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**Glittering Ramleela glorifies Shri Ram at Cullen Hall to a full house**



Sita with her friends, in a scene from Ram Leela. Photo by BIDAY DIXIT

The magnum saga 'Ram Leela 2012' presented by Shri Natraj School of Dance in association with Indian Association of Cultural and Heritage Foundation on Saturday, the November 3rd, 2012 at the Cullen Performance Hall of the University of Houston, was amongst the most sophisticated examples of professionalism, Indo-American cultural spirit, community bonding, and win of good over evil.

An outstanding journey involving more than 100 professional and amateur performers of ages between 6-month baby Ram to senior citizens in Dashrath Darbar, hundreds of bright costumes, spectacular pyrotechnics with special effects, and elaborate scenes were a sincere dedication to the epic story of Lord Rama and His conquests.

Ms. Kusum Sharma, the executive director of Shri Natraj School of Dance has been organizing Ramleela in Houston since 2005.

For past three years, the first time it was staged in 2010 at the Cullen Hall at the University of Houston, the Ramleela has set a tradition of ringing in the Dushhera and Diwali festivities in Houston.

With the passing of each year, newer elements have been added into the play, making it more spectacular.

After an invocation rendered by distinguished entertainment media icon Sunil Thakkar of Masala Radio, the directors of IACHF; grand Sponsor Shri Jugal & Raj Malani, the three-hour saga started covering all seven Kand (chapters) from Ramayana, witnessed and blessed by many distinguished audiences including Dr. Binshnupad Goswamiji, Head Priest of Durgbari Society, Sh. Amar Agarwalji of Shri Radha Krishna Temple and many others.

The first half of the Ramleela included Bal Kand (chapter on childhood) and Ayodhya Kand (chapter on first attempt of coronation) and covered Shri Ram's birth through His exile to the forest.

The special effects which were heavily advertised in the preshow media announcement were simply spectacular.

The first half showed Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva in the heavens using rigging special effect as they and other gods come to Lord Vishnu to seek his help in destroying devil Ravan (the daemon king) and free mother Earth.

Other special effects include Ahalaya emancipation, river Ganga descent from heaven to the earth, 12 feet tall demon queen Taraka to name a few. The use of pyrotechnics during swayamvar (the groom search competition) and other important turns of the show further heightened the visual effect of the show.

The second half covered Arayana Kand (chapter in forest) through Uttar kand (chapter on coronation of Lord Ram as king of Ayodhya) which continued to amaze and dazzle the audience by beautiful costumes, sets, props (built by IACHF team), and more special effects. Many in audience felt as they were taken back to Treta Yuga (the age when said time of occurrence of these events) and Ramayan was playing out in front of them when Hanuman flew in front of their eyes, Ravan fought with Jatayu who was flying using rigging special effects, Hanuman put the Lanka to fire using fire dance special effects and Lord Ram and Sitaji descended from Heaven in the grand finale while Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma are giving their blessings from the Heaven.

This style of Ramleela is a brain child of Ms. Kusum Sharma.

This changed style was appreciated by many in audience. They felt this was better than any Ramleela they had ever seen including ones in India.

From scripting verses, choreographing dances, conceptualizing special effects, selecting costumes, and teaching theatrical acting to performers, Ms. Sharma was personally involved in each and every aspect of the on-stage show and was instrumental in putting this grand show together.

IACHF, a non-profit organization which Shri Natraj School of Dance teamed up with for this year Ramleela, was organizing their first event and showed utmost professionalism in managing the organizational aspects of Ramleela and making it easier for the 100's of performers and volunteers.

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When asked after the show, what made this Ramleela such a grand success, Ms. Sharma attributed the quality and caliber of the show to strong team effort.

[submit your opinion](#)

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