

Gandhi continues to inspire NRGs

Hiral Dholakia-Dave

Ideals of Mahatma Gandhi continue to inspire, touch our hearts, be it in India or abroad. So when key events in the life of Gandhiji, which transformed him into a Mahatma, found expression in a dance drama in the US, the crowds were unstoppable.

It was presented by Abhinaya Dance Academy of San Jose to audiences in New York and New Jersey. The dancers, trained in classical Indian dances presented the episodes choreographed by artistic director Mythili Kumar, a Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi and Odissi exponent.

Organised at Sri Venkateshwara temple auditorium, Bridgewater, New Jersey on recently and at Hindu temple auditorium, Flushing, New York, the concert attracted a 500-strong audience from all walks of life.

Conceptualised in 1994 and developed a year later, the dance drama depicts events from Gandhiji's life as reminisced by his grand niece Manuben.

From how he was scared of darkness as a child and how he didn't want to copy in school despite his teacher asking him to and in youth feeling guilty over smoking and promising his father never to do it again to his anguish on partition and being shot at during a prayer session, the one and a half hour long novel production goes on to reaffirm his principles of nonviolence relevant even today. It also incorporated Gandhiji's favourite bhajans including 'Vaishnav jana toh...'.

"The family of the chairperson of our board of directors then was involved with the Gandhi Peace Foundation and came up with this idea of having a dance drama on 125th birth anniversary of Gandhiji.

After an in-depth research, referring a number of books I finally developed the concept. The Gandhi drama is preceded by a 45 minute piece Jagriti on women and attitude towards women through the ages followed by a piece from Bhagvat Geeta, which was his inspiration," says Mythili Kumar.

Essentially choreographed in Bharatnatyam style of dancing, the dance-drama impressed the audiences as much for the concept as the performances.

"The heart and soul put into this production were very evident. Emancipation of women who even today suffer many indignities, and the most precious of all "freedom" that was gifted to us through the sacrifice of many led by the Mahatma were brought out nicely by the group and surely will influence the thoughts and actions of many who were fortunate to be there," says a resident of New Jersey.



Scenes from dance drama on Gandhi's life