

Paeans to a guru

KATHAKALI ARTISTS AND SINGERS PAID TRIBUTE TO LATE MUSICIAN KALAMANDALAM GANGADHARAN WITH POETIC PORTRAYALS OF NALACHARITHAM

Published - June 22, 2017 10:44 am IST - Thiruvananthapuram

VINU VASUDEVAN

From The Hindu

Kalamandalam Balasubramanian as Bahuka and Kalamandalam Vivek as Karkodakan

Kathakali music has evolved over the years on account of eminent musicians such as Mundaya Venkitakrishna Bhagavathar, Kalamandalam Neelakandan Nambissan, Kalamandalam Unnikrishna Kurup and Kalamandalam Gangadharan. These four were considered the four pillars of the art form and each of them developed a bani of their own.

Among them Gangadharan was a teacher as well and many Kathakali singers of the era were his disciples. His death anniversary this year was marked with classical music concerts and Kathakali performances at M.D. Ramanathan Hall, Palakkad.

The cultural events started off with a Carnatic music concert by Kalamandalam Punnapuzha Ramanathan. Vayala Rajendran (violin) and Poongad Sanoj (mridangam) were accompanying artistes. *Asan*, a documentary, was screened and, in the afternoon, disciples of Gangadharan presented a Kathakali pada kutcheri.

Emotions at play

Nalacharitham was staged later in the day. It began with a scene where Damayanthi laments her fate, expressed in the padam *Alasatha vilasitham, athinal njan*, after Nalan abandons her in the forest. Vellinezhi Haridas, a senior artiste specialising in female roles, enacted the character; his expertise

was visible in this short but powerful performance. Kalamandalam Ravikumar appeared as Kattalan, who comes to Damayanthi's aid when she encounters a snake and, later, tries to woo her. Ravikumar's short manodharma attams were suited to the occasion and his act was skilful. Particularly noteworthy were his kalasams and his presentation of the padam *Angane njan angu povathengane* .

This was followed by the performance of *Nalacharitham — Day Three* , with Kalamandalam Soman as Nalan. Although it's not one of his favourite roles, Soman improvised a lot and did a commendable job of portraying the emotional trauma of the character.

Challenging role

The central character in this part is Bahuka and the role was performed by seasoned artiste Kalamandalam Balasubramanian. A challenging role for any artiste due to its structural aspects, it was Vazhenkada Kunju Nair's signature role. He always focussed on the subtleties of emotion while essaying the character. Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, another stalwart of yesteryear, meanwhile, chose to give full rein to the emotional spectrum of the character.

Balasubramanian choose to blend the two styles in the right proportion, much to the delight of the audience, especially in his picture-perfect depiction of the padam *Kadraveya Kula Thilaka*. The most enjoyable aspect of his acting style was that he never deviated from the techniques of the play and stuck to the text for mudras and footwork. His manodharma attam was poetic and suitable for the character and situation. *Vijanebatha mahithe* and *Mariman Kannee*, two important padams, were enacted without losing the emotional charm of the lyrics.

The recital got a shot in the arm with the entry of Peesappalli Rajeevan as Sudevan. He stole the hearts of the audience with his comic portrayal of the padam *Alakambadi kalodum melavadya ghoshathodum*. Rajeevan's flexibility and spontaneity were extraordinary. Kalamandalam Vijayakumar enacted the role of Damayanthi. Kalamandalam Vaisakh (Rithuparnan) and Kalamandalam Vivek (Karkodakan) were the other artistes.

Almost all the living disciples of Gangadharan, led by Madambi Subramanian Nambudiri, paid tribute to their guru. Madambi sung the padams *Lokapalanmare* and *Ghoravipinam* in the old style, making it an experience to cherish for a new generation of viewers. Kalamandalam Balasundaran (chenda) and Kalamandalam Rajnarayanan were the main percussionists.

The programme was jointly organised by Gangadharan Anusmarana Samithi and Palakkad Kathakali Trust.