

Priyadarshini Govind
A Review (September 21, 2002)
By Kala Menon

On Saturday, September 21, Sruti presented Priyadarshini Govind in her exquisite solo dance performance premiere of *Siva-Shakthi*--The Divine Union, choreographed by A. Lakshman. Priyadarshini, a student of Rajaratnam Pillai and Kalanidhi Narayanan is a dancer with unparalleled talent in *Aangika Abhinaya* which she executes with impeccable body-line precision and extension that is worthy of emulation. The students and connoisseurs of *Bharatanatyam* in the audience could not have missed the high aesthetic quality of her presentation. Although Priyadarshini picked an intense theme for the evening's performance that culminated in the union of *Shiva*(*Purusha*) and *Shakthi* (*Prakriti*), she presented it rather simplistically. She prefaced each part of her performance with a simple but effective verbal delineation of the underlying folklore/meaning. It was an enjoyable evening.

The performance was divided into five parts. In the first part, Priyadarshini introduced the characters *Shiva* and *Shakthi* to the audience. While, *Shiva* was once considered the "angry one" (*Rudra*), and the "inauspicious one", and was "intimidating" to the devotee, *Shakthi* was considered the "auspicious one" and represented "positive energy" and was therefore worthy of celebration. Priyadarshini's depiction of *Shakthi* being brought to Earth in a palanquin with pomp and glory was very impressive.

In the second part, Priyadarshini presented *Shiva* as the One who became auspicious over time and came to be known as *Ashtamoorthy*, the Lord of the five elements and the sun and the moon and also of *Aham* or self. In this piece, Priyadarshini also depicted *Shakthi* as *Mahishaasuramardhini*, the One who killed the demon *Mahisha*. Priyadarshini's presentation of the change in *Shakthi*'s emotions from *Roudram* to *Shaantham* in the moments immediately after the destruction of *Mahisha* until the time when the devotees calm her with a rendition of *Aigiri Nandini* was truly an uplifting experience. One could not help being drawn into the presentation of a Hindi *Bhajan* in praise of *Amba* depicting the simplicity and blissful devotion of everyday village folk in the presence of the deity. This part of the evening's performance was the high-point of the repertoire.

Priyadarshini then went on to depict an incident that occurred between *Shiva* and *Shakthi* through a composition of Subramanya Bharathi. *Shakthi* was bored with life and refused to respond to *Shiva*'s invitation for a game of dice. To amuse her, *Shiva* apparently offered *Shakthi* an opportunity to play the role of the "Destroyer" while He played the role of the "Creator". *Shakthi* then manifests herself as *Kali* and the whole universe becomes distraught. It was *Shiva*'s touch that finally calms *Shakthi* down and peace and harmony reign on Earth again. Priyadarshini depicted this harmony in the universe as the physical love between *Shiva* and *Shakthi*.

After the intermission, Priyadarshini presented a rather light-hearted folklore about the jealousy that *Shakthi* carried in her heart for *Ganga* because *Shiva* had the maiden trapped in his matted hair. When all attempts to appease her with rational explanations failed, *Shiva* asks for forgiveness by prostrating before *Shakthi*. Priyadarshini amused her audience by suggesting that the only reason *Shakthi* was appeased when *Shiva* bowed to her was because *Ganga* who was trapped in *Shiva*'s locks of hair also bowed to her.

The evening's performance ended with the presentation of *Shiva-Shakthi* as *Ardhanaareeshwara*. This part of the performance had more of the *Nritta* aspect of *Bharatanatyam* than the preceding pieces.

The music for the performance was composed by Sri C.V. Chandrashekar, a renowned *Guru* of *Bharatanatyam*. It is laudable that Smt. Ramya Ramnarayan stepped in at very short notice to replace Sri A. Lakshman, the Nattuvanaar who could not accompany the troupe from India due to Visa problems. The relatively young and enthusiastic team of musicians included Deepu Karunakaran Nair as the vocalist, T. Vishwanathan as the mridangist and Vinod Kumar as the violinist.

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