



Bala Devi brings alive temple dancer Padmavathi at Utkala Rangamancha

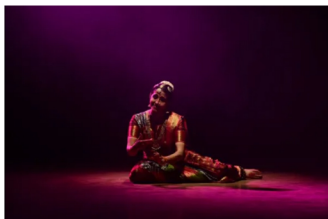
Guru Vijay Shanker

Guru Gajendra Panda's Tridhara Dance Company organised the presentation of *Padmavathi*, solo dance ballet by renowned Bharatanatyam exponent Kalaimamani Bala Devi Chandrasekhar at **Utkala Rangamancha in Bhubaneswar** early this month. *Padmavathi* is the story of the temple dancer who was a devotee of Lord Jagannath and was an inspiration for Jayadeva's immortal 12th century classic *Gita Govinda*. The union of *Padmavathi* with the Lord, the sublime presentation is juxtaposed with the amorous intimacy of Lord Krishna with Radha.

After extensive research of the subject with relation to the temple dancer Padmavathi and saint poet Jayadeva's 24 *ashtapadis* in 12 chapters of poetic and exuberant lyrics that interpret the varied emotions of love pertaining to the intimate relationship between Radha and Krishna, scholar and Bharatanatyam exponent Bala Devi Chandrasekhar takes you on a sublime and aesthetic journey, a unique combination of *geetam, vadyam, sangeetam, nrityam, kavyam, sahityam* and *abhinayam* that portrays the story of the temple dancer Padmavathi who ultimately merges with the Lord and the intimate relationship with Radha and Krishna.



Performed in four acts, *Padmavathi* commenced with *Salokyam* (being in His world) wherein the dancer forgets herself. Hence it is selfless love for the Lord thereby entering His world. The second stage is *Saroopyam* in which the dancer takes the form of the Lord. The third stage was *Sameepyam* (approaching Him) and ultimately *Sayujyam* (merging with the beloved Lord).



Besides the depiction of *Vipralabda Sringara* – anguish in separation and the ultimate joy of the union of the divine love, the dancer cleverly used various *astapadis* according to the requirement of the scene. For instance, in *Dheer Sameere Yamuna Tere*, it is Krishna who is anxiously waiting to meet Radha. Normally in most cases, we find that the *viraha tapam* is experienced more by women rather than men, nevertheless males do have their share of suffering, which becomes evident when Krishna falls at the feet of Radha and says you are my *Priya Charusheel*, how can I ever hurt you or torture you? Radha is completely shaken by the human like quality in Krishna and asks for forgiveness.



Padmavathi had a great mixture of all emotions like excitement, anxiety, pathos, suffering, love, restlessness and much more, blending well with beautiful vocal and instrumental music performed with complete involvement of *akashchharis, karanas* in the traditional style of *Bharatanatyam*. It was amazing to watch the seasoned and matured dancer dancing with flawless ease, dexterity and devotion winning the appreciation from the select audience. Teenaged disciples of Guru Gajendra Panda performed the *Pallavi* and the *Dashavatara* in the Odissi style with complete involvement and sincerity, forming the grand finale of the programme.



Based in New Jersey, Princetown, Bala devi is the disciple of the great mentor Dr Padma Subrahmanyam. She holds the distinction of performing for some of the most prestigious festivals around the globe. Her other dance productions include Nandanar Charitram, MLV Favourites, Krishnarpanam, Viswam – The Omnipresent, Uddhava Gita, Lord Krishna's Last Message, Tripura- Divine Feminine, Kama – Destiny's Child and Brihadeeswara – Form to Formless.

Guru Vijay Shanker is a professional Kuchipudi-Kathakali exponent, teacher, choreographer and an actor. He is also an art critic and has been contributing to national and international publications for over four decades. His lecture-demonstrations on Indian classical dancing for educational institutions and social organisations is a fine combination of education and entertainment. Connect with him at vijaydance@gmail.com