

# बाल्मीकि प्रतिभा



## Valmiki pratibha

The water in a vessel is sparkling; the water in the sea is dark. The small truth has words which are clear; the great truth has great silence.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Accolades...



# বাল্মীকি প্রতিভা

**A journey from the Demonic to the Divine**



Durga Puja is always a joyous and spiritual festival for Bengalis. But this year is wee bit more special than usual since Vashi Cultural Association is going to give a special dimension to it.

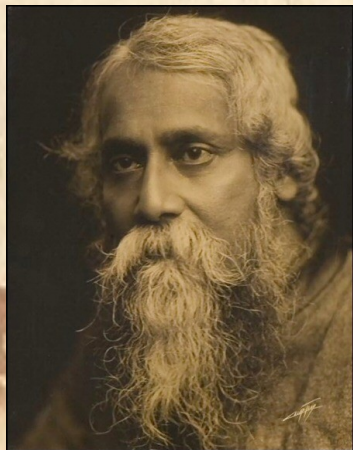
We are privileged to present a unique dance drama Tagore's Valmiki Pratibha done by the inmates of Alipore central jail and Presidency jail with around 70 participants under the direction of Smt. Alokanda Ray which has created a lot of euphoria in Kolkata and rest of India. It has brought about revolutionary changes in the concept of jail that has been transformed into correctional home.

The troupe performs plays, dance dramas and elocution shows on various cultural occasions. They participate in sports and cultural activities inside the jails. They go to various places on request and get huge applause whenever and wherever they perform. Not many in the audience are even aware that the cast members are convicts, including some with multiple criminal records.

The dance drama has played magic in bringing total transformation in the participants. Valmiki Pratibha is a unique endeavor not merely for its symbolism as the prisoners' journey but it is a symbol of Culture Therapy itself, a movement that has been embraced by the prison inmates as means of salvation. We feel proud to be a part of this historic project to bring to Mumbai. We need your fullest co-operation in this noble endeavor. We appeal to come forward for your involvement and active support to take journey forward for the benefit of society.

## Introduction to the epic

**Vālmiki-Praṭibhā** (বাল্মীকি-প্রতিভা, *Balmiki Protibha*, lit. *The Genius of Vālmiki*) is an opera by Rabindranath Tagore. The Bengali libretto was written by Tagore himself based on the legend of Ratnakara the Thug who later became Sage Valmiki and composed Ramayana, a Hindu epic. Composed in 1881, the opera was first performed at the Jorasanko Thakur Bari on 26 February, 1881. Tagore himself played the role of Valmiki. It was staged in front of some eminent literary personalities of contemporary Bengal like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Gooroodas Banerjee and Haraprasad Shastri. The first edition of the opera was also published this time.



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Since the composition tells the story of how Dasyu Ratnakar reformed to become a sage-maharishi Valmiki, who is revered to this day for having written the Ramayana, the convicts, in their heart of hearts, wholly identified with it. Nigel Akkara, alias Vicky, a young undergraduate from the prestigious St Xavier's College, Kolkata, who had strayed into

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crime and ended up murdering a man for failing to pay ransom, was a notable example. Born into a devout Christian family, Nigel had been an atheist all along, until training to play Valmiki got him to embrace spirituality.

The transformation was so complete, that it impressed documentary film-maker and lecturer in film studies Yudhajit Sarkar to make two films on the project.

Nigel was released in July 2009, after nine years in jail. However, he continues to play Valmiki as a



guest artiste in Roy's production. So does another ex-convict, Manoj Rajak, who plays Pratham Dasyu, a comic character.

Once hardened criminals and now do-gooders for all of society, Nigel Akkara alias Vikki and Debashis Chakraborty bring to life in more ways than one the old age story of robber Ratnakar who metamorphosed into sage Valmiki. Leaving behind long years spent in jail, Vikki now runs a business while Chakraborty is a sculptor.

