



● Vaishali Vijaykumar

Our rich traditions and stories need to be taken through dance around the globe. It shouldn't be stagnant within Tamil Nadu. I want my productions to touch the souls of the uninitiated and commoners. They want them to instantly connect with the art and only then the artiste has succeeded," said Bharatanatyam dancer Bala Devi Chandrashekar, who is the recipient of Kalaimamani award for 2019.

Like many foreign artistes, the New Jersey-based dancer is in the city for Margazhi season. She's a disciple of dancer Padma Subrahmanyam. Her solo, operatic and thematic production for this year is titled *Padmavati - An Avatar*.

Layered dance-drama

"It's about *Padmavati*, a temple designer in Puri Jagannath temple, who is the centre of attraction in the immortal classic *Gita Govindam* by poet Jayadeva.

The union of *Padmavati* and *Jayadeva* is highly sublime and is held in high esteem and adoration by many. This presentation is juxtaposed with the amorous intimacy of Lord Krishna and Radha," said the dancer who premiered the production at Kasi, Varanasi on December 15 in the presence of Sanskrit scholars.

"This production is a beautiful lyrical dance-drama laced with romance. It is based on the theme of *Vipralambha Sringara* — anguish in separation, and the joy in the union of the divine couple Radha and Lord Krishna. The *Gita Go-*

DANCE MEETS POETRY

After staging 300 performances in 30 countries and donning multiple avatars, artiste Bala Devi Chandrashekar is in the city for her solo production — *Padmavati*

I feel responsible as an artiste and want to be a soft, strong power ambassador of this art form
— Bala Devi Chandrashekar
Bharatanatyam dancer



vindam is a poem of 12 chapters or *sargas* comprising 24 *astapadhis* or hymns. The theme closely follows *Rasakreeda - ronde* dance," said the dancer who has conceptualised, researched and choreographed the work with the help of senior scholars.

Think global

Every dance production takes two years for her to conceptualise and present. Some of her previous works include *Brihadeeswara* — form to formless through the eyes of *Devaradiyal*; *Karna Destiny's Child* — the trial and tribulations of the great warrior; *Vishwam* — the omnipresent, among the many.

Bala Devi has presented over 300 performances in 30 countries. "I am fortunate to be one of the very few Bharatanatyam dancers in the world to have presented *Brihadeeswara* — one of my dance productions — at the UNESCO head office in Paris in June 2019, as a part of the world heritage week celebrations. The show was attended by over 500 art enthusiasts including ambassadors and dignitaries," said the dancer who was born in Tanjore.

Chennai, Kumbakonam, and Thanjavur will always be close to her heart. She's premiered all her performances in India. "Margazhi is special. People pass by me in *sabhas* and say that they look forward to my performances. They

appreciate my in-depth topics, research, and scholarly subjects based on ancient philosophical and literary texts.

The audience look beyond names and go by the work we present and that's encouraging. My commitment to art should stand the test of time," said Bala Devi who feels that dance is evolving in the right direction.

Passing on the legacy

Passionate about teaching, and as a professor and as the Artistic Director of SPNAPA Academy of Performing Arts, Princeton, New Jersey, Bala imparts valuable knowledge to her many dedicated students.

"It feels like Chennai there as well. With 22 years of experience in corporate life, it feels nice to see people from different fields taking up dance. Their involvement is tremendous. I aspire to sow the seeds and then it's up to the child to evolve. The students in the US are more committed and value the art more because they're far away from it. There's no dearth for students or teachers," shared the dancer who will be taking *Padmavati* to Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, by the month-end.

"Youngsters and dance practitioners should be confident. They have precious content to be shared with the world. I feel responsible as an artiste and want to be a soft, strong power ambassador of this art form," she said.

Bala Devi will be performing today, 7 pm Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. For details, call: 2464 3420 On December 30, 7.30 pm at Kartik Fine Arts. For details, call: 2499 7788 On January 2, 6.30 pm at Krishna Gana Sabha. For details, call: 2814 0806