

‘REBEL RANIS’

Brings four powerful women to life through dance

Keelaka Dance Company's 'Rebel Ranis' brings together the stories of Kaikeyi, Sita, Karaikkal Ammaiyyar and Draupadi in a vibrant blend of dance, theatre and music. With powerful performances and striking visuals, the production looks beyond familiar legends to explore four women who challenged the boundaries of their time

ANNA RAO GANGAVALLI

Ranghoomi Auditorium recently witnessed a dance theatre production, 'Rebel Ranis', by Keelaka Dance Company. The production was the result of a collaboration between senior Bharatanatyam guru Jyotsna Lata Shourie and her senior student Aneesha Grover from Delhi. The script was by Aneesha and the choreography by Jyotsna Shourie.

The focus was on four characters: Kaikeyi, Sita, Karaikkal Ammaiyyar and Draupadi. These are the heroines who narrate and play out their stories, presenting an intensely emotive slice of life, not legend, as seen from an insider's perspective. Shattering stereotypes, the subtly tailored kaleidoscopic visualisation, brimming with colour, made for an exhilarating experience.

From the start, the audience was gripped and drawn in, and the tightly packed hour-and-fifteen-minute timescale did not allow for any let-up in pace. The

dialogue and dance were seamlessly fleshed out in a bravura fin-de-siècle tone, as the Rebel Ranis briefly spoke and the incandescent energy of the dance took over.

The drama opened with the four heroines perched on high seats, exchanging their stories in a witty dialogue. The thread linking them is the fact that they all stretch the boundaries in a male-dominated society: Kaikeyi, being a warrior queen versed in politics; Sita, the slayer of Ravana in the apocryphal Adbhut Ramayan; Karaikkal Ammaiyyar, who gives up all societal norms in search of Shiva; and an assertive Draupadi, who breaks taboos.

A melange of music styles, from jazz to Carnatic, embellished the soundscape, including the Ravanashatakam, heralding the dramatic entrance of Ravana. The Shiva Panchakshari appropriately set the mood for Karaikkal Ammaiyyar.

Aneesha Grover was Kaikeyi in the first sequence as she described her upbringing. In a violet aharya, she was portrayed as learning



all the skills as a princess that were identical to those of a male counterpart. Her father, Aswapati, wished her to gain experience in warfare and politics. However, these talents proved to be more of a burden than appropriate to the role she was destined to play.

Apart from the occasion when she accompanied Dasaratha to the battlefield,

where she proved her valour by helping him win, thereby obtaining the boons that would prove to be her bane, she was relegated to wifely duties in the antahpura of the royal household. The memory of a matching duet showcasing her martial skills with Dasaratha is all that lingers.

Her sagacity and courage are forgotten, diminished in



the savage arc of the terrible act of sending Rama, Lakshmana and Sita into exile. We hear, in her own words, a trenchant justification.

Nandita Kaalan Mehra as Sita dominated the next scene. She was no fragile queen needing the solace of a protecting male presence. The 'Adbhut Ramayan', from a Shakta perspective, envisages the story of her victory over a thousand-headed Ravana reigning in Pushkar, more terrifying than the Lord of Lanka.

Nandita's orange-and-green dress was elegant. Rama and Ravana, played by male Chhau dancers Sagar Vashisht and Benjamin Jacob, gave a scintillating display of somersaults and cartwheels as they lunged and leaped in the battlefield scene, creating fireworks on stage with their athletic display.

Fit and chiselled, they duelled with vigour, and finally an exhausted Rama is overpowered and rendered unconscious by his antagonist. Nandita's aquiline countenance flashed with

rage as Sita's gentle visage transformed. The cosmic form of the multi-armed Goddess Mahakali, warrior of darkness, emerges.

Laughing hysterically, with bloodshot eyes and an outstretched tongue denoting her ferocity, she charges into the demon and his army ranks, decapitating the Asura's thousand heads in a flash and destroying his armies.

Ravana's myrmidons in black capes sported face masks resembling an amalgam of silvery metal and ruby-stained glass, giving an Art Deco look. They pranced and capered, looking like fiends from Dante's Inferno. Nandita, to sum up, depicted a Sita who would not have needed Lakshmana to ward off Surpanakha but would have been quite capable of doing so herself!

Amrita Sivakumar, in a green-and-yellow dress, gave a finely etched portrait of the great Saiva saint Karaikkal Ammaiyyar. She liberates herself from a mundane housewifely existence by the grace of Shiva.

As she prays to the Lord in despair, requiring a mango to serve to her husband, divine grace makes it appear. She gives up all the norms of human society to smear ashes on herself, denoting complete renunciation, to follow the ascetic path to self-realisation.

She does not care in the least, even shunning clothing, wandering ardently and unclad in search of the Lord.

Harini Iyer was Draupadi in a draped pink saree. She explains that, though being fire-born, she had to undergo the travails of a life full of perils while still being the rock-like support of her five husbands, enduring even the unendurable.

A leering, malevolent Duryodhana, sly Shakuni and a dignified figure of pathos, Yudhishthira, stole the scene. (Sagar Vashisht, Ravi Yadav and Benjamin Jacob.)

As the dice fall with a guillotine-like regularity, all the wealth of the Pandavas evaporates. When Draupadi herself is staked and lost, Duryodhana, intoxicated with victory, decides to hu-

miliate their queen.

He staggers in a louché, unsteady manner, indicating his bare thigh with a repulsive gesture. Leering malice oozed from Dussasana as he evinced satisfaction in physically dragging Draupadi to the palace hall. He is whirled around and collapses with the intervention of Krishna as he dismally fails in trying to disrobe the Pandavas' consort.

A Tamil jazz song, whose lyrics embroidered upon the theme of unleashing righteous wrath and which was sung by Harini Iyer, became the leitmotif of the finale. It received a standing ovation as the production signed off with a grim recital of the statistics of atrocities against women being committed in contemporary India.

It was a warning against the complacency of a society residing in the illusion of having achieved feminine empowerment, which is still a distant goal for many.

Dolly Thakore graced the occasion as a guest and congratulated the artistes on their proficiency.

Farah Khan opens up about raising three kids and being part of the 'sandwich generation'

Farah Khan has opened up about raising her three children while navigating the responsibilities that come with being part of the "sandwich generation" — a phase of life where one often finds themselves caring for both their children and aging parents. Reflecting on the experience, the filmmaker also shared a heartfelt message about recognizing and supporting caregivers, and said she hopes her children learn to acknowledge those who put the needs of their loved ones first. Sharing a couple of her photos with her triplets, Farah wrote, "Me with my three I am part of the sandwich generation. At that age when we either are caregivers to our parents or to our kids... sandwiched in between! One day these three will be sandwiched too, looking after me, n their kids. I am not being dramatic, that's just what it is, n



frankly good luck to them because I am going to be a nightmare." "Today, if u look after someone u love, u do it with nothing. Nobody asking how ur holding up, because everybody is asking about the patient, n quite rightly. We don't think about these people much. We just say she's a good daughter; he's a devoted son. As

if it's a personality trait n not the hardest job either of them will ever do. I don't want that to be what my children inherit. I'd like them to ask the person doing the caring how they are." <She added, "N that starts very small. One question, or even a little hug of acknowledgment.. every strong person sometimes needs to be cared for too. This is something we'll all go through at some point This is for all the caregivers, the pure souls out there putting everyone else first.. hope ur ok n taken care of too This film by @mrmedhq made me think about my kids and all these caregivers. Send it to someone who needs to know they've been seen."

Farah Khan and her husband, filmmaker Shirish Kunder, are parents to three children, triplets who were born in February 2008 through in vitro fertilization (IVF).

Dia Mirza on parenting her son

'I strive to teach him the values of care, respect, empathy and kindness'

Bollywood actress and environmentalist Dia Mirza has opened up about the values she hopes to instill in her son, Avyaan.

She emphasised the importance of empathy, kindness, respect for boundaries, and understanding consent from an early age. Sharing her thoughts on parenting, Dia said she strives every day to teach her son the importance of treating others with care and respect. "Every single day, I strive to teach my son the value of care, respect, empathy and kindness towards all," she said.

The 'Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein' actress stressed that teaching children about consent goes beyond simply understanding the word "no". She said her son should also learn to recognize subtle signs of discomfort and respect personal boundaries. "That means helping him understand how to respond to rejection, respect boundaries, and recognize and honour even the subtle ways in which a person may convey discomfort," she said.

Dia further explained that consent should be understood as an active and willing choice rather than merely the absence of refusal. "I want him to understand that consent is not merely the absence of a 'no'; it is the presence of a willing and comfortable



'yes,'" she added. The actress also highlighted the importance of teaching children that nobody is obligated to give them attention, affection, or intimacy. She said rejection should not be viewed as an insult or something that needs to be challenged or negotiated. "That no one owes him their attention, affection, or intimacy, and that rejection is neither an insult nor something to be challenged, negotiated, or taken personally," Dia said.

Calling it an important responsibility for parents raising sons, Dia said such conversations can contribute towards creating a safer and more equitable environment for girls. "This

is something every parent raising a son must strive for today. Only then can we build a world that is safer, more equitable, and healthier for our girls," she concluded.

Dia Mirza also shared an image carrying the message: "Don't raise girls to avoid harm. Raise boys who won't cause harm."

Dia Mirza is a mother to two children—her biological son, Avyaan Azaad Rekhi, and her stepdaughter, Samaira Rekhi, whom she shares a close bond with. Avyaan is Dia's son with businessman Vaibhav Rekhi. Samaira is Vaibhav Rekhi's daughter from his previous marriage and is Dia's stepdaughter.

CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 Hold sway (4)

4 Frozen drip (6)

8 Average (3)

10 Roman 1052 (4)

13 Cricketing skill? (8)

14 What's-his-name; a nuisance (2-3-2)

15 Centre (6)

17 Rigidly austere (9)

21 "Sea", in French (3)

22 Opening flower (3)

23 Gross Natl. Prod. (3)

26 The final demand (9)

27 Surrogate (6)

28 Nazi police (7)

32 Disgraceful (8)

34 Lip (4)

35 Designer monogram (3)

36 Unit in a sentence (6)

37 Auction condition (2,2)

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