

# Everyday Kuchipudi by Aishwarya Rajarshi

## Episode 1 : London-Tube Daruvu

As a Londoner and a regular commuter on the Tube, few events that transpire on your journey would surprise you. Like for instance, this evening I was a nonchalant spectator to a lively family melee, in an empty carriage, all in a language I couldn't comprehend but seemingly among a daughter, son and their parents.

But that's only half the picture. Amidst the high-drama sequence unfolding in front of my eyes, there was a parallel narrative blooming in my mind. I was devising '*Daruvu(s)*' for these characters and was trying to zero-in on the '*Ragam*' (a piece of Indian music based on a traditional scale or pattern of notes) that would bring out the character's identity and best convey the '*Rasa*' (emotion).

But wait, what's a *Daruvu*? A *Daruvu* is a rhythmic pattern, or a form of applied music, intended to be a medium for relating episodes within a story. But they are specific to a tradition - *Daruvus* are a characteristic feature of the Indian classical dance, '*Kuchipudi*', which has its roots in the south-Indian, dance-drama tradition.

In *Kuchipudi*, *Daruvu* is a key instrumental element used to depict a character or a group of characters on stage and tie them to their characterisation by conveying their intended emotion, which is aided by the usage of appropriate *Ragam(s)*. For instance, a '*pravesha daruvu*' is one that is used for introducing a significant character on stage.

Over-time these *daruvus* from dance-dramas have been curated and developed as independent dance items in *Kuchipudi*. A familiar one is the '*Satyabhama pravesha daruvu*' set to either the '*Mukhari*' or the '*Bhairava*' *ragam* to bring out the vivacity of the character *Satyabhama*. This *daruvu* has its origins in the prestigious dance-drama '*Bhama Kalapam*', penned in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the much revered Siddhendra Yogi.

Back to my tube journey, where I was exploring away in my mind, weaving the unfolding animated pictures into a tapestry of dance-drama, in *Kuchipudi* style: Since most of the showtime was skewed in favour of the dad, I decided to go with his role and since I couldn't make sense of his words I took cue by eyeballing his emotions, which although beautifully diverse by culture and language, has an underlying universally human strain that may be described by a perceptive mind with a bit of creative liberty!

The father's demeanour reminded me of the *pravesha daruvu* of '*Hiranyakashapu*' from the dance-drama '*Prahalada Charitram*'. My teenage memories of my senses glued to the stage with stalwarts from the Kuchipudi province (*the sanctum sanctorum of the art-form from the state of Andhra Pradesh in India*) bringing these characters to life with immense intensity came flooding in. These artistes I had the fortune to witness first-hand had undergone rigorous training and their performance was enabled and enhanced by the strong penmanship of the poets and literary experts who formally rendered an identity and structure to every story or event that was depicted on stage.

I fitted the dad's characterisation along similar lines and decided to go with the *ragam*, '*Saveri*' for his '*pravesha daruvu*'. And then, I rewound the scene and reconstructed a dramatic entry on stage (in this case, our carriage), which would qualify for the Olympics of Tube acrobatics if one exists. I

wouldn't let that deter me though, the dad in all his kingly attire would swoop into the stage (prelude to the *daruvu*) and land firmly on his feet (cue the actual *daruvu*), the duration of the journey meant that I could only fit in one '*charanam*' (stanza) within the song along with its '*pallavi*' (chorus). Once I had the tune (inspired by the glorious traditional dramas that I had seen and mused over) and words for the *daruvu*, I went ahead and put together a dance sequence by adhering to the devised narrative.

The tube approached my station and its doors flung open in all their TfL (Transport for London) pomp, I felt like they were the doors to my stretch limo and stepping out of which I was walking the red carpet to a special premiere of my new work, 'The London-Tube Daruvu', as the now cheerful family hopped, skipped and jumped off the tube .

Aishwarya Rajarshi, is an Indian classical dancer based in London. Through the 'Everyday Kuchipudi' series, she attempts to familiarise technical aspects of Kuchipudi, an Indian classical dance, through relatable experiences. You can reach her at [Aishwarya.rajarshi@kuchipudiglobal.com](mailto:Aishwarya.rajarshi@kuchipudiglobal.com) .