

An Ode to the Divine Mother



Bala Devi Chandrasekar

TOPICS

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dance

Baladevi Chandrasekar seeks to present Sakti as the embodiment of Energy.

Baladevi Chandrasekar, who made visual presentations of such exalted themes as Viswam and Uddhava Gita, is back with 'Tripura: the Divine Feminine,' an ode to the Woman. Of course, as the title suggests, there are spiritual layers based on a wide spectrum of texts.

"After presenting 'Viswam,' I was searching for a subject and my mother gave me a book by Swami Santhanandapuri of Tiruvannamalai on Tripura Rahasyam," begins Baladevi. "Tripura Rahsyam is a magnificent work on Mahatripurasundari, speaking of her glory. It is a three-part epic and the swamiji had distilled the essence of 12,000 verses. I went to Ramana Asram to meet the swamiji, who had been guiding me in all my projects. He advised me to take up Mahatmya Kaandam, the other two being Gnana Kaandam and Charya Kaandam. The last mentioned remains on palm leaves."

Bala takes the audience through the different stages of the Goddess culminating in her form as Sivasaktaikyaroopini – Sri Lalitha or Mahatripurasundari seated on her throne. Female energy is symbolised through Srichakra, which will be depicted through ragas and abhinaya. "Presented as Margam, the introduction will see the female energy in three forms – child (Bale), an enchanting maiden and Amba, the Mother, full of compassion. Boulipantu, Kalyani and Ahiri are the ragas appropriately used. Mangalanjali (Pushpanjali) will conclude with a depiction of Dasamahavidyas that stand for Wisdom.

Ambal is described as Sama Veda Swaroopini and hence the show will open with the chanting of Sama Veda by scholars.

Thodaya Mangalam is all about Sri Chakram and how it can be compared to the human body. Swadishtanam, Manipuram, Anagatham... each layer unfurls to the melody of a raga and the appropriate tala. "Five is a special number in Saaktam," informs Baladevi. Ambal is referred to as Panchatanmatrasayaka, Panchasatpitaroopini, Panchabrahmaswarupini and so on. So five ragas, all said to be Her favourites such as Vegavahini and Nayaki in which Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Syama Sastri composed songs, have been used," explains the dancer.

Ambal is described as Graha Anugraha Dayini. Hence the rasikas will be quickly taken through the zodiac constellation.

The talamalika alarippu will trace the Sri Chakra culminating in the Bindu, the centre, storehouse of energy.

The third segment unfolds with Syama Sastri's Bhairavi Swarajati. Devi will be seen as the executor of five activities – creation, protection, dissolution, concealment (of Maya) and Grace (Anugraha). Anandabhairavi is the raga chosen to describe Sakti as Panchkrutyaparayana. "All the jatis have been made to convey this. She is Gayatri, primordial energy, epitome of yajnopavitam. Ambal has been perceived as Saraswati – Goddess of Speech, who bestows the right words," expands Bala. This segment ends in the background of Purvikalyani.

What appeals to the Mother most? Worship of the Cow. "Taking the third eye of Parameswara and the Chandrakala, she becomes Sivasakti and is pleased by khopuja,"

If all gods are described from their feet upwards, in the case of Ambal it is Kesadipada. The Javali pivots round this idea conveyed through song, dialogue and veena. How can a scene of this nature be bereft of sringara? So the goddess who has eyes that stretch endlessly just to protect the universe is beauty personified, conveys navarasa through sidelong glances. "Mahaperiyava in his work has devoted a chapter to Navarasa. The Ardanariswara concept finds expression in this part," says Bala.

Dhrupad, the finale in Sunadakalyani, is all swaras. Tripura is the divine flower that spreads the fragrance of knowledge and we, who are struggling in the ocean of samsara at Her Feet just as bees fall into a flower for its nectar. The message is culled from Gnana Kandam that Siva and Sakti are one in the form of Pranavam – OM.

"Gnana Kandam was the favourite of Ramana Maharishi, I was told," informs Baladevi.

"Looking back I marvel at Destiny's hand. It has been a sort of evolution for me," ruminates Bala. "First I did Nandanar Charitram on a Siva devotee, then MLV's songs on Krishna that was skimming the surface, delved into philosophy in Uddhava Gita and presented a wider perspective through Viswam. I considered it a privilege to present 'Uddhava Gita' at the Gita Conference held in Bangalore last week.

"It is said that one's mind is directed to Sri Lalitha only if She so wishes. Thus I consider myself fortunate to be handling the most sacred concept of Sri Vidya, the Universal Mother – Tripura, who contains in her the Energy of the Trinity and all the celestials."

Such a presentation calls for extensive research. Baladevi agrees.

"My sources, apart from Tripura Rahasyam, were many. Devi Bhagavata and commentaries, Bhaskara Rayar's bhashyam on Lalitha Sahasranamam, Adi Sankara's Soundarya Lahari and Mahaperiyava's commentary, Syamala Dhandakam, Mukha Panchasati and so on. Only I have not used the verses directly but instead got the ideas scripted under the guidance of Swami Santhananda Puri, who attained Samadi recently. Sri Jayendra Swami of Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Bangalore was another source that guided me. Dr. Pappu Venugopala Rao wrote the script and music was scored by Rajkumar Bharati."

Baladevi will be premiering Tripura, the Divine Feminine on December 19, 6 p.m., at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kilpauk.

Also on the cards:

December 22 - Brahma Gana Sabha (Smt. Sivagami Pethachi Auditorium, 6 p.m.)

December 24 - Kartik Fine Arts (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore, 7.30 p.m.)

December 27 - TAG Center, Alwarpet, 9 a.m..

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