

Shanti – a celebration of Indian music and dance at Carthage – 28 July, 2013



Shanti, a dance drama celebrating the theme of peace and non-violence in four dance styles of India - Kathak, Bharatnatyam, Odissi and Kathakali – was presented as part of the International Festival of Carthage on Sunday, 28th July, 2013. The International Festival of Carthage is considered to be the most prestigious cultural festival celebrated by the Ministry of Culture of the Government of the Republic of Tunisia. India participated in this festival for the first time in years in homage to the spirit of non-violence with which the people of Tunisia had waged a successful struggle to end dictatorship and to bring about democracy in Tunisia.

The performance was a magnificent display of virtuosity in dance and music. After a resplendent beginning in which all the dancers performed on stage in harmony, the show moved on to solo or group performances in each dance style separately. The audience was treated to a breath-taking solo performance by Pandit Rajendra Gangani in which he displayed scintillating foot work, extraordinary pirouettes and expressive *abhinaya* (facial expressions and gestures). His depiction of *sawan* or the

monsoon rain in north India was masterly and seemed to bring *sawan* to the north African summer. The rains were evoked by all the lead dancers in their depiction of *navarasa*, or the nine emotions of the Indian artistic tradition. Kathakali dancer Rajendra Pillai also depicted the rains using episodes from Indian mythology. Odissi dancer, Kavita Dwibedi gave a beautiful rendering of the *dashavataar* or ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu in Odissi style of eastern India along with her accompanying dancers. The graceful steps and the beautiful group poses appeared to recreate the temple sculptures of Konark in Carthage eliciting rounds of applause from the audience.

Then came four young performers in Kathak who displayed their mastery of fast-paced foot work for which Kathak is known. Complicated patterns of steps were performed to beautiful effect ending in dance poses of elegance and grace, to repeated rounds of applause from the appreciative audience, especially for young danseuse Shobhana Jha.

The performance was crowned by a duet in Bharatnatyam by Dakshina Vaidyanthan and Himanshu, depicting the majesty and statuesque beauty of this South Indian dance form. *Shringara rasa* or love was depicted by elegant gestures, synchronised foot work and the language of the eyes to extraordinary effect. The finale was when all the dancers performed on stage together in brilliant synchronised choreography and ended with the chant of surpassing peace - *Om Shanti Shanti Shanti*.

HE Mr. Mehdi Mabrouk, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Tunisia graced the commencement of the performance. A cross-section of Tunisians formed the audience, while the venue was the magnificent open-air amphitheatre of Carthage built over 2000 years ago and belonging to Tunisia's heritage of Roman antiquity. *Shanti* was an evocation of Indian culture in a truly Tunisian setting.