



Karna, the unsung hero



Bala Devi Chandrashekar rehearsing the portrayal of Karna. Photo: Special Arrangement

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The impact the Mahabharata has on people and the way they relate to its characters is fascinating. The turn of events at every stage tempts one to think whether it was destiny that made Yudhishtira play the game of dice with Duryodhana, Duryodhana team up with Sakuni, and Karna befriend Duryodhana.

Bala Devi Chandrashekar, U.S.-based Bharatanatyam dancer and the founder of Shree Padma Nrityam Academy, attempts to find an answer to such questions through her intense research. She has spoken to scholars and read commentaries and many retellings of the epic. As she says, all these have helped her understand better the various dimensions of each character.

This understanding has resulted in a dance production that explores the persona of Karna. Karna, known for his generosity, valour, loyalty and friendship, is portrayed as destiny's child. Titled 'Karna – The Destiny's Child', the dance drama will be presented in Bharatanatyam format by Bala Devi Chandrashekar this Season.

What made her choose Karna as the protagonist? "After an extensive study of various characters for one-and-a-half years, I realised that Karna is someone who everyone could relate to in everyday life, especially the trials and tribulations one encounters when they fail to follow the path of justice. I feel the character also makes one realise that however mighty or good one may be, the good deeds go unnoticed if one joins hands with evil."

The production is spread over four segments, each one leading to the next. "It is a challenge; I try to depict over 15 characters with no props. At the same time, I need to ensure that the traditional format stays intact."

The recital will feature Sanskrit songs and dialogue, supplemented with English commentaries. Also, the dancer is planning to launch the production in different languages such as Spanish, Russian, German and French with an idea to take it to foreign audiences. She is also taking the show to Visakhapatnam (Dec. 18, 7 p.m., Kala Bharathi) and Bengaluru (Jan. 7, 7.15 p.m., Seva Sadan, Malleswaram).

Funds raised during the concert will be donated towards flood relief work.

Keywords: [Bala Devi Chandrashekar](#), [December season](#), [Bharatnatyam](#)