

## Expansive expression

Ranee Kumar

*Dance Divya Devaguptapu scored purely on her 'abhinaya'. Ranee Kumar*



There are some dancers who are strong on the nritta (pure footwork) while there are some others who are fine on the abhinaya (artistic expression) front. Divya Devaguptapu can be placed in the second category. In her recent Bharatanatyam recital for Kalasagaram's annual festival, this US-based dancer chose to present rare compositions, mostly in Telugu, which were not strictly nritta-based but had great scope for expression. And Divya came up with excellent abhinaya. The 'Mallari' in Nagaswaravali was a brilliant exposition of salutations with jatis in tow. Her artistic traits came to the fore in her beautiful delineations and of course sober, suitable costume which of late has become a sort of rarity. One could guess the range of her abhinaya for the next two hours, within the first ten minutes of the Mallari where she depicted a very abstract term 'para' in the viruttam she was miming. It gave us a concrete

exposition of this philosophically abstract term.

Divya picked upon a Mangalampalli Balamurali composition, a semi-esoteric one where the bhava was profound but the kriti per se was not exactly based for dance. *Omkara pranava* in Shanmukhapriya needed a faster-paced set of jatis to add pep to this fairly lengthy song. But what was compensated for this was the exquisite expression through hastabhinaya the dancer presented at least a dozen varied versions for just this one single line! There was not one repetitive gesture to express such a conjectural concept like the *omkara*. Just a few instances of interpretation: she drew the letter 'Om' in Sanskrit in the air and expounded on it; secondly, she deciphered the sacred sound as 'Aum' standing for 'akara', 'ukara' and 'makara' with a hastabhinaya that made for concretisation of the abstract and enhanced our understanding. In such features of expression, Divya was exceptional than the present day veterans. Had she chosen a more danceable kriti than this one, which meandered from Shiva to Krishna to Ananthasayana (Vishnu) without correlation as such as each verse was a standalone piece by itself cobbled together into a musical composition. Here too, one should acknowledge the artistry that was displayed in viewing the flute as a hollowed piece of bamboo which is a metaphor for the intrinsic nature of Krishna — a total lack of ego. She was able to come out with a tangible depiction of this image through her abhinaya, though for most part she held on to the murali icon as a fixed gesture which was not really needed. The tanam too had its share of varied expressive notes that convincingly conveyed the import of the kriti. The jatis with shikara mudra were compelling though by and large, but by the same token the adavus to swaram seemed more of sanchari than pure dance.

The javali in Chenchuruti *Iddari pondhelaraa...* depicting the khanditha nayika, of late has become popular with many an artiste. Having established her forte on the abhinaya front, Divya sailed through with aplomb, though she made do with basic emotions. Jandyala Papaiah's *Kunti vilapam* had more of the dramatic element which shows the state of turmoil in Kunti, an unwed mother with Karna, an unwanted baby. None of the songs chosen by the artiste, barring the javali and tillana, were actually meant for dance, more because of the slow pace in which they run. She could not infuse any vigour into these compositions without tampering with the framework and to use them in their original form meant sacrificing on the element of energy which is the backbone of pure dance. The Bharatanatyam formed a part of the Kalasagaram annual festival at Keyes High School.