

## DANCE

### Exploring navarasas in Gita Govindam

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**Bala Devi Chandrashekar's 'Padmavati — an Avatar' depicted the different aspects of Radha-Krishna relationship**

"I have always loved the Gita Govindam — the ostensibly Shringara laden work by 12th century poet Jayadeva. But it is not just that — all the Navarasas come into play making it bhakti-oriented, marking the union of atma and jivatma. And that is why I chose to do 'Padmavati — an Avatar', where the rich, intense poetry of Jayadeva combines with the magnificence of the deity of Puri, Jagannatha, to convey the story of passion, devotion and purity of intent," said dancer-choreographer-researcher Bala Devi Chandrashekar.

And this is what stood out in her solo thematic production, presented at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kilpauk. Artistic director of Shree Padma Nrityam Academy of Performing Arts, New Jersey, Bala Devi has developed her own dance style and has been working on multiple projects to showcase the beauty of Bharatanatyam and the way it connects to other art forms in New Jersey. Trained under Jayalakshmi Narayanan (Hyderabad) and Padma Subrahmanyam, she has been given the titles of 'Nritya Seva Mani' and 'Nrityasali' on the completion of a course on the 108 Karanas by Dr. Padma. She is also a recipient of the Kalaimamani among other awards.

It is interesting to know that somebody would choose a work such as Padmavati for a solo performance, especially when there are several layers of interpretation, rasas and thought processes. Padmavati is a transitional narration of the ultimate bhakti — of moving from the Form to the Formless, from the jivatma to the Paramatma. And here it is the central character, a devadasi from the Puri temple, also the focus of Jayadeva's forays into lyricism and poetry.

In 'Padmavati', Jayadeva depicts the Krishna-Radha relationship through Saalokhyam - being in His world, Saaroopyam - taking His form, Saameepyam - approaching Him and finally, Saayujyam - becoming one with Him!

The production was done at a rather racy pace with quicksilver expressions and a dancing style that veered between Bharatanatyam and shades of Kuchipudi. An adept dancer, Bala kept the proceedings going with a clear vision about building it up to heightened bhakti and changing roles adroitly. Her footwork showed the influence of Guru Padma, but she also brought in her distinct style.

Beginning with Padmavati and Jayadeva's marriage (Harikhambodi), the piece had plenty of sollukattus and swaras that made it vibrant. An added cameo was about a flower girl's bhakti and how Lord Krishna presents her with a ring. When she is called out as a thief, Krishna appears in the King's dream and tells him about the ring.

Saalokhyam showed the gopis and the rasakreeda. One of the Upanishad vakyas brought out as a rhythm piece in Bageshri (Adi tala) was beautifully rendered. A strong point of the presentation was the rousing music composed by Rajkumar Bharathi. It helped the dancer convey the spirit of the theme. Saaroopyam showcased Radha's separation from Krishna. The usage of Bilaskhani Thodi was poetic. In Sameepyam, using a verse from the Bhagavatam in Kanada, showed how the Divine ensures a devotee's bhakti, whether away or near Him. Saayujyam is where the soul merges with the Supreme and Lord is bound by the love of Yashoda, gopis and Radha. Brindavana Saranga was aptly chosen to depict the essence of this segment. Padmavati ended with the festivities and fervour during the world famous Puri rath yatra.

Concept/choreography was by Bala Devi while the entire work was compiled by Kovai Jaanakirama Bhagavathar and N. Neela Bala Sharma. The lyrics were by Dr. S. Umaapathi Shiromani and music by Rajkumar Bharathi were recorded, mixed and mastered by Sai Shravanam.

Special mention must be made of the jathis and mridangam playing of Guru Bharadwaj. On the vocals were Srikanth Gopalakrishnan, Keerthana Vaidyanathan and Deepika Varadarajan. Able accompaniment was also provided by Ganapathi on the tabla and pakhwaj; Bhavani Prasad on the veena, Embar Kannan on the violin, vishnu on the flute, Ballesh on the shehnai (very rarely used in the orchestra for Bharatanatyam), Kishore Kumar on the sitar and chorus by Manoj Krishna and troupe. Voice over was provided by Meera Maran.