



Valmiki Pratibha was written by Tagore and was based on the legend of Ratnakar the thug who was transformed to sage Valmiki who later went on to compose Ramayana, the great Indian epic. Composed in 1881, the opera was first performed at the Jorasanko Thakur Bari on February 26, 1881. Tagore played the role of Valmiki and the play was staged in front of eminent literary personalities of Bengal of that era



Kolkata jail inmates to perform Tagore ballet at Vashi Durga Puja

Indrani Basu

This is for the first time Valmiki Pratibha, the acclaimed dance ballet penned by Rabindranath Tagore, will be staged live in Navi Mumbai, which is the outcome of the revolutionary changes in the concept of Kolkata jail that has been transformed into correctional home.

The performance will be staged during the forthcoming Durgapuja celebrations. The Vashi Cultural Association has taken the initiative to organise this show for a wider section of residents on October 4. This path breaking production will be presented by 40 inmates of the Alipore Central jail and Presidency jail of Kolkata. Alokanda Ray, noted danseuse from Kolkata will direct this performance. Another 20 inmates including a big group of 30 security personnel from the prison will also be actively involved in other arenas of the presentation like tailoring of costumes, makeup, set designing and background designing.

The brain behind the staging of this show, Swati Guha Dey, a veteran dancer and choreographer from the city asserted, "Though the show has received huge acclaim, many are unaware that the performers are convicts. The dance drama has attempted to bring a transformation in the lives of the participants. Valmiki Pratibha is a unique endeavour not merely for its



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symbolism as the prisoners' journey but also is a symbol of culture therapy itself. We feel proud to be a part of this historic project and bring it to Navi Mumbai."

Says organizer Dipika Sengupta, "The entire arrangement has been done by members of the association who have dared to go against the current trend of inviting film actors to perform during Durga Puja and have now taken the forefront to present this great show. We are very much obliged to the city police commissioner Javed Ahmed to make all necessary arrangements for the inmates. In all, 95 people including inmates and prison supervisors, security staff are

coming here and with permission of the Koparkhairane police station they will be temporarily housed at the Shetkari Samaj mandir."

Rana Sengupta, vice-president of the association said, "We sincerely believe in the concept 'hate crime, not the criminals' and want to give a special touch to this year's Durga Puja celebration by providing a chance to the inmates to perform here. We are thankful to the clubs of Mumbai and Thane for extending their support and would like to invite everyone to watch this great show."

Since the composition narrates the story of how Dasyu Ratnakar was reformed and become a sage, known as Ma-

harishi Valmiki—revered to this day for having written Ramayana—the convicts could relate their lives with the narrative.

Nigel Akkara, a young undergraduate from the prestigious St Xavier's College, Kolkata, who had strayed into crime and ended up killing a man, was a notable example. Born into a devout Christian family, Nigel was an atheist all along, until training to play the role of Valmiki got him to embrace spirituality. Nigel was released in July 2009 after nine years in jail.

The ballet will be performed at ICL ground, sector 15, Vashi on October 4 at 9.30pm and entry is open to all.