



Parāśakti: The Flame Within

NOTES AND TRANSLATIONS

The Chan Centre Dot Com Series presentation of Parāśakti: The Flame Within brings together six talented BC-based artists for an all-new virtual production celebrating sublime Indian classical music and dance. While the provenance and training of these artists is diverse, the central narrative of the performance is based on Parāśakti—the Mother Goddess, the Absolute Divinity—a timeless archetype that traverses geographic and socio-cultural barriers in Hindu traditions. Parāśakti acts as a reflection on the human condition and presents paths for attaining enlightenment through her many iconographies and forms. This work skillfully utilizes elements of both the Hindustani and Carnatic musical traditions, alongside Bharatanatyam dance technique, contemporary storytelling, and devotional poetry.

As you watch the performance, it may be helpful to refer to the traditional sources, descriptions, and select translations for each chapter as outlined below.

► CHAPTER I Parāśakti's Triad

Rāgas: Kauśika Dhwani, Bhīmpalāsī, Amṛtavarṣiṇī

Tālas: Catusra Jāti Eka Tālam

Compositions and Poetry: Dhyāna Śloka (Devī Māhātmyam), Alārippu (Traditional), Śyāmalā Daṇḍakam (Kalidasa)

Description: An invocatory piece exalting the three primary forms of the Great Goddess, highlighting Their physical attributes, reflected through instrumentation. The first form is the three-eyed Kālī, Goddess of Time and Dissolution, who holds a severed head and many weapons. The second is Lakṣmī, Goddess of Prosperity and Sustenance, radiant like a coral holding Her lotus and discus. The final form is that of Sarasvatī, Goddess of Water, Arts, and Wisdom, playing music on Her lute-like instrument.

Translations

Dhyāna Śloka (Devī Māhātmyam)

- (1) I revere Mahākālī, who holds in her hands the sword, discus, mace, arrow, bow, iron club, spear, sling, human head, and conch; who is three-eyed, adorned on all her limbs, and sparkling like a sapphire; who has ten faces and ten feet; and whom Brahmā extolled while Viṣṇu slept, in order to slay Madhu and Kaiṭabha.
- (2) I revere Mahālakṣmī, who holds in her hands the prayer beads, ax, mace, arrow, thunderbolt, lotus, bow, waterpot, staff, lance, sword, shield, conch, bell, wine cup, trident, noose, and the discus Sudarśana; whose complexion is radiant like coral; who is seated on a lotus; and who is the destroyer of Mahiṣāsura.
- (3) I worship the incomparable Mahāsarasvatī, who holds in her lotus-like hands the bell, trident, plough, conch, mace, discus, bow and arrow; who is effulgent like the moon shining at the edge of a cloud; who is the support of the three worlds; and who came forth from the body of Gaurī to destroy Śumbha and other asuras.

Śyāmalā Daṇḍakam (Kalidasa)

O The Mother of the Worlds who has four hands, whose head is adorned with the crescent moon, who has a full bosom, who has a complexion like red powder, and who carries in her hands a bow of sugarcane, arrows of flowers, the rope and the goad, my prostrations before you!

► CHAPTER II Sāmarasya

Description: Narratives exploring binary experiences and identities through rasa (emotional essence), sensory processes, and symbolism. The devotee learns that everything within the world is the Goddess, culminating in the dissolution of dualities, and the harmonious union of Śiva and Śakti within the devotee.

Choreography Mentor: Smt. Bragha Bessel

► CHAPTER II PART I Bhayam (fear) & Vīram (valour)

Rāgas: Bairāgī Bhairav/Revatī

Tāla: Khaṇḍa Cāpu

Compositions and Poetry: Kālī Gāyatṛī Mantra (Traditional)

Description: The devotee enters the temple of Kālī and sees Her bloodthirsty form, vanquishing the fear in the world caused by the destruction of the arrogant buffalo-headed king. A fight scene depicts the enraged Goddess riding on a lion, and destroying all that disrupts balance through Her creative destruction - like that of time.

Translations

Kālī Gāyatṛī Mantra (Traditional)

Om! We meditate on the Great Goddess Who Takes Away Darkness, we contemplate She Who Resides in Cremation Grounds (the ultimate form into which creation dissolves). May that Great Goddess grant us increase.

► CHAPTER II PART II Adbhutam (wonder) & Śāntam (tranquility)

Rāga: Khamāj

Tāla: Tintāla

Compositions and Poetry: Sarasvatī Mahābhāge (Traditional), Sargam Gīt (Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande), Koyaliyā Kūka (Traditional)

Description: The devotee then wanders into the woods collecting glistening white flowers that resemble Sarasvatī's attire. She starts to feel inspired and sings, while the bees and birds buzz around her. They lead her to a river, where she realizes the flow of the Goddess' grace has been around her all this time.

Translations

Sarasvatī Mahābhāge (Traditional)

O Goddess Sarasvatī, the most auspicious Goddess of Knowledge with lotus-like eyes, an embodiment of knowledge, with large eyes, kindly bless me with wisdom. I salute You!

Koyaliyā Kūka (Traditional)

We hear the kūka (sound) of the cuckoo bird.



► CHAPTER II PART III Karuṇa (pathos) & Karuṇā (compassion)

Rāga(s): Miśra Pīlū, Malhār

Tāla(s): Ādi Tālam (Tisra Nāḍai), Addhā Sitārkhāni

Compositions and Poetry: Barasana Lāgī (Traditional), Ardhanārīśvara Stotram (Adi Sankaracarya)

Description: The bountiful forest becomes unsettled by man-made destruction. The devotee feels the thirst of the barren earth and the dying fauna. All of a sudden the sky fills with refreshing rain, and the devotee realizes the Goddess is all her experiences and emotions, no matter how conflicting they may be. The thunder and rain start to dance together in the sky, symbolizing the confluence of Śiva (consciousness) and Śakti (energy), exalting the androgynous form of the Divine.

Translations

Barasana Lāgī (Traditional)

The raindrops (tears) have started to fall, come to me. Without you, my eyes are unhappy.

Ardhanārīśvara Stotram (Adi Sankaracarya)

The Goddess' (left half) sparkling earring is studded with blazing precious stones and the God's (right half) is adorned with a terrifying snake as His earring. Supreme Auspiciousness is the essence of both Śakti and Śiva. Such is the wonderful form of Ardhanārīśvara (half-feminine principle, half-masculine principle). I bow to Śakti and Śiva.

► CHAPTER III The Flame Within

Rāgas: Hindōlam/Mālkauns, Miśra Bhairavī

Tālas: Khaṇḍa Eka Tālam, Ādi Tālam (Tisra Nāḍai)/Dādrā

Compositions: Jvala Prajvala (Traditional), O Queen of my Blood (Akhil Jobanputra), Kalakshetra Thillāna (Thirugokarnam Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar), Ebār Nabīn (Kazi Nazrul Islam)

Choreography Mentor: Prof. C. V. Chandrasekhar (Thillana)

Description: The spark of divine essence awakens within the devotee. The flame within continues to grow till it fully consumes them, and the devotee realizes their inner Parāśakti-nature and starts to dance in bliss. We come to understand Her universality, that the entire cosmos, including the devotee, is nothing but the Goddess. All limits of our own perceived nature and of external influences are burnt away.

Translations

Ebār Nabīn (Kazi Nazrul Islam)

Now in the new mantra, O Mother, your inauguration will take place
You will remain as constant in our home, Your immersion will not take place.

Soul of men and women from all races, will be Your altar, Your seat!
There with strength, and with devotion, they will create Your throne!

There will be no discrimination based on untouchability or high and low caste
Everybody will come together, chanting the Mother's name

We are the children of One Mother, we know
We will break the wall, and forget violence
Nobody will stay poor or wretched, everybody will be equal.
The world will become Mahabharata, Vrindavan of everlasting love.

