

# Nature's essence

**ROUND-UP** The grandeur of the Himalayas, the thread of prana in the cosmos and the monastic dance of Assam — dancers explored worlds beyond the mundane.

LEELA VENKATARAMAN

**"B**etween Heaven and Earth" mounted by Anant Art at the Triveni was dedicated to the grandeur of the Himalayas. Iqbal's poem addressing the Himalaya, (introduced and read by B.N. Goswami), and the mountains lauded and sung through the Punjabi poetry of Surjit Patar were all substantiated by a danced version from an inspired Malavika Sarukkai. Starting from the descent of the mighty Ganga on to the locks of Shiva, came the sensuous Alakananda and the stately Bhagavati joining at Devprayag to become one massive sweep of water flowing through hills and valleys. "Bird's Song" visualising the bird flying high over the mountains in the lonely skies, was a metaphor for the inner journey of the pilgrim doggedly negotiating Himalayan ranges and rivers, as horizons shift and change, to reach his destination of Kashi. Not the conventional interpretation through mudra and movement expressing the grandeur of the mountains and rivers, the treatment going far beyond margam Bharatanatyam comprising adavu movements, saw both dancer and the dance transforming into the mountain and the river, capturing the serenity and quietude, the vastness, the silences of nature in these awesome manifestations, making man realise what a speck in the cosmos he was. Amidst such magnificence the individual's ego gets erased in the enormity of what is beheld.

The unconventional sound tape with snatches of tabla rhythms, konakkol recitation, chants, and the unforgettably haunting solo interventions on the violin so indicative of the lonely flight of the bird amidst the soaring, untrammelled expanse of the sky, was music designed for the dance instead of dance interpreting given music.

## Kathak interpretations

"Ek soor chara char chayo" went the music as Shila Mehta in her Kathak recital at the IIC,



**EXUBERANT** Kathak dancer Shila Mehta

tried to catch that essential thread of vital 'prana' running through this cosmos — making the sun shine, the flowers bloom, the waters flow, the birds fly, the trees grow and the rains fall. Thanks to a fine singer in Somnath Mishra and sarangi player in Ali Ahasaa, Shila managed, in her dance interpretation, to partially suggest this elusive life energy forming an unending cycle with Brahma's creation, Vishnu's sustenance and Shiva's destruction.

For a recital under "My Journey" the Teen tala nritta was not ideally introduced. Spirituality as an inner conviction brought out in the dance communicates, rather than the redundant talk peppered with how most other dancers have forsaken this element. Upaj and thaata became tame thanks to a timid tabla start,

the theka with the nagma refrain playing, not finding immaculate sam synchronisation with the dancer's rhythm. It perked up with the jugabandi and ginti ti-hais of Pandit Birju Maharaj and of Kishan Maharaj (the latter acquired through her guru Vijay Shankar), into which rhythmic moulds the dancer imaginatively wove quick narrative flashes indicating 10 directions, navarasa, etc. A kavita on Nataraja, changing rhythmic accents through unobtrusive body weight manipulation while executing footwork, and the final tonal music of the "Na Dhin Dhin Na", were all to the good.

The interpretative highlight was in the monsoons as a theme ("Barkha Bahaar") showing human responses at different periods of life — frolicking in the

showers as a child, stirred by desire during the teens, sringar's happy face in "Jhool Jhulave" and Saawan maas "Jhoome naache gaaye", followed by its separation pangs in "Ghir ghir aye kaari baadariya". With age the rain seems God's bounty to man. Both singing and dancing were at their best with Vivek Mishra on the tabla now in full bloom. Using coloured sticks in a Dandia-like "Lakudi Tarana" with two well trained young students dancing alongside, came the joyous finale.

## Sattria to stage

For the traditional Gayan Bayan prelude before an Ankia Nat performance, done by monks of the Bhogpur Sattria in Assam's Majuli island, there could hardly have been a better venue than the Birla Mandir Annexe, both ambience and setting perfect for what is a meditative exercise. The synchronised khol play with mudras and movements, the stave formations with the cymbal players providing the beat in the background, were all watched with great interest by an involved audience. The dances by Kalabhumi Guwahati, under Indira P.P. Bora, had their best feature in Indira's solo interpretation of lyrics, the Bargeet and the Krishna Vandana, rendered with highly communicative abhinaya. Her performance the next day at Triveni under Jayalakshmi Eshwar's initiative comprised a fine rendition of Dashavatar, the conscious addition of hastas from the 17th Century Shubankar's Hastamuktavali very decorative and distinctive. Again in the description of Krishna given the Lotus epithet, Indira's expressions were very vivid. How the Pataka hasta is used according to Hastamuktavali was briefly touched upon.

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