



"Vishwam Vishnur vashatkaro bhoo-tabhavya bhavat-prabhu..." goes Vishnu Sahasranamam. Krishna is worshipped as the Omnipresent, Lord Supreme, present in everything and that which contains everything. This mega concept is the theme of Baladevi Chandrasekhar's latest production, 'Vishwam.' Her 'Uddhava Gita,' staged last year was received with such warmth that she is getting requests to present it at several places.

"In fact, the success of Uddhava Gita gave me the courage to think of Vishwam," confides Baladevi. "It is one thing to worship Krishna as the Universe and an entirely different thing to present the concept in a visual form," she adds. But she has a reliable source in Swami Shantanandanandapuri of Tiruvannamalai, who spoke to her at length on the subject. "Oh, he is an exalted soul and is a fountain of knowledge. I spent three days at his feet, listening and taking down notes," says Bala. This and the material gathered with extensive reading of texts ranging from itihasa, purana and Prabhandam to lectures of scholars such as Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariyar, had to be coalesced to give the subject a form that should appeal to the intellectual and layman alike.

A sneak preview reveals



Universal dimensions

Baladevi will take the viewer through the micro and macro aspects of Sri Krishna's omnipresence.

GEETHA VENKATARAMANAN

the magnitude of effort that has gone into the production. From 'Om Namoh Bhagavathe Vasudevaya' that comes as a refrain to the concluding suit of mangalaslukas, the 90-minute Four-Act presentation (script by Dr. Pappu Venugopal Rao) encompasses familiar and unique interpretations.

"Bhagavan in everything," - none followed this tenet better than Sukha, Sage Vyasa's son. The gopis' encounter with the duo (Act 1) anchors the concept of universality with emphasis, setting the stage for elaboration. What is Vishwam without Visvaroopam? Three instances are chosen for treatment.

A gem is the depiction of Vamana as he grows in front of Mahabali. The Sun diminishes in size and becomes pieces of jewellery as the dwarf rises to the sky. "Mahabali was a great devotee, who was close to the Lord's heart. He was not an egoistic monster nor did Mahavishnu perform the Trivikrama feat to punish

him," explains Bala. The Ragam-tanam-pallavi format adds majesty to the description.

Arjuna is terrified by the Visvaroopam shown on the battlefield. "Something none will see," states Krishna to a stunned Parthiba, who needs that jolt to pick up his Kandipa. It is a hide-and-seek game that Krishna plays with Yasoda.

The 22 avatars of Krishna as Madhava, Kesava, Janardhana, Madhusudana... is an unusual touch. "It was such a surprise to find Markandeya in a dimension not generally discussed. The rishi, who marvels at Vatapatrasayi, baby Mukunda on a floating pipal leaf in the Deluge, wants to witness the Lord's Yogamaya. He is sucked into His stomach, where he sees the universe and the objects therein. Expelled, Markandeya remains on earth worshipping Srihari in everything that he sees.

As always music is a big plus for 'Vishwam.' Carnatic and Hindusthani blend beautifully with rhythm playing a central role. The theme unfolds in the traditional format of Mallari, Kavuthuvam, Varnam and tarana/tillana. "The making of Vishwam has been a learning experience for me. As an artist I wanted to experience Mahavishnu as the Absolute and share the experience. It was not an easy task and I thank all the scholars who guided me. Of course my pranams to Mahatmas, whose devotion was itself a lesson," says Baladevi, who will be presenting 'Vishwam' at five places.

VISHWAM

- Dec 21 - Narada Gana Sabha - 2 p.m.
- Dec 24 - Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Kilpauk) - 7.30 p.m.
- Dec 26 - Kartik Fine Arts (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore) - 7.30 p.m.
- Jan 2, 2014 - Sri Krishna Gana Sabha - 6 p.m.
- Jan 3 - Tapas - Rajaratnam Pillai Auditorium - 7 p.m.