The Navaratri festival, at Isha Yoga Centre, featured puppetry, dance and music concerts.

B. RAMADEVI

Isha Yoga Centre, Coimbatore, had lined up a series of cultural programmes as part of the Navaratri celebrations at the Linga Bhairavi Temple. There were classical art forms such as kathak (Sanjukta Wagh), Bharatanatyam (Prachi Saathi), Mohiniyattom, (Sujatha Nair), Carnatic vocal recital (Jyotsna Shivakumar) and a veena-violin duet (Jayashree Aravind and V.V. Ravi).

Prof. Thyagarajan delivered a lecture on Kamalamba Navaravana kritis composed by Muthuswami Dikshitar on the presiding deity at the Tyagaraja Temple in Tiruvur (one of the Sakti Peetams). His presentation was accompanied by short renditions of the kritis by the students of Isha Samskriti.

Importance was given to the folk art forms too. Folk dance forms – Thappattam, Kavadi and Karagam – and folk songs were presented by members of Sukra Folk Group Company (founded by Sundaramoorthy). On the final day, another member of the same group, A. Selvaraj performed ‘Thol Paavai Koothu.’

‘Thol Paavai’ is a Tamil term, referring to a puppet, made of leather. The hide of the goat is tanned and processed with special techniques and then carved and dyed. These puppets are placed behind a translucent screen and made to move by the artists according to the dialogue.

The movements of the puppets have peculiar jerks that are characteristic of their traits. The puppetry artists change their voices to suit the characters. The dialogues take the story forward. A 15th generation artist, A. Selvaraj presented ‘Thol Paavai Koothu’ on the theme, ‘Moondru Deivangal.’ He enacted episodes from the life of deities such as Ganesha, Ayyappa and Krishna. Evidently meant for children, the dialogues had them in splits.

They were not necessarily connected to the main theme, but the children enjoyed them.

There was a special comedy track too, about a borrower who wrote a promissory note to the lender that he would return the amount with interest the next day (Naalai Vattiyudan Thiruppiththarugiraen). Each day, the lender comes and asks for the money and gets the polite reply – ‘I will give it back tomorrow’. Selvaraj’s dialogues and the appearance of the puppets made this episode hilarious.

On all the days, the programmes were followed by a vibrant procession of the Linga Bhairavi Utsava Murti around the parikrama of the Dhyanalingam. The fire dance performed as an arati in front of the Dhyanalingam was the highlight.