



Magic in the theatre

Description



The mesmerizing combination of puppets and dancers presenting the epic tale of Ramayana

The process of revisiting and reenacting the epic dramas and stories is nothing short of a formidable task and this process doesn't seem to have an end. More so in case of Ramayana, since its impact is huge and has so many versions. Katkatha, a Puppet Art Trust based in New Delhi performed a puppet show, *About Ram* on Friday, 20th of December. The show was held at Bharat Nivas, Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Auroville. Katkatha's *About Ram* was a stirring look at Ram's inner journey using puppetry, animation and dance. This show is an adaptation of Bhavbhuti's Ramayana which looks at it as a tragic love story.



Ram surrounded by loud voices doubting the virtue of Sita and unable to block them

“I am fascinated by the relationship between the puppeteer and the puppet,” says Anurupa Roy, founder of Katkatha and director of *About Ram*. *About Ram* is also the first show in which Katkatha used animation. Katkatha was established in 1998 and since then, it has performed several shows with themes as disparate as Shakespearean comedy (*Almost Twelfth Night*), HIV/AIDS (*Virus Ka Tamashaa*) and Indian mythology (*Durga* and *About Ram*).

Produced by Katkatha in collaboration with Vishal Dar, *About Ram* germinated three years ago when Roy watched a Balinese Ramayana. After studying different versions of Balinese Ramayana, she came across Bhavabhuti’s *Ramayana*, which looks at it from a different perspective altogether. It revolves around the theme of loneliness. Each human being is ultimately alone and so Ram in choosing his call of duty over his wife Sita, becomes alone for the next thousand years.



Sita reliving memories of her past with Ram

The show opens with Ram, sitting in solitude and gazing across the sea, with thoughts of his love, Sita. He looks at the ring on his finger and it evokes countless memories of their past. The central character of Ram is played by a two and a half feet puppet made of Styrofoam, thermocol, wood and paper mache. It has a personality with remarkable humanness. The low light and soft music coupled with this soulful puppetry, had the attention of the audience riveted on the performance.

The story then proceeds, showing Sita in a wistful state reminiscing about her past with Ram. Other than puppetry, the performance relied on a combination of animation, dance and music and the act of Sita’s recollection was shown

by the use of DLP (Digital Light Processing) theater projector. This projector was used to display images of the memories Sita had of herself and Ram. In Lanka, Hanuman gives the ring to Sita and gazing at the ring she is bombarded with images of her past which is shown with the help of this projection.



Sita at Lanka

This is followed by scenes of Hanuman being captured and lighting fire to his tail, which sends him into frenzy. War is declared where demons and monkeys participate, and Ram comes out as a flaming warrior, intent on avenging and destroying Ravan.

The scenes where they show Ram fighting and eventually gaining his revenge by slaying Ravan, were interesting. Ravan was brought in the form of a leather puppet, specially made in Andhra Pradesh. The fight was between Ram, now played by an actor and Ravan, in puppet form and was a feast to the the audience eyes. The credit goes to the puppeteers who controlled Ravan with the strings.



Ram preparing himself to avenge Ravan

Post war, Ram's mind is filled with doubtful voices questioning Sita's purity. Unable to face her, he eventually turns away. Sita, filled with agony sinks into the the mother earth. The show ends, where Ram is given his throne, and rules Ayodhya as a king for years in loneliness.

After the end of the show, the audience was invited to ask questions and interact with the performers. The organizers also showed them the puppets and permitted those interested to touch and get a feel of the puppets.

They also explained about the mechanism of the puppets and the places where they are made. The audience responded with great interest and many commented on finding the show transforming, transporting and entrancing. The Katkatha group's interpretation of Bhavbhuti's Ramayana left the people of Auroville and Pondicherry asking for more.



The final Battle between Ram and Ravan

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Category

1. On the wings of the muse

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