

Festival of Ramkatha - 12th - 15th March, 2008

Ramman from Garhwal by Saloor Dongra Gram Sabha

15th March 2008, Saturday at 7:00PM

Venue: Open Air Theatre, No. 3, Dr. R. P. Road, IGNC, New Delhi - 110 001

Ramman is a term given to the annual re-enactment of the life of Ram in a few villages of Chamoli and Rudraprayag districts of Garhwal region situated on way to Badrinath and Kedarnath respectively. The same performance has now been confined to mere tableaux in a dozens of villages.

There are so many mask characters common to other gods and goddesses, but owing to the dominance of Ramayana ritual, the cycle is called Ramman. The myths, tales and legends do not refer to Ram's sojourn in this area. These rather locate the locales of Ram's history in the region itself.

The traditional narrators of Ram's history called BhalDas are invited to sing the ballad on the 12th and 13th day of Baishakh (25-26th April) every year. In their song the villagers give them company too. Like Ramlila, Ramman is not rendered through dialogues. The medium here is pure dance supported by the ballad. The lifetime of Ram and his people is danced out in eighteen "taals". A "taal" is made up of five beats of drums and corresponding dance rhythms. The "taals" are punctuated by other mask dancers like Mwa:r, Morin, Banya-Banyaan, Khelwaari etc. at a fixed fixture. For the purpose, a person sitting by the arena goes on drawing lines to count the 'taal' and to co-ordinate the entry of other characters. The sequence of 'taals' comes in the following manner-

1. Seven 'taals' are danced out to the beats of drums and to the narrative of the BhalDas, enacting the birth of Ram and his brothers, their education and their visit to Janakpuri where auspicious drums are beating (now the Bhoomyal-the god of earth comes out and dances).
2. Eight Taal- Ram and Laxman dance representing their meeting with Sita and the wedding, and thereafter their return to Ayodhya where they are ordered to go into exile (here a character half man, half woman, called Ardhanga enters and asks the audience, "have you seen Ram and Laxman here?" The audience says no to it.)
3. Ninth Taal- Ram, Laxman, Sita and Hanuman make dance enactment of some happenings in their exile. The ballad narration continues simultaneously (here Mwa:r and Mwa:rin enter and present their theatrical piece).
4. Tenth and Eleventh Taal- Ram, Laxman, Sita and Hanuman dance to the narration of Ram's meeting with Sugreeva etc. Banya-Banyaan and Khelwari present their event).
5. Twelfth and Thirteenth Taal- Ram, Laxman, Sita and Hanuman dance and narration of balled goes on.
6. Fourteenth Taal- Again Ram, Laxman, Sita and Hanuman dance in synchronization with the ballad.
7. Fifteenth Taal- the same, the dance combat of maal's "the fighting gallants" for about two hours and then the disrupting entry of Kurjogi, a man attacking with Kummars (brains).
8. Sixteenth Taal- Ram, Laxman, Sita and Hanuman's dance to the rhymes of the ballad. (Entry of Purcheli- the blessing goddess)
9. Seventeenth Taal- Ram, Laxman, Sita and Hanuman appear (here the mimetic enactment of Sita Haran by Ravan and Lanka Dahan is presented).

Sita Haran- a glittering deer (a man wearing a deer mask) enters. Sita runs after it dancing, offers milk to the deer and dance. Then Ravan, a man wearing a goat hide enters and takes away Sita.

Lanka Dahan: Hanuman comes, tramples upon a hut made of grass and burns all the grass piled

up there.

10. Eighteenth Taal- Dance of Ram, Laxman, Sita and Hanuman. The ballad Singer narrates how Ravan is defeated and how they return to Ayodhya. In the end, Ram, Laxman, Sita and Hanuman are shown meeting Bharat. They dance in a circle interlocking their hands upon one another's shoulder. The following dialogue is repeated after each round of dance.

“O, Bharat Bhai, what do we do now?” Dancing in the interlocked position they sit down and bend forward upon a flat basket carrying prasad in it. The Ramman ends here.