

Dance like a woman

Ranee Kumar

Dance Halim Khan's attempt of doing a Kuchipudi ballet blending Urdu ghazals and devotionals of Annamacharya was a treat. Ranee Kumar



Rhythmic steps Halim Khan performing Kuchipudi dance. PHOTO:M. SUBHASH

The concept was laudable. Here is a dancer who has not only imbibed the traditional dance grammar of Kuchipudi but brought it to blend with Urdu ghazals of yore and flow into the Telugu devotionals of Saint Annamacharya.

Halim Khan who impersonated a woman enthralled the audience with his chiselled expressions and an equally impressive costume to match. He first essayed a Qutb Shahi era poetry in ghazal format. A prayer to Allah culminating in a very popular *bandish* (Jago mohan pyare...) a composition by Jasraj, was a secular piece with the three dancers paying obeisance to a universal God.

Mohammad Quli Qutb Shah's two romantic ghazals *Piya baaje pyaala...* and '*... ishq se sajden raahen*' and two more attributed to Abul Hasan Tana Shah which sounded more like poetry than ghazal were chosen to present the first part of *Yaad-e-maazee* (poetry in dance). Though the lyrical quality of Mohammad Quli's poetry is excellent, there was hardly any scope for dance, and that too through the medium of a robust dance form like Kuchipudi.

Ghazals are not tuned to classical dance whose rhythmic patterns are set to *tala*. Despite these constraints and that of the stage, Halim was able to present through abhinaya what could not be actually said with feet. The *hastha mudras* were of course culled out of Kuchipudi grammar to denote the more emotive aspects of the ghazals.

Then, as the second part, the audience was treated to more classical form of dance with Annamacharya's new *sankeertanas*. The opening Maharashtra devotional on Ganapati (Eka dantaaya, Gowri tanayaya...) marked the beginning of a delectable treat. *Ativaro...* in Nata, Vorapu, merupu, vayyaramu... in Hamsanandi and Rammanave vaani... in Desh were more of the erotic yet Halim did justice to the spiritual and *madura bhakti* that is said to be the essence of Annamayya's compositions. His varied expressions and body kinetics in tune with the lyrics were excellent and if at all the dance fell short of something it was the need for more clarity in *adavus*. There weren't any *jati* patterns but even the footwork which was fleeting would have been enhanced were it more pronounced. The La Makaan stage was not perfectly suited to a dance of vigour. The briefing for each of the songs in English was very educative and welcome. With a good command over the medium, Halim Khan can go places even if he danced like a man sans impersonation.