya in her portrayal transcends, becomes the Saint himself, to attain Lord Rama, in "*Ninnu baasi ara nimisha morva nura*." (Without you, cannot tolerate for even a fraction of a second). To me, this proved to be the highlight of her performance. It is at this stage that Divya, Saint Thyagaraja, the audience in the hall all became "One" - *Sohamanidhi Chalu*.



Nattuvangam by Guru Shanta Dhananjayan, vocal by Arun Gopinath, violin by Sunil Bhaskar, and mridangam by Jaya Sankar, expertly

enabled the performance to rise to the occasion. Credit should also go to Padmaja Avvaru, Kanakam Devaguptapu for the support in the research and notes.

B Venkat, a student of Bala Kondala Rao, is a Kuchipudi dancer in the Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam style.

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