

Dancing to the rhythms of history

Keremane Shivananda Hegde, director of Idagunji Mahaganapati Yakshagana Mandali, gives us insight into Yakshagana, an ancient dancedrama originating from Karnataka. This vibrant art form breathes life into timeless epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata through elaborate attire, dance, and soul-stirring music

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PHOTOS: GAURAV KADAM

In a world where contemporary entertainment often takes centre stage, a recent event at Spicmacay IISER Pune transported the audience to the enchanting world of Yakshagana. The spotlight was on the acclaimed Idagunji Mahaganapati Yakshagana Mandali, led by Keremane Shivananda Hegde, a master in the art of this traditional dance-drama. Yakshagana, a jewel in India's cultural treasury, originates from the coastal districts of Karnataka and boasts a rich history dating

back to the Vaishnavite Bhakti movement. It is a blend of theatre, dance, and music, bringing ancient epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata to life. One of the most striking aspects of Yakshagana is its elaborate and colourful costumes, intricate makeup, and evocative masks. Keremane Shivananda Hegde, the brilliant mind behind Idagunji Mahaganapati Yakshagana Mandali, offered us an insight into this mystical art form that has been cherished for centuries.



Generations of artists

Hailing from a prestigious lineage of Yakshagana artists, Shri Hegde's journey with this art form began when he was just 12 years old. After completing his academic BA, he followed in the footsteps of his father, the late Keremane Shambhu Hegde, and obtained a Diploma in Choreography under the guidance of the eminent Guru Dr Maya Rao. Hegde's passion for dance and performance extends beyond Yakshagana, as he proudly mentions, "I have also learned Kathak and many folk dances of India, including Chhau Dance of Seraikala and Manipuri Marital dances, to

name a few.” Over the years, he has portrayed leading roles in various Yakshagana performances, such as Shri Krishna in the episodes of Sandhana and Krishnarjuna, Shiva in Daksha Yajna, Vishwamitra in Harischandra, Duryodhana in Gadhayudda, and Shri Rama, among others.

Breathing life into the epics

Keremane Shivananda Hegde shares, “Yakshagana is a traditional dance drama of Karnataka. A troupe of Yakshagana artists is called a Mela or a Mandali, which is a traditional repertory that travels from one village to another. It used to be performed in paddy fields in the open air, throughout the night. Stories from the epics of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavatha, and Purana are depicted in Yakshagana through elaborate costume, dance, music, dialogue, and drama. Freedom for the artists to depict characters and stories in their unique perspectives, through extemporaneous dialogue, dance, and drama, opens up stories and characters in multi-facets, making every performance of Yakshagana unique and interesting.”

A three-fold mission

Keremane Shivananda Hegde sheds light on the mission of their organisation, ‘Idagunji Mela,’ saying, “Our organisation has three significant ambitions in its activities: Shikshana, which pertains to the education of the art form; Rakshana, aimed at preserving and protecting the art from deterioration; and Samvardhana, which involves enabling artists and uplifting the spectators.”

Balancing tradition and innovation

Celebrating their 85th year, the Mandali aims to maintain purity in tradition and perfection in their performances. Mr. Hegde proudly notes, “Many experiments and innovations happen without affecting the traditional heritage of this theatre. Our troupe has performed more than 10,000 shows, touring extensively, not only in India but also in the USA, England, Spain, Bahrain, France, China, Nepal, etc., spreading the flavours of native stories and culture. We have maintained a fine balance between tradition and innovation in Yakshagana performances.”