

Marked by unbridled grace

A unique presentation depicting the lesser known facets of Indian mythology made for an enriching experience



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At Pune in Maharashtra, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and Infosys Foundation presented a cultural outreach programme at Sardar Mahadeo Balwant Natu Sabhagriha. This was possible due to Bharatanatyam exponent and SNA awardee, Sucheta Bhide Chapekar, the founder member of Kalavardini. Her momentous work *Nritya Ganga* uses Marathi and Hindi

songs to compose Bharatanatyam pieces. She along with her accomplished daughter and disciple, Arundhati Patwardhan was responsible for hosting the *Divya Trilogy*.

The *Divya Trilogy*, conceptualised by Usha RK, was a one-of-its-kind imaginative foray into mythology. Stories of weapons such as the Brahmastra, Pinakastra, Sudarshanastra and Puspastra, each narrating several stories, captured one's fancy. The great Indian epics abound in legends of weapons used by the Gods like Brahma, Manmatha, Vishnu and Shiva. Those weapons had untold power and needed a *Beej Mantra* (coded message) to detonate them as they were down by gurus to their most illustrious disciples. Sometimes deities handed them out to the chosen ones themselves.

The *Divya trilogy* — *Divya Astra*, *Divya Vahana* and *Divya Pushpa Astra*, *Divya Vahana* and *Divya Pushpa Astra* — germinated in Usha RK's mind when she visited the Aurobindo Asram Library at Hardwar and chanced upon a slim volume written by The Mother on the spiritual significance of each flower. A film on Sri Aurobindo further opened a new vision to her. She put forward her help to the upcoming generation of Bharatanatyam dancers to bring out their creative talents.

The divinity of gods is often identified by their attributes, vehicles and weapons. Usha selected *Divya Astra* or weapons, *Divya Vahana* or vehicles and *Divya Pushpa* or flowers for dancers to create individual and unique presentations, researched and sourced from texts with sincerity. *Brahma Astra*, supposedly the most powerful weapon, was presented by Pavitra Bhat; *Sudarshana Astra* with many of its legends was by Mithun Shyam; *Pushpa Astra* used by Manmatha, the god of love, was presented by Parimal Phadke, and *Pinaka Astra* associated with Shiva was by Parshwanath Upadhye.

Brahmastra, the most infallible weapon of annihilation, was created by Brahma himself. Bhat geared it up with

Trikala jathi along with *Brahma Kavuthavam* describing the origin and usage of the *astra*. Later it was followed by the tale of Rama who used it because of Sita's abduction. Bhat wielded the idiom of Bharatanatyam like a master craftsman to present the unparalleled grandeur of the *astra*.

Pushpa Astra of Manmatha took a fresh look at the awakening of the senses. Born to goddess Lakshmi, an embodiment of *lecha shakthi* or desire, Manmatha, her son is destined to create arrows out of flowers to awaken love and desire. Phadke as Manmatha created his bow with a sugarcane stem, using the Aravinda, Ashoka, Cutta, Navamalika and Nilotpala flowers, which cause fascination, disturbance, burning, desiccation and destruction.

Inspired by the lotus that blossoms with the kiss of the rising sun, he tries it on Rathi, who feels the same — Phadke was at his best in this. The cuckoo and the Ashoka flower remind him of her lips, intensifying love. Love's suffering, caused by separation, was depicted by the hanging creeper on the mango tree. The blossoming Nilotpala makes him faint. Manmatha was described as *manoja* — one who is born in the mind and whose friend is spring. The heart, mind and senses all get enticed by his invisible arrows. Manmatha's work is as relevant today as it was before.

Besides other references, Phadke told the story of Manmatha and why Shiva had to resurrect him for the sake of creation. The story of Kama's desire for Puranakala and his subsequent enslavement to her made his presentation interesting.

Parswanath Upadhye's entry to show the feats of Pinakastra was dramatic. His enactment of Shiva destroying Tripurasura using Pinaka with grand leaps and great poses; its role in ushering in peace between Hari and Hara and the marriage of Sita and Rama; ultimately reaching King Janaka and becoming the cause for the annihilation of Ravana was gripping. The audience stayed glued to their seats.

Sudarshanastra depicted in the episode where Arjuna vows to kill Jayadratha by sunset to take his revenge

for the brutal killing of Abhimanyu was a treat to watch as was the chopping of Sisupala's head with the Sudarshana-chakra. Sudarshana as the saviour was depicted when Dakshayini's body was cut to fifty one pieces to stop Shiva's Tandava.

The second part of the *Divya Trilogy* dealt with the vehicles of the gods. Uma Satyanarayanan was an epitome of grace, beauty, wisdom and knowledge and peace in the emulation of Saraswathi's and Brahma's vehicle, the Hamsa. Uma's delineation through Bharatanatyam hand gestures was aesthetic. Hamsa's graceful movements on the banks of the Saraswathi were heavenly.

Patwardhan in the role of Gaja Vahana was regal. She used the *gaja* motif of Lakshmi, seated on a lotus in yogic posture, to her advantage. With her emotive powers she alternated between the roles of Lakshmi and Gaja with élan drawing a parallel with the goddess of agriculture. She adopted the narrative style and her softness was appealing.

Shivaranjini Harish described the mystical bird as golden bodied, white faced, with a spherical, sharp beak, large wings and a massive form — the vehicle of Lord Vishnu in *Garuda Kavuthavam*. The movement of her facial muscles along with her large hand movements depicting Garuda's wings looked authentic. The costume was excellent.

Garuda's flight to the heavens for the pot of Amrutha, which promised eternal life, was blissful. His combat with Indra and an army of snakes combined drama along with *nritya*.

Nandi, the celestial vehicle of Lord Shiva is a Paramabhakta of him and goddess Parvati. Soundarya as Nandi-Shiva's mount stole *rasikas'* hearts with her wonderful stage presence and rendition of *nritya* and *natya*.

Nandi's knowledge of Parambrahma, which drew many to him, was displayed through scintillating Mridangam *bols* explaining the *Naada Roopa* aspect of Parambrahma to the disciples. Accompanying artists, vocalist DS Srivathsa, music composer Nattuvanar Ramya Janakiraman, mridangist R Kesavan and flautist Rajat Prasanna added to the beauty of it all.



Soundarya

Parimal Phadke

Arundhati Patwardhan

Mithun Shyam

Parswanath Upadhye

Uma Sathyanarayanan

Blending emotion & skill



Indrani Mukherjee

MEENA BANERJEE

The auspicious sound of conch shells followed by Sanskrit *stotras*, invoking blessings of the Gurus, announced the commencement of the fourth Mangalacharanara Sangeet Sammelan at Rabindra Sadan. This much awaited annual day-long soiree, also dedicated to social causes under the stewardship of renowned musician-couple Apurba and Indrani Mukherjee, began by giving away scholarships to several brilliant but

needy students and felicitating veteran musician Dulal Roy (player and guru of jal-taranga, santoor and flute) and instrument (sarod-sitar-violin et al) maker Nripen Roy. The grand finale of the evening turned out to be a captivating recital focused on the salient features of tabla's Lucknow Gharana by celebrated maestro Swapan Chaudhuri (tabla) and Pankaj Mishra's perceptive sarangi. The traditional *peshkaar* with characteristic *patta-theka*, coupled with the deep melodious tone of the tabla

acquired a regal quality. Both, the father and son, played *kaidas* belonging to different gharanas, varied *gat*, *tukra* and *parans* interspersed with energetic *padhant*. This was preceded by another equally delightful recital, by vocalist Indrani Mukherjee. Superbly supported by Pandit Sanjay Mukherjee and Vinay Mishra on the tabla and harmonium respectively, she offered a bouquet of soulful *Khamaj thumri*, *nirgun dadra* and *hori* replete with emotive appeal, interesting *talifir-ta* and thrilling *laggis* — that captured the essence of this endearing musical form belonging to Hindi heartland.

Earlier the soiree's opening artist, sitar maestro Kartik Seshadri, chose to play the early evening *raga Patadeep* around 2pm and followed it up with *Mallikapritya*, his own creation. Arup Chatterjee's brilliant support on the tabla added extra lustre. A young and extremely popular Kathak virtuoso Vishal Krishna mesmerised all with his brilliant performance. His instantly created energetic replies to the vociferous tabla of Biplob Bhattacharya were very impressive examples of Kathak's *khula* character that ventures out of the pre-composed items. Shubhankar Dey (vocal) and Rohan Naidu (vio-



Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri

lin), two young disciples of Pandit Devashish Dey, offered a matured duet-recital based on *raga Madhuvani* (slow *ektal*), medium *teental*, fast *teental tarana*) and a *Hori-dadra*, flanked by two tabla accompanists Mihir Kundu and Rupak Mitra. The latter stood out for his innovative solo-round.

To Ma

For a decade now, tabla exponent Hin-

Beautiful recitals at a few disparate soirees in Kolkata warmed the heart

dole Majumdar has been offering annual tributes to his departed mother Sunanda Majumdar, who inspired him to move ahead on his path as a musician. This year the loving ritual, held in the prestigious Vivekananda Hall of Ramakrishna Mission Golpark, featured Pandit Debashish Bhattacharya in the final slot of the first evening. The *Chaturangui* slide guitar maestro, with Majumdar as his accompanist, played *raga Maru Bilhag* (*alaap-jod-jhala*, *gatkaris* in *rupak* and *teental*) in his usual style that blends emotion and skill in equal measures.

The evening started with a fascinating tabla solo in *teental* by Shiv Shankar Ray, a worthy disciple of Pandit Jnan Prakash Ghosh. Vijay Mishra's sarangi accompaniment added to the beauty of this recital.

The second evening began with a beautiful khayal recital in *raga Bhimpalasi* by Suman Ghosh, a senior disciple of Sangeet Martand Pandit Jasraj. He concluded with *bhajans*, ably supported by

Jyotirmay Roychowdhury (tabla) and Anirban Chakrabarty (harmonium). Finally, sitarist Indrajit Banerjee, a worthy disciple of Pandit Kartik Kumar, played *raga Shyam Kalyan* replete with elaborate *alap-jod-jhala* and slow and fast *gatkaris* in *teental*. With Hindole Majumdar's passion-driven tabla support he also played a *Pilu dhun*.

In Memoriam

Ustad Umar Khan Sangeet Sabha organised a musical at Sandre Hall, Calcutta School of Music recently to mark the 36th death anniversary of Ustad Umar Khan, the late sarod maestro belonging to the Lucknow Gharana. His worthy son Irfan Muhammad Khan is striving to carry the tradition ahead. As the final artiste of the event, the sarod exponent played *raga Chayanat* with Ilmas Hussain Khan's tabla as his ally and concluded with a *dhun* in *Gara*. Earlier his students commenced the evening with brief pieces in *ragas Khamaj*, *Yaman*, *Basant* and folk tunes based on *ragas Pilu* and *Misra Yaman*.

This was followed by a vocal rendition by Nabhoodeep Chakraborty. Accompanied by Keshab Banerjee's harmonium and Rahul Ganguly's tabla, he sang *raga Jog* (vilambit *ektal* and *druv teental*) in the true Patiala style showcasing *patta* based *sargam taans* and powerful *akar taans*. With a lovely *Adana* composition of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, set to *druv ektal*, and a *Pahadi dadra* he concluded. Ustad Ilmas Hussain Khan, son of the legendary tabla maestro Ustad Afaq Hussain, played a tabla-

solo in *teental* with Keshab Banerjee playing *naghma* on the harmonium. He presented many age old compositions of the Lucknow style that are rarely heard now.



Vishal Krishna



Debashish Bhattacharya with Hindole Majumdar



Shiv Shankar Ray with Vijay Mishra

