

Deepavali Celebrations by the Telugu Association of Greater Boston

The Boston area Telugu community celebrated Deepavali (Diwali) with its usual pomp and circumstance under the auspices of the Telugu Association of Greater Boston (TAGB) on the day of the festival, Saturday, October 21st, in Framingham. Close to 550 people, including many children, enthusiastically participated in the program and savored the unique cultural presentations by invited artists from Andhra Pradesh. For more than five hours, the artists kept the audience enthralled, and the inevitable delays in the program did not wane the keen interest of most of those in attendance. A devotional composition by Saint Tyagaraja and a Telugu folk song, both rendered by Mrs. Valli Bhamidipati of Nashua, opened the program and set the tone for the content of the rest of the evening. In his remarks, President of TAGB, Mr. Sreenivas Kaki, pointed out the many changes he and his team are endeavoring to bring about in the working of the Association, and called on the audience members to encourage their activities by greater participation and continued feedback, either on their website (<http://www.tagb.org>) or via email to president@tagb.org.

Mrs. Anu Metra, who was the evening's compere, started off by introducing a special guest from India, Padmasri Dr. Yarlagadda Lakshmi Prasad, a former minister and member of the Rajya Sabha. Dr. Prasad called on the expatriate Telugu community to preserve their bonds with the motherland, and commended them for their dedication in preserving and furthering Telugu culture.

The first of the evening's two main programs was a rendering of Ghazals in Telugu by the famed Dr. 'Ghazal' Srinivas. Dr. Srinivas is a recognized pioneer in bringing the predominantly Hindi and Urdu art form of Ghazals to Telugu audience through his melodious rendering of plain Telugu compositions, both by him as well as by other pioneers in the area. He sang several such Ghazals, including many by Dr. Rentala Venkateswara Rao, Dr. Tatavarti Rajagopalam, and by himself. The songs touched on varied themes, such as the rural and cultural moorings that innately touch us, the simple pleasures that children bring, the lost innocence of childhood that all of us longingly recall, and some light-hearted ones such as a ghazal that satirizes the seeming differences between a husband and wife, or another that extols the virtues of a morning walk. One of Dr. Srinivas' last renderings was a touching, almost lachrymose, description of the agony of a mother left behind as her son travels to foreign lands in search of better life. Dr. Srinivas' commentary was interlaced with vivid humor, and his visible effort to connect with the audience was refreshing. The repeated uproarious applause, especially the standing ovation given to him at the conclusion of his program, is an indication of the immensely enjoyable time the audience members had.

The final piece of the evening's program was a Kuchipudi dance-drama recital of the well-known 'Mohini Bhasmasura' episode from Indian mythology by a troupe led by Natyakalaratna Sri Pasumarthy Venkateswara Sarma, founder and head of the 'Sri Bala Tripura Sundari Natya Kalakshetram' of Vijayawada. A primary disciple of the famous Padmasri Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam, a leading exponent of Kuchipudi dance form, Sri Sarma himself is a renowned artist who has choreographed close to a dozen ballets, and has given performances around the world. The seven Act rendering of 'Mohini Bhasmasura' stood out for every aspect of the performance, from the artistes' make-up and glorious costumes, to the unique and captivating songs that described the story line.

In particular, the acts in which Bhasmasura desires to destroy Lord Siva Himself, and the one in which Bhasmasura mimics Mohini's dancing (thus bringing on his own death) are captivating for the way the artists strove to relate to the audience while keeping the authenticity and quality of the performance. Sri Sarma himself gave an outstanding performance as the lead character, Bhasmasura, playing a superb role in every Act. His expressions of emotion and his choreographic style gave him an on-stage presence that was thoroughly enjoyable. His skill and expertise bring glory to the Kuchipudi tradition, as well as to all of India.

Both the centerpiece programs proved that polished and sophisticated art forms can have enormous popular entertainment value. Dr. Srinivas proved that literature doesn't have to be dull, and that humor need not be slapstick or risqué. Sri Sarma's performance proved that an age-old art form, especially one born and bred in Andhra Pradesh, can keep a modern, even movie-jaded audience enthralled. This feast of literary, musical, and visual cornucopia ended with the presentation of souvenirs to the artistes by prominent members of TAGB. In conclusion, TAGB Vice President Dr. Surya Jayanti offered thanks to the sponsors who provided financial support – Sri Mohan Nannapaneni, Prakash Reddy, Dr. Ammanni, Ranjan Vadlapatla, as well as the New England Telugu Association (NETA), and all the members that purchased specially-priced VIP Tickets. Thanks were also offered to the countless volunteers from the local Telugu community who worked hard to make the program a success.