



“Brihadeeswara/ Peruvudaiyar” dance performance by Bala Devi Chandrashekar

Date: 09/06/2018

Venue: Diamant theatre – Den Haag, Netherlands

Netherlands Tamil Sangam’s preparation, stage setting, audio and ambience gave a perfect start to the event. The intro speech about the artist was very useful to the crowd to know some interesting facts about the artist. It was notable to learn that she received “Thalaikoli” award from Rajasree Babaji Rajah Bhonsle, the Senior Prince of Thanjavur, during her performance in Peruvudiyar temple on Arudhra darisanam on January 2nd 2018. Bala Devi gracefully shared a brief introduction about the concept and her thoughts before the performance.

The production was divided into four sections with a unique presentation entirely in Tamizh.

The main theme revolved around “Devaradiyal” – who dedicated her life to the service of Lord Peruvudaiyar the presiding deity of Tanjore Rajarajeswaram – an architectural wonder built by Rajaraja I the great, and it moves on with her bhakthi towards form and formless nature of lord. In most of the Bharatanatyam performances it will be character based like Krishnaleela, Andaal kalyaanam etc., this was quite different from conventional performance, as it took the grand temple as the important element in the performance and went on to depict the architectural beauty of the temple.

Performance started with invocation to Ganesha in ragam naatai, followed by Shiva, Nisumbasoodhini and Murugan, Invocation to Nisumbasoodhini was an interesting element, since she was a favourite deity of the Cholas, even today you can see the temple dedicated to her in Tanjore.

In the introduction scene, the artist portrayed the entire family of Rajaraja I, including the architect of the great temple – Kunjara mallan. One could visualise the scenes from “Udaiyar” – a novel based on medieval Cholas, and able to visualise the characters. Bala Devi’s expression for each and every character was so apt, especially the pride of Rajaraja. The depiction of the five entrances of Peruvudaiyar temple, with final depiction of vimana virtually took us into the heart of Chola period to see the Sree Vimana of Rajarajeswaram. One could feel the immense effort behind the study to understand each portion of Peruvudaiyar temple from Keralanthakan vaayil to Shree Vimana.

The brilliant music scored by Rajumar Bharathi was evident from the beginning, the rich tapestry of artists were used by him very effectively. I have very rarely witnessed such an impeccable audio, optimally recorded and mixed by Sai Shravanam of Resound India.

The show unfolded with introduction of Devaradiyal, her beauty and her deep devotion to Peruvudaiyar. The soothing background with lyrics glorifying her as Ramba of heaven, followed by beautiful depiction of temple procession and Bala’s subtle expressions as Devaradiyal entering 5 gates with solemn feeling of the Panchakshareem. Speciality of agamas followed in Saivaite temples of Tamil Nadu gave a very special status to Tamil hymns, along with the recitation of Vedas and Thevaram was creatively enacted by the artist, the final important scene as Devaradiyal giving the “Kudavilakku” to the temple priest to complete the ritual brought out the glorious past of Devaradiyal, who was held in a respectable status in temples.

Second section took dance references and literary references from age old great Tamil works Silpathikaram, Kalithogai, Thevaram and the Devaradiyal’s Shiva darshan and how Devaradiyal sees the cosmic dance of Lord shiva in Peruvudayar’s linga form. Devaradiyal visualises five different forms of dance based on Panchakshara (Namashivaya mantra).

Ilangovalikal who wrote the great Tamil epic Silapathikaram mentioned 11 different types of dance forms that Madhavi mastered, Bala portrayed Pandarangam, Kodukotti and few other dance forms in par with appropriate Tevaram songs. I wish the artist portrayed the entire array of dance forms mentioned in silapathikaram, probably she had the time limitation ? This act was embellished with Thiru Navukkarasar’s “Kunitha puruvamum” – the dancer’s expressions was a visual treat. This dance sequence portrayed Goddess Uma and Lord shiva’s cosmic dance. The rare “Invocation to God” from Sangam work Kalithogai, was truly a revival of ancient Tamil works through Dance and music.

In the third segment, Bala visualizes the sanctum of Rajarajeshwaram as the linga form of Shiva, she sees the lingam as combined form of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and navatatva as described in Magudaagama sastra. The artist enacted brilliantly the story behind the endless form of Shiva, of Vishnu taking the form of wild boar and brahma taking the form of swan to see the feet and head of Lord Shiva. Devaradiyal sees the lord as Ardhanari (Uma Maheswara) and here comes the beautiful portion of angaharas, combination of Karanas, sculpted in the first part of the vimana of Peruvudaiyar temple. The ending for this part was embellished with the panchamukha vadhya sollus - the rare five faced instrument which was unique.

Final section had an awesome “folk element” as Bala Devi used her imagination to visualize a group of Kurathis visiting Rajaraja to get gifts. Bala portrayed this section with the sporty gait of the kurathi which reminded us of the famous Tamil work by Thirikooda Rasappa kavirayar – Thirukuttrala Kuravanji. Devaradiyal sees the painting of Sundarar and

Cheraman's Ula to Mt. Kailash in a white elephant and horse respectively. The artist used appropriate charis to portray the gestures of flying elephant and Cheraman's horse, it was like virtual Kailash on the stage. The end depicted devardiyaal Bala Devi, filled with devotion and loosing herself to Lord shiva, to the ringing Thirunavukarasar's thevaram. The spectators echoed, it was like travelling back almost 1000 years to Rajarajeswaram and to visualize and experience a life of a devout Devaradiyal!

Our heartfelt thanks to the artist Bala Devi Chandrasekhar for bringing such a scholarly, well researched production and Netherlands Tamil Sangam members look forward to her next production.

All of us are aware of the phenomenal work done with respect to the Thanjai kovil by Dr. T N Ramachandran and Dr Kudavayil Balasubramanian. Their fingerprint on this production was evident throughout. I remain an ardent fan of them !

- Dhanasekar Prabakaran –Tamizh literary writer and art critic - Den Haag, Netherlands
Tamil Sangam