



Leela - A Kuchipudi production full of divine ecstasy



ANNA RAO GANGAVALLI

The recent Kuchipudi production ‘The Leela’ by Akshadha School of Performing Arts at Rangbhoomi, Madhapur, was a treat to watch. Featuring solo and group performances by Nihanthri Reddy and her students, it was a soulful journey into divine madness—the mystical ecstasy experienced by the true devotee in search of the ‘Paramatma’.

This sacred longing often appears as madness to the outside world. But as Sant Tukaram profoundly said, the ideal devotee is one who

appears mad in the eyes of society—for it is only in such uninhibited devotion that one truly surrenders.

In this recital, Nihanthri explored the Bhakti period and its rich legacy of poets who poured their souls into verses of divine love and surrender. She chose the ‘sarga’ format, similar to Jayadeva’s magnum opus ‘Gita Govinda’. Five themes, forming the spiritual and aesthetic spine of this work, were selected. Krishna’s multifaceted nature was reflected through deeply devotional portrayals of these songs, envisioned through dance and music.



A transcendental Kuchipudi performance blending dance, music, and Bhakti, where devotion, artistry, and spiritual ecstasy became one

It was explained that these compositions are not mere lyrics, but cries from the soul—echoes of mysticism that bind the devotee to the divine. Therefore, the emotions and feelings depicted were compared to a world of sacred frenzy where the audience was invited to feel—smile, cry, laugh, and chant the divine names—to truly partake in a living devotion, not just witness a performance.

The students wore yellow-orange silk ‘aharya’ with multicolored borders. Nihanthri herself stood out austere, having pared down all accessories to a minimum—just a plain dark dress with minimal but exquisitely sparkling jewelry and no ornate headdress. This gave an almost balletic look and

enabled the audience to discern every gesture of ‘angika abhinaya’ with lucid clarity, allowing the movements to be followed throughout their amplitude from start to finish. The flowing grace of Kuchipudi in every minute detail was crystal clear.

The solo piece by Nihanthri, ‘Swagatham Krishna’, though a much-performed item, conveyed a depth of feeling through its ‘sancharis’ that was truly eloquent. The ‘nritta’ was exceptionally energetic and vigorous in the ‘jathis’ presented. ‘Abhinaya’ flowed well in tune with the ‘natya’, creating a well-rounded exposition.

‘Nada Murali’, performed by Nihanthri along with her students, reflected the rigorous training of their young

guru. The students’ precision in every step stood out. The ‘abhang’ ‘Bhakta Jana Vatsala’ by Sant Namdev praised Vithala as the compassionate protector of the world. In a unique phrase, he is hailed in the feminine form as the divine mother whose grace is as vast as the ocean.

Here echo the words of the Vaishnava commentator Vidya Bhushan, who described Krishna as ‘Madhusudhana’—he who not only vanquishes demons but also removes such tendencies from devotees’ minds to clear the path for their spiritual growth. Krishna is thus both destroyer and liberator—the freer of the soul from its internal enemies.

Nihanthri was as brisk as the crisply melodious stanzas,



her energy peaking as she darted across the stage with rapid twists and turns, almost too quick to track. The very air became vibrant with the devotional atmosphere of the song and dance. The material and spiritual merged as the boundary between them dissolved in the sanctified space created.

‘Namdev Keerthana Kari’ by Janabai reflected this merging. It was ably portrayed by the students, who danced in exacting symmetry and high-caliber synchronization. The ‘sankeertana’ delved into the Lord’s absorption in his devotees’ singing—so rapt that his yellow silk ‘Pitam-

bara’ slips, a striking image. The Lord himself partakes in the ecstasy thus generated. Heaven becomes the living experience of chanting, singing, and breathing His name.

The highlight was the mellifluous ‘Mazhe Mahera Pandhari’, which kept the audience swaying to its tune. With wide-open lotus eyes, the Lord is constantly scanning the horizon for the souls calling out to Him. Panduranga is the loving father, and Rukmini, the affectionate mother. They wait with the tender eagerness of parents for the return of their daughter to the maternal home—a place of com-

fort, love, and belonging.

The choreography was particularly creative as the students, with Nihanthri, formed intersecting arcs and circles—patterns that caught the eye with dazzling displays of skill. The ‘Nagara Sankeertana’, where all the students and Nihanthri sat in a row to joyously sing the Lord’s name, was magnified by the audience clapping in tune—creating a union of voice, melody, rhythm, and emotion. It was a sweet, heartfelt outpouring—an offering from the heart—where all sense of time and place was lost, and surrender to the music became total.

Nimrat Kaur celebrates her mother with a heartfelt tribute on Guru Purnima



On the occasion of Guru Purnima, actress Nimrat Kaur penned a moving tribute for her mother, Avinash Kaur.

She called her mom her “first home” and “divine mentor,” while expressing gratitude for the strength and wisdom she’s drawn from her over the years. Taking to Instagram, the ‘Airlift’ actress, on Thursday, posted a series of her photos with her mother alongside a heartfelt note. She shared a deeply emotional post honouring her mother, whose birthday coincidentally falls on the same day this year.

In her moving tribute, Nimrat reflected on the spiritual connection she shares with her mother. The ‘Dasvi’ actress also praised

her mother’s grace, patience, and ability to find beauty in the ordinary things. She added that these qualities continue to guide and inspire her every day.

Nimrat Kaur wrote, “They say a teacher appears when the soul is ready. Before the ‘I’ was even named, my soul, through its eternal search was blessed to anchor itself in you Mama. And I know this to be something that shall transcend time and space as we know it.”

“I live life trying to emulate how you keep grace in the face of any adversity, how you choose patience and dignity no matter what life presents and how you simply make the ordinary, extraordinary every single day. It’s no co-incidence that today

the Gurupurnima full moon aligns to celebrate you Ma, my first home, my divine mentor, my sanctum sanctorum. Happy Birthday Mama...can’t wait to kiss and hug you and have some birthday cake together!!! @avinashsethi.10.”

Guru Purnima is a sacred Hindu festival observed on the full moon day of the Ashadha month. It is a day devoted to honouring teachers, mentors, and spiritual guides. This year, Guru Purnima is being celebrated on July 10.

On the work front, Nimrat Kaur most recently appeared in the film ‘Sky Force,’ which hit theatres on January 24, 2025. She was also seen in the web series ‘Kull: The Legacy of the Raisingsh.’

Mannara Chopra resumes work post father’s demise; says ‘Thanks you for your support’

Actress Mannara Chopra is all ready to join the workforce following the demise of her father, Raman Rai Handa in June this year.

Mannara took to her Instagram handle and announced that she has resumed work.

Showing gratitude to her fans and well-wishers for supporting her during this difficult time, she wrote on the photo-sharing app, “Thankyou from the bottom of my heart for all the love and support you’ve shown to me and my family during these tough times. Resuming work now, with gratitude in my heart.”

Mannara’s father left for heavenly abode on June 16 this year at the age of 72. Sharing the unfortunate news on social media, she had penned, “With profound grief and sorrow we inform the sad demise of our loving father who left us for his heavenly abode on 16/06/2025. He was the pillar of strength for our family.”

After the last rites which took place on June 18 in Mumbai, the family further organized a prayer meet for him attended by Mannara’s ‘Bigg Boss 17’ co-contestants Abhishek Kumar and Khanzaadi, along with others.

For the unversed, Raman Handa was married to Kamini Chopra, the paternal aunt of Priyanka and Parineeti Chopra.

PeeCee extended her heartfelt condolences to her cousin sister through a post that read, “You’ll always be in our hearts. Rest easy



Raman uncle (fufaji). Om Shanti.”

Talking about her work, Mannara made her Bollywood debut in 2014 with “Zid,” however the film did not perform well at the box office.

She finally rose to fame with her appearance on “Bigg Boss 17,” where she

became the second runner-up.

Mannara was last seen in the cooking reality show “Laughter Chefs – Unlimited Entertainment Season 2,” along with Elvish Yadav, Rubina Dilaik, Bharti Singh, Krushna Abhishek, Vicky Jain, Ankita Lokhande, and Abhishek Kumar.

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12 Bay (5)
13 Glassy little meteorite (7)
15 Eagle’s nest (5)
18 Recipe amt. (3)
19 Angel of death (6)
21 Benefit (7)
22 Catch wind of (4)

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24 Divide proportionately (7)
26 State of equilibrium (6)
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31 Lift shoulders (5)
32 It has eight arms (7)
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36 Nostalgic look (5)
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