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Cidānandavilāsa

A Report by Jayita Sengupta

This was part of the **Tarañg** – a programme by ***Punashcha*** dance troupe steered by **Smt. Nandita Banerjee**. The production was at Gyan Manch, Kolkata on 5 June evening, 2025. *Cidānanandabilāsa*, as the phrase suggests is the joy of finding the Self and blending the same with the expansiveness of the divine creation. There is an element of 'relish' in the word *vilāsa*, where this nectar like joy so perceived through the awakening of cetanā is to be tasted with a divine 'relish'!

Based on the precepts of the Trika Philosophy of Kāśmīri Śaivism, the dance has been wonderfully choreographed by Nandita Banerjee to unravel slowly and luxuriously this journey

of self-searching and fathoming the meaning of one's existence. This universe is inhabited by multiple beings, and we are a minuscular part of divine manifestation. The infinitude of this universe which we attempt to grasp with our sensory perceptions, baffles us joyously. Our heart is filled with praise and glory for the Supreme Creator: "Glory be to God for dappled things- …" (Hopkins). The production begins with a joyful group dance suggesting this pulsating joy of divine creation.



This joy so well-orchestrated through choreography, costume, rhythm, music, dance and the visual effect created by the lights, resonated with the mind and soul of the viewers and reminded one of the verses from Tagore songs like: "Jagat-e ānondo joggye, āmār nimontron" or "Mahā bishwe, mahākaśe, mahākālo mājhe/ āmi manabo ekāki bhromi bismoye ….".



Yet this joy slowly evolves into complex questions. The joyous bewilderment gradually leads to self-query and perplexities and an urge to fathom the mystery of existence itself. *'Who am I? From where do we come from? Why are we here? What is the purpose of this existence? What role do we have to play? Where does this lead to? Who is the divine? How and where to find the divine? How could we grasp this Creation?'* - We feel lost amid multiple *darśaṇas* (philosophical doctrines) that try to reveal the path to the divine within and in every sphere of pulsating life around us. Yet once the seeker is impelled on to this path, there is no going back, the path slowly unfolds itself or rather carves its way through the obstacles, complexities and hurdles which must be overcome. The dance production is about *this*

journey. Here, Nandita Banerjee as a dancer is impersonating the seeker or *sādhikā* who is trying to find her way home to the Eternal Creator of this universe.



Confused thus with such complexities the *sādhikā* or the seeker searches for some light. And it is at this stage, the Guru arrives as a divine preceptor to guide her to the path of Trika philosophy and initiates her to go within, rather than search for the answers in the external circumstances of life. The search within through deep *dhyāna* is often disturbed with otherworldly beings who are otherwise ordinarily imperceptible to the senses.



External distractions of the sensory world and the worlds or *lokas* that one must transcend is not easy, yet it is a divine romance. Once the love for the divine germinates in the heart, the seeker is impelled like a lover to this divine journey, stage by stage, till she finds her answers. Guru's guidance and initiation, awakens the *kuṇḍalinī śakti* in the *sādhikā*, and through deep meditation or the journey within she finally fathoms the mystery of Creation and perceives *Mā Kalī*, the Divine Mother who empowers us to transcend Time or *Kāla.*



As the *suṣumṇā nāḍī* conjoins with *iḍā* and *piñgalā nādīs* in the spine, the *sādhikā* experiences the divine bliss and she is one with the Śiva and Pārvatī. With such perception of *sat-cit-ānanda*, the *sādhikā*'s divine romance concludes with her oneness with the Supreme (*śivoham*) and she perceives the divine in every being, every molecule of this existence.

The trope of the mirror used in the dance beautifully choreographs the concepts of *māyā* or illusion. Delusions and illusions of this world are a part of the divine romance for the *sādhikā* to find her oneness with the Supreme and to understand her oneness with all that exists, in matter and spirit.





So, the concepts of duality in the world of matter are not to be negated. We play along with God's play with this universe. So ultimately all dualities are subsumed in the process of self-realization where the Eternal Truth slowly and luxuriously unfolds itself and is revealed to the seeker and leads to her oneness with the Supreme.



The excellent background score is by Pandit Debojyoti Bose, script is by Swastik Banerjee and lights by Soumen Chakravarti. The voice over in a resonating male voice in English, by

Dr. Sudipta Chatterjee and costume design by Niloy Sengupta, added to the seamlessly perfect and elegant presentation of the theme. A brief lecture on Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory by Professor Ratna Basu (Retired professor of Sanskrit, Calcutta University) that preceded this brilliant performance, prepared the audience for the show for a more complete understanding and enjoyment of the performance.
