

## Dance and Theatre Festival of 2012 August Swami Dayananda College, Manjakkudi



This August, the students of Swami Dayananda College, Manjakkudi were treated to a memorable Festival of Dance and Performing Arts. The Trust has been conducting Music Festivals every year for the last seven years. This year however, the Festival took on greater dimensions.

Mrs. Sheela Balaji, fondly addressed as 'Madam Secretary' in Manjakkudi, the brain behind the festival, was keen to expose the students to the rich heritage of Classical and Folk Dances of India, with a thematic presentation depicting stories of our two great epics - *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The meticulous planning had started at least six months before.

The five days were packed with various other activities. Guided meditation classes were held by Swamini Brahmaprakasananda, Swamini Brahmalinananda, Swamini Atmaprajnananda, and Swamini Svatmabodhananda for different groups.



They introduced the students to techniques of meditation aimed at giving the students a focused mind, and a capacity to look at one self.

During the pre-lunch sessions, Dr. Balasubramaniam gave a detailed audio-visual presentation on the Chola Dynasty, and their contributions to the rich cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu. He presented the history of the Cholas, their achievement in every field of government, art and culture. In the process, he presented the three architectural monuments – the Brhadiswara Temple, Tanjore, the temple at Gangaikondacholapuram and the Airawateswara temple, Darasuram. In effect, Dr. Balasubramaniam gave the presentation for thirteen long hours, over the five days. He is indeed a walking encyclopedia of Chola history. To make his presentation suitable for the young students, he had to choose from his collection of 10,000 slides, and most of the time spoke *ex tempore*, with passion. Each



On the third day, the Kuchipudi presentation titled 'Krishna Margam' by Jaikishore Mosalikanti's group was a great treat. Five eminent solo dancers of Kuchipudi from different parts of India got together four days before, to prepare for the seamless presentation, solely for the Manjakudi audience. Stories of Krishna stealing butter, His Rasaleela with the Gopis, Kaliyamardana etc. were

depicted beautifully.

On the fourth day, an Odissi Dance Ballet titled 'Krshna-saranam' was presented by

day the students gave feedback, which was indeed amazing. It is not an exaggeration to state that such in-depth presentation, as well as a receptive audience is indeed rare. On the fifth day, Dr. Balasubramaniam revealed that he was a descendant of the Cholas, his family name being 'Cholagar', which brought an instant applause. On the fifth day Mrs. Sheela Balaji felicitated Dr. Balasubramaniam amidst huge applause and standing ovation of the audience.

In the evenings, the Dances began on the first day with a traditional Bharatanatyam presentation by the dancers from Kalakshetra. It included Allaripu, Varnam, Padam, Javali, and a spirited Tillana.

On the second day, the Kalakshetra again presented various Folk Dances of India (Gujarat, Odisha, Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala etc.). We are sure some of the items presented will be adapted by the students and presented in their college cultural functions.



Aruna Mohanty and her troupe of Orissa Dance Academy. They had a novel innovation of having another elevated stage, with a digital screen behind depicting scenes like creation of the universe, appearance of Krshna, the stormy night of Krshna's birth, and battle scenes of the Mahabharata etc. The most striking moment of the ballet was the 'Govardhanadhari episode'. The context was Krshna dissuading the citizens of Gokula from performing the Indrotsava. He wanted them to celebrate the glories of Nature with a Vasantotsava, instead of propitiating Indra. People of Gokula were afraid that they will be incurring the wrath of Indra. At that time Krshna asked, 'What will Indra do? – *'mahendrah kim karishyati?'* Lo and behold – it really poured heavily outside. Initially, most of us thought it was the special sound effect for the episode. Then we realized, it was really raining, when Krshna lifted the Govardhana. We were all moved by the Grace of Krshna. In postscript, we have to state that the rain stopped immediately after the episode. The next day, Dr. Balasubramaniam confirmed that there was no rain anywhere else.

On the last day, we were treated to a Drama in Tamil – 'Karna – The Abandoned Child' presented by Indianostrum Theatre, Pondicherry. The theme was conceived and directed by

Koumarane Valouvane. It was the character of Karna, depicted in a unique modern concept with very sophisticated theatre techniques. The play was presented through Kalari – the ancient form of martial art of Kerala. It had very few, but poignant dialogues without microphones. The story was presented through soulful Sanskritised Malayalam lyrics, to the accompaniment of Chendai, a drum used in Kathakali.

Each day witnessed a growing number in the audience, starting with around 900 on the first day; we had more than 1,200 by the third day, which grew to more than 1,500 on the final day. This was the first time in the history of Tiruvarur district, and Manjakkudi in particular, that dances from different provinces were presented. And it was truly a grand success.

Mrs. Sheela Balaji and Sri G. Ramachandran, Correspondent of the Institutions, extended warm, loving, lavish hospitality to the invited guests.

One hundred staff of the school and college, along with staff from TVS, worked day and night before, during and after the Festival.

*Swami Dayananada College of Arts and Science, Manjakkudi*

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