

Presented by SIFAS Festival of Arts 2024
In Collaboration with Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

Rukmini Kalyanam

Produced by Kalakshetra Foundation (India)

Choreographed by Rukmini Devi Arundale with music by Thuraiyur Rajagopala Sarma (India)

A traditional Indian dance production in a classical style like *bharatanatyam* is a *drishya kavya* (visual poetry). The performers on stage evoke an emotion in the audience, which leads to what is known as *rasanubhava* (aesthetic experience).

Rukmini Kalyanam is the delightful tale of the wedding of Krishna and Rukmini. Wise and valourous, loving and loved, far-seeing and yet living in the moment, gifted with sage like detachment, yet intensely human, the sage and man of action—this was Krishna, the eighth avatar of Lord Vishnu, who was supposed to have come down to this mortal world to save *dharma* (righteousness). The tale is at the same time a story, which will resonate with the younger generation—it is that of a woman exercising her agency to marry the man she loves.

It was originally conceived as a *melattur bhagavata mela*, a traditional theatrical performance in Thanjavur, Tamilnadu, India by Melattur Balu Bhagavatar. It was adapted into a *bharatanatyam* production by Rukmini Devi of Kalakshetra in the year 1964. It is the 60th year of the production.

Turaiyur Rajagopala Sarma has composed the music for the production and the lyrics are in the language Telugu.

We give below a summary of the performance in the order in which events unfold.

Rukmini Kalyanam

The production opens with the *gopis* (girls who herd cows) singing praises of Krishna, who subdues the venomous serpent, Kaliya.

The scene shifts to the Kingdom of King Bhishmaka and his Queen Rukmaangi. The court singers sing ballads in praise of the King and his kingdom, while the dancers dance to the ballads.

The King Bhishmaka and his Queen discuss the wedding plans of their beloved daughter Rukmini, who has come of age. They wish for her to get married to Krishna, who is a personification of Lord Vishnu. They feel that Krishna and Rukmini would be perfectly suited to each other. The entire Kingdom is happy with the decision.

They call their son Rukmi and convey their views to him.

Rukmi has other plans for his sister. He does not consider Krishna her equal and has plans to get her married to Shishupala, the Prince of Chedi. He berates his parents for choosing Krishna and instead decides to get her married to Shishupala. His mother pleads with him to no avail. Rukmi storms out of court having made his decision.

The scene shifts to Rukmini, who is joyously playing with her friends. She has heard of Krishna's valour and has always imagined herself as his wife. Meanwhile, a messenger from court arrives and conveys the news of what transpired in court.

Rukmini is upset to hear of her brother's plans to get her married to Shishupala. She decides to visit a fortune-teller who tells her that all will be well and that she will indeed marry Krishna.

She decides to take matters into her own hands. She writes a letter to Krishna, conveying her love to him and asks him to abduct her from her Kingdom. She dispatches the letter through a trusted Brahmin asking Krishna to hasten.

Intermission

The scene shifts to Krishna's court in Dwaraka.

The Brahmin arrives in Dwaraka and he is welcomed by Krishna. He delivers Rukmini's letter to Krishna. Krishna has also dreamt of the day he would wed Rukmini. On receiving her letter, he tells the Brahmin that he will set forth from Dwaraka to Rukmini's kingdom on the day of Gowri Pooja. The Brahmin leaves satisfied that all will be well.

Krishna hastens from Dwaraka with his brother Balarama and their army.

Gowri Pooja

The scene shifts to the Gowri Pooja at the temple. Rukmini arrives at the temple to perform Gowri Pooja. She prays to Goddess Gowri to make her wish come true.

Meanwhile, Krishna arrives in a chariot to the sound of the conch. He takes Rukmini along with him, while her brother Rukmi is in pursuit. Rukmi orders Krishna to stop. A battle ensues between Krishna and Rukmi with Krishna the clear victor. Rukmini pleads with him to spare her brother's life and Krishna does so.

Krishna and Rukmini proceed to Dwaraka to get married amid much pomp and splendour. The court celebrates the wedding, singing and dancing in joy, in praise of the divine couple.

End

Introduced by
Mellatur Balu Bhagavatar

Adapted and Choregraphed by
Smt. Rukmini Devi in 1964

Music by
Turaiyur Rajagopala Sharma

Cast

Sri. Krishna
Sri. P N Vikas

Gopis
Smt. Sreeliji Sreedharan
Smt. Ramya kannan
Smt. Ardra
Kum. Anjana
Smt. Kavya
Kum. Anagha

Bhishmaka
Sri. Surya Narayana Murthy

Minister
Sri. P K Geethanadhan

Vandimagadulu
Sri. Roopesh
Sri. Jyothish

Dancers
Smt. Haritha Haridas
Kum. Manasi

Rukmaangi
Smt. Sreedevi

Rukmi
Sri. Jayakrishnan

Rukmini
Kum. Malavika

Sakhis

Smt. Krishna
Kum. Anagha

Budubudukalavadu
Sri. Rajkamal

Brahmin
Sri.PT Narendran

Balarama
Sri. Geethanadhan

Musicians

Nattuvangam
Smt. Dr. Jyolsana Menon

Vocal
Sri. Hari prasad

Mridangam
Sri. Kalainath

Flute
Sri. T. Sasidhar

Violin
Sri. Sivakumar

Maddalam
Sri. Dinesh Kumar