

EVENT DANCE

40 memorable years

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Aharya Darpanam offered a window into the evolution of dance production techniques



Shankarananda Kalakshetra's celebration of its 40 years through an exhibition saw several dance enthusiasts visiting Kalakriti art gallery in Hyderabad over the weekend. 'Aharya Darpanam' (*aharya*: costumes; *darpana*: images) was an aesthetic showcase of Bharatanatyam costumes, jewellery, stage props and photographs used by the dance school.

Navigating the exhibition gave viewers glimpses of the evolution of the dance school helmed by Ananda Shankar Jayant, choreography and narrative techniques, and the stage setting. The display of all these curated by the dancer along with designer Ganesh Nallari and photographer Muralidhar Gonugunta, made the exhibition a unique storytelling experience.

On display were several of Ananda's dance costumes, since the 1980s. Select productions beginning with 'Thyagaraja Ramayanam' in 1986 were discussed through brief notes, costumes, accessories and photographs. A vermilion-hued Kanchi sari was turned into a lehenga for Radha in 'Sri Krishnam Vande Jagadgurum' in 1987, contrasting the turmeric-hued backdrop.

Move through the decades and you observe how productions took a more minimalistic approach. A dancer no longer needed to sport heavy braids and a snake around the neck to depict Shiva. The rudraksh and the tandavam did the needful. "You don't have to spoon feed the audience," Ananda affirms.

In place of heavy silks, dance ensembles were designed using Mangalagiri cottons with thin zari borders (for *What About Me?* in 1999, discussing gender issues) or a black-beige cotton for 'Darshanam - an ode to the eye' in 2005: "We chose black to break its notion of being inauspicious," says Ananda.

An elegant 'poola jada' made by Ananda's mother in the 80s is worth the attention. Elsewhere, a tanpura and *talapatras* were on stage for 'Talapatra - Hymns from the Hills' (2011), a rendition of Annamayya kritis.

A traditional 'poola jada' from the 1980s

The 2018 production 'Tales of the Bull and the Tiger' used digital projections on stage. A series of photographs depict how this completed the picture for the audience. Visitors could also pore over archival brochures from the 1980s and 90s that detail the dance themes.

Aharya Darpanam set us thinking of the wealth of information on dance, textiles and jewellery available with dance schools. All these call for diligent documentation.



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<https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/dance/aharya-darpanam-offered-a-window-into-the-evolution-of-shankarananda-kalakshetras-dance-production-techniques/article25597361.ece>

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