

Duryodhanavadham: A Guide to the Performance

Welcome to this performance of *Duryodhanavadham*, a powerful and dramatic story from the epic Mahabharata, brought to life through the art of Kathakali. This guide will provide context for the story and the key scenes you will witness.

The Epic of Mahabharata

The Significance of the Mahabharata

The **Mahabharata**, one of India's foundational Sanskrit epics, holds immense importance as a profound exploration of human nature, morality, and societal dynamics. It serves as a rich source of Hindu mythology, philosophy, and ethical guidance, weaving together complex narratives of duty (**Dharma**), the consequences of actions (**Karma**), and the pursuit of righteousness. Its transformative value lies in its timeless lessons on the complexities of right and wrong, the destructive nature of greed and envy, and the significance of selflessness, resilience, and integrity. Through its diverse characters and their moral dilemmas, particularly the teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita** embedded within it, the epic inspires individuals to reflect on their own lives, make choices aligned with their moral duties, and strive for spiritual growth and a more just and compassionate society.

A Summary of the Mahabharata

The Mahabharata chronicles the bitter dynastic struggle for the throne of Hastinapura between two sets of royal cousins: the five virtuous **Pandavas** and the hundred ambitious **Kauravas**, led by the eldest, **Duryodhana**. Fueled by jealousy, Duryodhana cheats the Pandavas out of their kingdom in a rigged game of dice, which leads to the public humiliation of their wife, **Draupadi**, and forces them into a thirteen-year exile. When the Pandavas return to rightfully claim their share of the kingdom, Duryodhana refuses, making a cataclysmic war inevitable. This conflict culminates in the massive **Kurukshetra War**, where Lord **Krishna** imparts the divine wisdom of the **Bhagavad Gita** to the Pandava prince **Arjuna**. The war ends with the annihilation of the Kaurava clan and a victory for the Pandavas, but at a tremendous cost. After their reign, the Pandavas and Draupadi renounce everything and undertake a final pilgrimage to the Himalayas.

The Story of the Play

The Plot of Duryodhanavadham

The Kathakali play **Duryodhanavadham** ("The Slaying of Duryodhana") dramatizes the core conflict leading to the Mahabharata war. It begins with Duryodhana's searing humiliation at the Pandavas' Indraprastha palace. Consumed by jealousy and goaded by his uncle **Sakuni**, he challenges the Pandavas to a rigged game of dice, through which he deceitfully wins their kingdom, wealth, and even their shared wife, **Draupadi**. The play's emotional peak arrives when his brother **Dussasana** drags Draupadi into the court and attempts to disrobe her. This act of profound dishonor provokes a furious **Bhima** to vow that he will one day drink Dussasana's blood and shatter Duryodhana's thigh. When all peaceful negotiations fail, including a mission by Lord **Krishna**, the stage is set for a catastrophic war.

The play's climax stages the brutal fulfillment of these vows on the Kurukshetra battlefield. In a terrifying display of rage, Bhima hunts down Dussasana, tears open his chest, and anoints Draupadi's untied hair with his blood, allowing her to finally fulfill her own vow. The story culminates in the final, decisive mace duel between Bhima and Duryodhana. Guided by a signal from Krishna,

Bhima smashes Duryodhana's thigh, leaving him mortally wounded. Duryodhana's death (*vadham*) marks the dramatic conclusion, symbolizing the ultimate, albeit bloody, triumph of righteousness (**Dharma**) over the arrogance and evil of the Kauravas.

A Scene-by-Scene Breakdown

Scene 1: A Vow Demanding War

As Lord Krishna prepares for a final peace mission to the Kaurava court, an anguished Draupadi (**Panchali**) confronts him. She recounts her profound humiliation and reminds him that diplomacy has failed. With fierce resolve, she insists that only a devastating war can deliver justice. She reiterates her sacred vow: her hair will remain unbound until it is tied with the blood of Dussasana, making a violent confrontation not just necessary, but a fulfillment of Dharma.

Scene 2: The Arrogance of Power

In the court of Hastinapura, Krishna makes a patient plea for peace, asking Duryodhana to return the Pandavas' share of the kingdom. He progressively reduces his request from half the kingdom to just five villages. Duryodhana, blinded by arrogance, scoffs at the proposal, declaring he will not grant even a "needle-point of land." Enraged by Krishna's persistence, he orders his guards to capture the divine envoy. In response, Krishna abandons his human guise and reveals his awe-inspiring cosmic form (**Vishwaroopa**). The terrifying divine vision overwhelms the entire court, causing everyone to fall down in shock. After Krishna departs, a defiant and unshaken Duryodhana ignores the pleas of his terrified elders and commits his kingdom to war.

Scene 3: The Fury of Bhima

The scene shifts to the Kurukshetra battlefield with the terrifying entrance of **Raudra Bhima**—Bhima consumed by righteous fury. He hunts down and confronts his nemesis, Dussasana. After a brutal fight, Bhima strikes him down with his mace and, in a shocking act of vengeance, rips open his chest to fulfill his vow. He then brings Draupadi to the scene and anoints her untied hair with Dussasana's blood before tying it. Bhima's rage is not yet spent; it culminates in a final, climactic mace duel with Duryodhana, whom he also slays by shattering his thigh. With both his vows fulfilled and the war won, Bhima's fury continues to burn until Lord Krishna appears before him, finally calming his spirit and blessing him.

Enjoy the performance!