



THE HINDU

Stepping into the sublime

Nrityagram dance ensemble comes together with Chitrasena, Srilankan Dance Company for a spellbinding performance this evening

By Karthik Hebbar | May 19, 2017



The Sanskrit word “Samhara” has multiple meanings and connotations. The most popularly perceived meaning is ‘to defeat’ or ‘to destroy’. The other meaning associated with this word is ‘coming together.’ Nrityagram ensemble in collaboration with Chitrasena Dance Company, in its production SAMHARA does exactly this; destroys borders by coming together through artistic dialogue. This creative and experimental production is essentially a conversation between the two dance styles Odissi and Kandyan (traditional dance form from Sri Lanka). The artistic director of Nrityagram Surupa Sen, Bijayini Satpathy, Pavithra Reddy, Akshiti Roychowdhury and Urmila Mallick from the ensemble perform in this presentation along with Thaji Dias and Sundani Sulochani from the esteemed Chitrasena Dance Company from Sri Lanka to a grand live orchestra.

This production was devised through constant dialogue between the dancers and thorough understanding of each other’s dance forms. There is no attempt to compete, fuse or any other such gimmickry and it is pure soulful dancing all the way. Surupa’s choreography is always known for its relevance and adaptability but, it is interesting to note that the form used in the production is pristine and honest to its

classical paradigm. Every moment is poetry in motion and etched with aesthetically rich ornamentation. The subtle and sublime sensuousness of the graceful Odissi form embraces the vibrant and energetic Kandyan form with open arms and in union they energise every space on the canvas with unmatched beauty and vigour.

Kandyan dance was originally a ritualistic dance popular in Sri Lanka and performed only by men. The legendary Chitrasena, his entire family and students dedicated their life to adapt this ritualistic art into a performing art. It's pure machismo and is in total contrast to the purely feminine tribhanga of Odissi and yet, they converge and diverge in a seamless tapestry of angika abhinaya. Surupa's choreography is impeccably breathtaking and the way she uses the co-ordinates in space to move and freeze, creates such magnificent imagery that it is almost impossible to be not overwhelmed by the performance.

Samhara is tailored beautifully by bringing together the elements of pure nritta and natya. Arpan is essentially an offering to the five elements by both the dance forms set to beautiful music by Pandit Raghunath Panigrahi. The ragas melt into each other and the rhythms of the Odissi maddala and the Kandyan maddala converse with such panache and majesty that it fills the air with its magical tonality. There is lyrical flow here and a deep prose there but joyful dancing everywhere. Arpan is followed by a Shivastuti in Odissi and has been conceptualised with great care. The lasya and Tandava in Shiva's dance and form are sketched so beautifully through satvika and angika abhinaya of the dancers. If at one point Bijayini is vibrantly doing her tandava with one leg on the ground and the other in the air (urdhva paada), the next moment she is still as a mountain, brimming with shanta rasa in a meditative posture. There is not an atom on Bijayini's body that is not steeped in dance and many a times she seems to personify dance herself.

Whilst describing Shiva and Parvati, Kalidasa says "Vagartharthiva sampriktau vagarthah pratipattaye" which translates to -- if Shiva is speech then Parvati is his meaning! Similarly, if Surupa is the soul of the choreography it is Bijayini who adds meaning to it and their work is so beautifully intertwined that they seem like a continuum of each other.

This feature next moves onto a purely satvika abhinaya piece, an Ashtapadi which is a monologue of heart broken and repenting Krishna who cannot believe that he let Radha go! Surupa brings out all the nuances of subtle abhinaya with complete involvement and unmatched class. The "Dheera Lalita" Krishna is so honestly sorry for his behaviour that his melancholy strikes a chord in your heart. Surupa moves with such elegance and poise that her body too speaks in the voice of Krishna's regret. Her presentation is like an estuary of sensuousness, eroticism and pain merging into this calm and subtle ocean of love and longing.

The last piece is called 'Alaap' and is a conversation when simply put. This piece is spellbinding and almost thrilling to keep everyone on the edge of their seats. The 'abhugna – vibhugnas', 'harinaplutas', 'matthalis' and many other chaaris roll out one after another in an amalgamation of coordinated spacing and it creates a kaleidoscope of abstract shapes and forms that leave you with an awe of having watched temple sculptures in motion.

Words fail in describing the charm and beauty of this choreography and how it brings together the forms of dance, the music, the rhythmic syllables and also how beautifully it breaks all the cultural barriers, erases borders and crushes all gender stereotypes through movements.

‘Samhara’ is awe inspiring and an experience that simply one must not miss!

Bhoomija presents Samhara, May 19, Chowdaiah Memorial Hall, 8 p.m. Tickets available at the venue and www.bookmyshow.com

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