

In an introspective mood

RECITAL Sonal Mansingh's Odissi performance at Isha Foundation, Coimbatore, was a celebration of femininity.

B. RAMADEVI

"I am here, I am there, but actually, among the crores of people, where exactly am I?" Hasn't every woman in this world asked this question to herself, at one time or the other? Sonal Mansingh, one of the foremost exponents of Odissi, and an adept at many dance forms of India such as Bharatanatyam, Manipuri, Kuchipudi and Chau, made every spectator introspect with this poignant question, through her Odissi performance at Isha Foundation, Coimbatore.

Sonal's dance recital had been organised in connection with the forthcoming installation and consecration of the feminine goddess Linga Bhairavi, inside the campus as a counterpart to the Dhyanalagam. Sonal's performance was a celebration of femininity, beautifully planned and impressively presented. It comprised just three items - the mangalacharan, an ashtapadi from Gita Govinda, and 'Aaj Ki Kanya', which focused on the plight of today's woman.

The immensely powerful mangalacharan was dedicated to the Dasa Maha Vidyas, (ten cosmic personalities). In Jayadeva's ashtapadis, the sakhi is more than a friend to the nayika. She acts as the guru who guides the



EXTOLLING WOMANHOOD: *Sonal Mansingh.*

Jeevatma towards the Paramatma and facilitates their union. In her presentation of the ashtapadi, 'Rathisukha Saare,' Sonal brought to life the lovely episode in which Krishna awaits Radha at the bower, with her emotion-filled abhinaya and graceful body movements. . The final item, 'Aaj Ki Kanya' tore

apart the complacent mask of present day society, strongly reprimanding it for the way it treats its women. In India, the divine being is worshipped in the feminine form as 'Goddess', but the common woman is subjected to torture and untold misery. Even while lying in her cradle, the poor baby girl

has to listen to unkind words and soon gets to know that she is unwanted.

Even while she is playing happily with her friends, she is forcefully dragged into the house to shoulder responsibilities and bury her desires amidst household chores. Wedding is usually forced on her and she gets neither love nor recognition in her father in law's house. 'How long will I tolerate all this,' she asks. She does not beg or plead any more. She orders man to understand her worth, recognise her power and worship her. ('Mujhe Maano, Mujhe Jaano, Mujhe Pahchaano, Mujhe Poojo').

Sonal danced with so much involvement and intensity that the spectators forgot Sonal, the dancer, and had 'darshan' of 'Aaj Ki Kanya' (Today's woman).

Sonal, introduced every item with the required details and made sure that the spectators were kept in the right frame of mind to appreciate her performance. Vocal support by Bankhim Sethi was full of emotion and packed with power. Sarod by Abrar Hussein, flute by Vinay Prasanna and pakhwaj by Kshamanidhi Pradhan were apt and made the evening unforgettable.