**INTRODUCTION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**V**. **MINNAGANTI**

Hello everyone. The Indian (**Do you prefer Hindu?**) philosopher, Jiddu Krishamurti taught us, “You must understand the whole of life, not just one little part of it. That is why you must read, that is why you must look at the skies, that is why you must sing, and **dance**, and write poems.... and understand, for **all that is life**.” Today we are here to honor a part of the history and culture of India. We’re here to take our places and to observe and learn about the kuchipudi, one of the historical regional dances of our colorful country. Today, we are here to participate in sharing a rich and storied legacy, and most importantly, we are here to encourage those that will carry our legacy into the future for others to learn, enjoy, and share.

I’m here, not only as an Indian man, proud of the culture that formed and informed my early life... I am also here to introduce my niece, Divya, as she presents her rangapravasan. While we are proud of all of the bright young stars that will perform today, I am particularly proud of Divya.... and I am honored and humbled to have been chosen to introduce her to all of you on this important occasion. Divya has always been special.... at least in my eyes. I noticed, since she was a little girl, that she displayed a genuine and passionate interest in the history of her heritage. While other kids her age were content to amuse themselves with games and distractions more centered on contemporary American cultural themes, Divya distinguished herself early on... she was enthralled by classic Indian cinema and demonstrated an insatiable appetite for watching those old classic movies on TV... Just ask her grandparents... (**Will they be there? Do you want to name them?**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Divya always expressed her enthusiasm and curiosity and eagerly encouraged them to join her on the journeys she would take while watching the films... Together they connected in so many ways... as family, sharing a common interest, and honoring the cultural heritage that has meant so much to all.... or at least **most**... of us.

When she wasn’t finding herself immersed in the “silver screen” of old India, Divya was expressing her love of her culture by beginning her kuchipudi education and practice. By now, we, as friends, family, and devoted fans of the practice, know the dedication, intricacy, and discipline involved in this amazing art form. We know that students of the dance usually start young... sometimes as young as three years old. At that age, the dance becomes one with the child (**If you want to make a joke, you can say**).... of course that’s what I’ve seen and what I’ve been told... personally, I have discovered my stronger skills lie with me participating... **from the audience.**.. encouraging, cheering, applauding... and keeping my feet **firmly** planted on the floor...trust me... it’s better that way... this talent skipped over me!!! ... (**And wait for the laugh**). I **have**, however, noticed the wonderful effects that participating in the dance have blossomed in Divya... over the years I’ve seen her grow... and she’s become so poised...she’s found her center and has become grounded thanks to the practice she has meticulously pursued. The dance is like a form of meditation... it enhances concentration while connecting the dancer to her... or his roots.

In the movement... in the costumes... in the makeup and demeanor.... we are transported back hundreds... maybe thousands of years to when the dance first came to life... and kuchipudi has been coming to life for generations of Indians, throughout time and geography... and no matter where we are in the world, the dance takes us home and connects all of us.

There are some people I would like to acknowledge before Divya takes her place on this stage... and in a big way..inherits her legacy. I would like to acknowledge my brother, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Divya’s father, and her mother,\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, for supporting her dreams.... these two had a vision when Divya was born... you see, Divya translated means , “great.” I would also like to acknowledge the teachers and staff who have supported the students and who have produced this wonderful program and event. To all of you, I would like to share a quote that I heard recently... “Students do not care how much you know until they know how much you **care**.” Today is a demonstration and a manifestation of all of the care and encouragement you’ve invested in these students.... we, as family and friends, are very proud.... you, as their teachers, I am sure, are even **MORE** proud... and rightfully so!!!

Lastly, to Divya, thank you for being exactly who you are.... for approaching life with an enthusiasm and grace that are rare in a young person. Thank you for honoring your family and for showing us, step by step, the brilliance of our heritage. Thank you all!!!