

Review of 1994 SRUTI Concerts

Jaya Jaya Devi - An Operatic Ballet
June 6, 1994

Rasikan

Devi, as Mother Goddess, is a powerful icon in Hindu mythology. Millions worship the Shakthi aspect of the Divine and firmly believe that Shakti and Shiva are two facets of the one and same Godhood. Neither is separable from the other. The power and appeal of Mother Goddess were vividly brought out in the operatic ballet, *Jaya Jaya Devi*, a sold out presentation by SRUTI on Sunday 6 June '94 at the Germantown Academy, Fort Washington.

The music for the ballet was composed by the great violinist Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman. A group of 10 dancers with support from 6 musicians (mostly from India) performed six well known episodes from the Hindu mythology pertaining to Devi, variously known as Durga, Uma, Parvathy etc.

The first episode presented the story of Dakshayani, who against the wishes of her father Daksha, marries Shiva. Daksha, in performing a yagna - a religious ceremony - pointedly slights Shiva by not inviting the latter. Devi, unable to change her father's mind and not able to stand the insult to her husband immolates herself. Hearing of this tragedy, Shiva performs the fierce Rudra Tandavam, a cosmic dance of destruction. The audience was spell bound by this superb piece of dance.

In the next segment, Uma Parinayam, Shiva having lost his wife, undertakes severe penance. Devi is reborn as Uma, the daughter of Himavan, the king of the Himalayas. She vows to marry Shiva and Shiva alone. Manmatha (the god of love) abets in the change of mind of Shiva towards Uma. This segment of the program ended with the joyful celebration of Uma and Shiva.

The third episode epitomized the dual aspect of Divinity. The dancers depicted the story of sage Bhringi who vows to worship only Shiva and refuses to acknowledge Devi. To teach Bhringi a lesson and to exemplify the indivisible divinity of Parvathy and Shiva to the world, Devi merges with Shiva and becomes Ardhanaari (half male, half female). The dancers exhibited extraordinary technique in depicting this scene where each had one arm in fixed position and brought out the mudras in the other hand in perfect unison.

The first segment after the intermission portrayed Devi, the destroyer of evil in the world. The demon Mahishasura, protected by a boon from death by any man, runs amok in

the world. Little did he imagine that Goddess Durga, not only can challenge him to a war but actually destroy him. The destruction of evil by Durga is celebrated annually in Bengal and many parts of India, over a period of 9 days during Navarathri.

In Southern India, Devi is worshipped as Karumari, the Goddess of plenty, of snakes and animals, of arts and artisans. The dancers presented this aspect of Devi in folk style.

In the final segment of the program, Parvathy and Shiva at the behest of sage Bharatha, perform the twin aspects of dance, Tandava the exuberent cosmic dance and Lasya the delicate feminine interpretation by Parvathy. The program concluded with a grand finale of rhythmic dance. This becomes the inspiration for Bharata for an exhaustive treatise, *Natya Sastra*, from which evolved *Bharatnatyam*.

The program, *Jaya Jaya Devi* was indeed a great visual treat. The dancers though trained in different schools of dance in India, delighted the audience by their artistry and closely coordinated execution. Smt. Radhaa deserves lots of credit for the lovely choreography. The packed audience at the Germantown academy in Fort Washington gave multiple standing ovations to the young artists.

The delightful music composed by Lalgudi Jayaraman and the excellent rendering by the musicians led by young S.P. Ramh considerably enhanced the enjoyment of the program. A unique feature of the program was the concept of Suthradari (narrator), brilliantly played by Shri C.P. Ramakrishna, in a classical Indian dance program.

SRUTI, the only organization in the Greater Delaware Valley devoted solely to Indian classical music and dance, has presented many outstanding programs in the past. It can justifiably proud in having presented one more in *Jaya Jaya Devi*.