

# friday Review

THE HINDU

**Spotlight on pallavis**At the annual festival dedicated to this segment of Carnatic music **p2****A bond built on music**Umayalpuram Sivaraman and M.A. Baby in conversation at *The Hindu* office **p3****A THEATRE COLLECTIVE'S TRANSFORMATIVE TALES**How Storee ki Boree reaches out to children through fiction and reality **p4**

## The stage, his world

In his birth centenary year, remembering actor-director R.S. Manohar, who changed the course of Tamil theatre



ILLUSTRATION: SAN

**Karthik Bhatt**

**T**he 1950s was a pivotal decade in Tamil theatre. A major change to happen was the shift in focus from historical and mythological subjects (a staple those days) to social themes and drawing-room dramas. With the legendary Nawab Rajamanickam in the last phase of his active theatre life, it looked like it was curtains down for the historical and mythological genres. That they continued to thrive for more than three decades after this, was largely due to the efforts of theatre and film actor, R.S. Manohar, whose birth centenary is being celebrated this year.

Born on June 29, 1925, to Rajalakshmi and R. Subramania Iyer, an inspector in the Postal Department, Manohar was named Lakshminarasimhan at birth. As his father was in a transferable job, Lakshminarasimhan had his early education at various places, including Namakkal and Bellary, before moving to Madras, where he studied at the Muthiah Chettiar school and later at the Ramakrishna Mission High School in T. Nagar. He did his B.A. from the Pachaiyappa's College. After working with the Imperial Tobacco Company for a short while, he quit his job and joined the Postal Department.

Lakshminarasimhan's interest in theatre dated back to his school days, when he acted in one-act plays. His first major play was *Rajabhakti*, enacted by the students of

Ramakrishna Mission High School. He then went on to act in a few more plays while studying at the Pachaiyappa's. The story of how he came to be christened Manohar, is also well-known – he substituted for the lead actor at the last minute in the popular play, *Manohara*, and the name stuck on.

Manohar continued performing on the stage, even while working, and was associated with troupes such as the Egmore Dramatic Society, Nataraja Amateurs and the YMIA. In 1951, his performance in the play, *Marumalarchi*, caught the attention of screenwriter A.T. Krishnaswamy and director R.M. Krishnaswamy, who were looking for a fresh face for their upcoming movie *Rajambal*. Manohar fit the bill and thus began a successful stint on the big screen. He performed in over 200 films – *Kaidhi Kannayiram*, *Vallavanukku Vallavan*, *Ayirathil Oruvan*, *Adimai Penn* and *Ulagam Sutrum Valiban* – to name just a few. Despite sharing the screen with two of the biggest heroes of the era – MGR and Sivaji Ganesan – Manohar carved a niche in cinema, but the stage remained his first love.

Manohar started National Theatres on November 14, 1954. Interestingly, the first few productions such as *Inbanaal*, *Alavukku Meerinaal* and *Ulagam Sirikkiradhu* were based on social themes. However, *Ilankeswaran* was its biggest hit in the mythological genre.

**CONTINUED ON**  
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Scan to Chat



**P. Srihari**

**A**rtificial Intelligence (AI) has found its way onto the Carnatic concert stage – truly ‘All-Invasive’, one might say. Just two days after ChatGPT made its debut as a pallavi composer at Pallavi Darbar 2025 (July 2–6), though, the spotlight swung back to tradition.

Under the auspices of Carnatica and Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha, disciples of vocalist-violinist Delhi P. Sunder Rajan revisited and reimagined pallavis, crafted by past masters and their guru. The event, organised as part of the annual Pallavi Darbar festival, was held at Srinivasa Sastri Hall.

Shruthi Shankar Kumar, R.P. Shravan, Padmashree Srinivasan and Dhanya Rudrapatnam not only rendered a curated array of pallavis with flair, but also articulated their structural and aesthetic features with endearing clarity.

The programme titled ‘Pallavi Memoirs’ saw the quartet present nine pieces, with Chidambaram G. Badrinath on the violin and R. Akshay Ram on the mridangam providing enthusiastic support. Of the nine selected, four were composed by T.R. Subramaniam, a pioneering one by M. Balamuralikrishna and four by Sunder Rajan. Given the focus was on the pallavi structure, the traditional trikalam and tisram were demonstrated where relevant.

**Mukhi pallavis**

Known for his inventive, populist approaches to pallavi, Subramaniam brought a fresh energy to the form. Balamuralikrishna, on the other hand, enriched the rhythmic canvas with his Mukhi pallavis, opening up new exploratory possibilities within the Carnatic idiom. The main pallavi, composed by Sunder Rajan, was a creative expansion of Balamuralikrishna’s Mukhi concept.

Though it came later in the recital, the conceptual high point merits early attention here. As a tribute to Balamuralikrishna on his 95th



# On a pallavi trail

‘Pallavi Memoirs’ provided a peek into the creations of past masters

birth anniversary, the team offered a brief presentation of the maestro’s well-known Panchamukhi Adi tala pallavi in Kalyani ‘Sangeetha laya jnaanamu, sakala soorbhagyamu’.

Balamuralikrishna devised the Mukhi talas – Trimukhi, Panchamukhi, Saptamukhi, and Navamukhi – by applying different gatis (rhythmic subdivisions) to the two components of a Suladi tala: sa-shabda (with sound) and ni-shabda (without sound). In these talas, only the sa-shabda (e.g., beats 1, 5, and 7 in Adi tala) adopt a nadai other than chatusram, while the rest of the cycle retains its base structure. The tala derives its name from the nadai applied to these audible beats: tisram (Trimukhi), khandam (Panchamukhi), misram

(Saptamukhi), and sankeernam (Navamukhi).

Inspired by the concept, Sunder Rajan composed a Gati-traya Bahumukhi pallavi (featuring three gatis and multiple rhythmic dimensions) in Charukesi, set to Misra Triputa tala. Following a succinct raga alapana by Dhanya, mirrored on the violin by Badrinath, Shravan rendered the tanam. The intricate pallavi ‘Eesanai mahesanai ninai, trineethranai pavithranai jaga(deesanai)’ was executed with poise by the disciples. Its vibrant rhythmic fabric incorporated tisra (first beat), khanda (eighth) and misra (10th) gatis in the sa-shabda sections, representing the confluence of the three gatis. A short burst of kalpanaswaras followed, with Akshay Ram capping the piece with a crisp, energetic tani avartanam.

The recital opened with three consecutive pallavis by Subramaniam. The first in Pantuvarali ‘Sambho mahadeva vibho paahi prabho, santatam swayambho’ was set to Misra Triputa. The uttarangam featured a Gopuchcha yati – a tapering sequence of syllables resembling the shape of a cow’s tail – beginning with ‘santatam’ (seven counts), followed by ‘swayambho’ (6), and continuing into the purvanganam with ‘sambho’ (5) and ‘maha’ (4).

**Interesting addition**

A Bilahari sketch by Shruthi preceded the next pallavi ‘Raghukula tilakudai velasina ramachandru, maa paali devudu sri’ set to Khanda Triputa. The embedded trikalam in each of the first three words – in a 4:2:1 ratio – was aesthetically executed, as was the tisram. The inverse ratio singing (1:2:4) was an interesting addition.

The Kiravani pallavi, ‘Vallee deva senapathe, name namasthe’ had a tanam prelude by Padmashree. Set to Khanda Triputa, this pallavi featured a receding mathematical pattern in the purvanganam: ‘vallee’ - 4,4 counts; ‘deva’ - 3,3; and ‘senapathe’ - 2,2. In the uttarangam, name - 1,4; namasthe - 1,4; and 1,4 (the

**ChatGPT turns composer**

The audience at Ashwath Narayanan’s concert at Pallavi Darbar was in for an unexpected revelation. The acrostic pallavi in Tamil that he presented in four ragas had been composed with the help of ChatGPT – marking a novel intersection of technology and tradition in the evolving landscape of Carnatic music.

An acrostic pallavi is one in which the first syllables or letters of each word or line of text form a meaningful word or phrase. In this instance, the structure was designed to yield four raga names – Ananda Bhairavi, Vasantha Bhairavi, Saalaga Bhairavi, and Sindhu Bhairavi. The purvanganam (first half) contained text whose opening syllables of the words spelt out the respective raga names (excluding the common suffix ‘Bhairavi’), while the lyric of the shared uttarangam (latter half) gave out ‘Bhairavi’.

The lyrics ran as follows:

‘Adinaa nandogapan thanayan, painkuzhalada rasamigavaagi vinaigal-arave’ (Ananda Bhairavi);

‘Vadamathurai sannidhiyil thavazhndhaadinaan’ (Vasantha Bhairavi);

‘Saarangan layamodu gathiththaadinaan’ (Saalaga Bhairavi); and

‘Slambaadinaan dhuvaaarakapurisan’ (Sindhu Bhairavi).

Ashwath said that, not being someone with a flair for lyric-writing, he had turned to the AI tool for assistance. Given the pallavi’s multi-raga structure, he added, he chose to focus primarily on the melodic aspect, keeping the rhythmic framework deliberately simple.

The composition followed the acrostic structure closely in the first three segments, but the fourth – Sindhu Bhairavi – featured a minor lapse, with the middle syllable ‘n’ of ‘Sindh’ not represented in the lyric. Nevertheless, the experiment stood out for its creativity and aesthetic execution.



# Square route

Sumitra Nitin’s ‘Sri Chakra’, a blend of Navavarana kritis and visual art, is an ode to the sacred geometry



Insightful Sumitra Nitin with her disciples; and a Sri Chakra Yantra painting by Rekha Krishnan. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The inspiration came from a Sri Chakra Yantra painting by Rekha Krishnan. “I then started dreaming about this programme,” she recalls, “where I could showcase the synergy between this ancient visual art and the profound Navavarana compositions.” Though initially unfamiliar with the kritis, Rekha’s journey soon became intertwined with Sumitra’s vision, leading to a collaboration bridging the sacred and the aesthetic.

For Sumitra, the idea for a unique presentation of these kritis came in an unexpected moment of quiet reflection.

the Kamalamba Navavarana kritis, the timing was serendipitous. Rekha had, by then, become a Sri Vidya upasaka herself. “I’m very much into the Sri Vidya philosophy now,” she shares. Rekha created an entirely new series of paintings, each infused with her spiritual understanding of the corresponding avaraṇa.

This vision now comes to fruition in an upcoming thematic event titled ‘Sri Chakra’, to be held at Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha (Vani Mahal) on July 20 at 10 a.m. Sumitra will present a

lec-dem of the Kamalamba Navavarana kritis, accompanied by nine of her students from Natyarsuti. As the compositions unfold, Rekha’s visual interpretation of each avaraṇa will be projected on screen. The musical ensemble includes Sivateja Mallajosyla on the violin and Abhiram Nitin on the mridangam.

When asked about her interpretation of the Navavarana kritis, Sumitra was quick to clarify: “I follow Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer’s Patantaram.” She learned a couple of kritis directly from him and absorbed more through her guru T. Rukmini, also a disciple of Semmangudi. This lineage is not about rigid replication but about aesthetic refinement.

Sumitra, as a teacher, took on the challenge. Referring to the sheer complexity of Navavaranas, she taught them “slowly,” often just “one line or maximum two lines per class.” Many of her students are in school, some in college. Yet, through patience and perseverance, the young ensemble rose to the occasion.

One might assume that to compose such spiritually potent music, a composer might simplify his musical structure. But Dikshitar did the opposite. “He challenged himself in his own way,” says Sumitra. From using all eight vibhaktis to composing in rare talas such as the 14-akshara cycle for the seventh avaraṇa, Dikshitar imposed complicating conditions upon himself, only to transcend them. In doing so, he didn’t just compose kritis, he expanded the very boundaries of Carnatic music.

During the performance, Rekha’s Sri Chakra paintings will be displayed on the stage. “These visuals will add a new dimension to the kritis,” adds Sumitra.

# Comedy of errors

*Killadi Maplae* is low on logic but high on humour



and has no qualms about blackmailing him.

Kandasamy also happens to be in love with Bhamini and wants Arunachalam to stop the wedding.

Arunachalam is resourceful, and manages to avoid being exposed by pretending to each wife that Kandasamy is the husband of the other. The quirky humour in these mix-ups was endearing.

Mappilai Ganesh’s direction ensured that the audience was not confused by the complicated goings-on in the play.

Interestingly, the roles of Yamini and Bhamini were played by the same person, and when a character in the play asks why both sisters are never together, Arunachalam replies, “This is not a film, where we can show the same actor in dual roles at the same time.”

Neither wife showed any surprise upon discovery of the other, which was rather odd, even for a farce. There were political jibes as well in the play.

Don’t look for logic in the play. Who wants stark realism all the time? Reality can be depressing, and we need a trip away from it now and then. *Killadi Maplae* is the prescription for your anxieties.

**Well-curated** Shravan, Shruthi Shnkar Kumar, Dhanya Rudrapatnam and Padmashree Srinivasan with G. Badrinath on the violin and R. Akshay Ram on the mridangam. PHOTO: R. RAGU & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

final 4 transitioning into the purvanganam). After trikalam in chatusra and tisra nadais, pratilomam was performed from the arudhi – an uncommon but intriguing choice. The swara garland, besides Kiravani, included Valaji (Dhanya), Abheri (Shruthi), Shanmukhapriya (Shravan), Mohanakalyani (Padmashree) and Vasanthi (Badrinath).

The next three presented were those of Sunder Rajan. The Saveri pallavi in 2-kalai Adi tala ‘Kumara (3 syllables) gurupura (4) karthika(ya) (5), ninadhupadhamalar (7) panivome (5), showcased elegant ascending and descending patterns. The purvanganam built up as 1 matra X 3 syllables, 2X4, and 3X5, while the uttarangam traced a descending sequence – 3X7, 2X5, and finally 1X3 (returning to ‘Kumara’).

‘Venkataramana, sankataharana tirupati’ in Lathangi set to Khanda Jhampa, had the purvanganam in Tisra nadai (3X5) and uttarangam in Khanda nadai (5X3), and was well-executed along with trikalam in Chatusra tisram and pratilomam. The swarakshara pallavi in Khamas ‘Saamagaana lola nin paadhame gathi, mahadeva sadasiva nidham panindhen’, set to Adi tala in Khanda nadai, was presented in four speeds – keezh, chatusra-tisram, samam and mel.

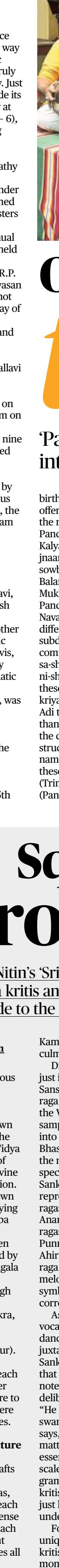
The concluding number – a Surutti pallavi in Sankeerna Jhampa tala (Tisra nadai) ‘Velan sivabal vanuguneselan, vallee lolan’, composed by Subramaniam, was structured in Srotovaha yati, the ascending counterpart to Gopuchcha yati, evoking the image of a river that begins as a trickle and gradually widens. The quartet performed Chatusram to this Tisra nadai pallavi with assurance.

**Aishwarya Raghunathan**

**S**ri Vidya, the luminous knowledge of the Goddess, and the Cosmic Mother, Tripura Sundari, stand as the crown jewel of Shaka Tantra. The spiritual tradition of Sri Vidya is rooted in the worship of Shakti, celebrating the divine as both creator and creation.

Though popularly known as the Navavaranas, implying nine kritis, the Kamalamba series by Muthuswami Dikshitar comprises eleven compositions. Bookended by a Dhyana Kriti and a Mangala Kriti, these works are a musical pilgrimage through the sacred enclosures (Avaranas) of the Sri Chakra, with Kamalamba, the goddess, presiding at Kamalanagaram (Tiruvarur). Dikshitar’s compositions methodically illuminate each Avaraṇa, guiding the seeker from the outermost square to the innermost bindu, where the goddess herself resides.

**Intricate musical structure** Dikshitar, an ardent Devi upasaka, meticulously crafts each kriti to reflect the geometry, deities, mantras, and esoteric qualities of each Avaraṇa. The lyrics are dense with Sanskrit grammar, each kriti employing a different vibhakti (case), which uses all eight cases, Kamalamba,



# The musical bond

Mridangam maestro Umayalpuram Sivaraman and Marxist leader M.A. Baby talk about their enduring friendship at a special conversation session organised at *The Hindu* recently

**B. Kolappan**

Kolappan.b@thehindu.co.in

**W**hat could be common between a mridangam exponent and a Marxist leader? Music.

The friendship between Umayalpuram Sivaraman, who describes himself as a hardcore traditionalist yet ultra-modern, and M.A. Baby – general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and a connoisseur of Carnatic music, dates back decades. The two came together to share their stories at a special conversation session at *The Hindu* office, where N. Ram, former Editor-in-Chief, explained how an unusual association blossomed into an enduring friendship.

It was during the Emergency, imposed by the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, that the world of Carnatic music first opened its doors to Baby. Then a student, he almost went underground and later, even courted arrest.

"His elder brother advised him

to visit a temple and attend concerts. That is how he discovered the music of Sivaraman," Ram said.

Baby fine-tuned his taste in music by attending concerts of masters of that time, who were often accompanied by Sivaraman on the mridangam. To this day, he vividly recalls the songs rendered at those performances and the way Sivaraman's artistry elevated each concert. He once even travelled to Erode to hear him as he accompanied K.V. Narayanasamy, after seeing an announcement about the concert in *The Hindu*. "That day, KVN sang 'Evarimata' in Kamboji. The elaboration of the raga, the rendition of the kriti and the tani avartanam that followed are unforgettable," Baby said.

So thorough is Baby with Sivaraman's bani that when he was a Member of Parliament, he once asked Arun Kumar, after listening to him perform, if he was a disciple of Umayalpuram Sivaraman. The mridangam maestro was thoroughly impressed when he heard of this.

Recalling the incident, Sivaraman said, "Later, I got a call

on my landline – I still don't have a mobile. The person, at the other end of the line, said, 'I'm Baby. I'd like to meet you.' So I invited him over, and that's when I realised he was the person Arun had mentioned. We met again with some friends, and ended up discussing music till late into the night. 'My wife was worried and called to check if I had been kidnapped,' he laughed.

Appreciative of Baby's sensitivity to music, Sivaraman shared how Baby can identify the style of most artistes, vocalists or instrumentalists. That's a rare quality.

Baby, who has organised many concerts, was instrumental in bringing together Chenda melam exponent Mattanoor Sankarankutty Marar and Sivaraman for a performance. He even arranged for the latter to accompany Kathak exponent Birju Maharaj.

Baby recalled Sivaraman's decision to call Neyyattinkara Vasudevan to sing

a Pallavi at the inauguration of the Kerala University Students' Union. "When Vasudevan saw Sivaraman walking in, there were tears in his eyes."

Referring to himself as a honeybee, Sivaraman said, "Wherever there is good music,

irrespective of caste or religion, I offer to accompany the artiste." The veteran has also composed music for a fashion show.

Sharing his experience of accompanying stalwarts, Sivaraman pointed out how each possessed mastery in their respective field. "Your imagination should come through in your playing. It's hard work that helps you reach the top. But to maintain that position, one should constantly keep improving," he said. On the subject of creativity, Sivaraman said, "I Don't think everything old is good, or

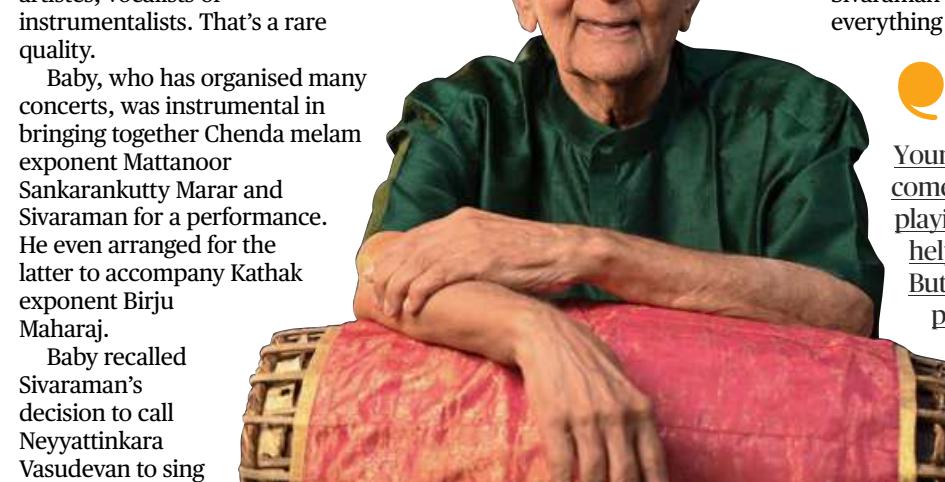
## An unusual association

Umayalpuram Sivaraman and M.A. Baby.  
PHOTOS: SHIVARAJ S & B. THAMODHARAN

everything new, bad. People with wisdom always choose the best from the old and the new."

The conversation also featured Sivaraman's friendship with actors Sivaji Ganesan and M.G. Ramachandran. He played for the Sivaji Ganesan-starred *Mridanga Chakravarthy*. "Sivaji used to call me vathiyar (teacher). Before every shot, he would ask me if he was playing it right. Such was his humility."

Sivaraman also recalled the presence of MGR and Devaraj Urs at M. Balamuralikrishna's concert at the Music Academy. That year, the vocalist was conferred the Sangita Kalanidhi. "I accompanied him. After the concert, we went to meet both the Chief Ministers (Tamil Nadu and Karnataka). MGR came up to me and said, 'You played well. He had prepared the pallavi at home, but you played on the spot.' Will anyone say that? That shows how deep his musical knowledge was!"



Your imagination should come through in your playing. It's hard work that helps you reach the top. But to maintain that position, one should constantly keep improving."

UMAYALPURAM SIVARAMAN

## For Vedic scholars

Om Charitable Trust conducts the 17th year National Vedic Talent Vista - 2025 on July 19 and 20 at Sri Krishnaswamy Kalyana Mandapam, South Boag Road, T. Nagar. Different programmes from the Vaidika Vijnana Vikasini Sabha (Society for the Development of Vedic Wisdom - Exam Unit of the Trust) will be inaugurated on day one. Justice G.R. Swaminathan, Judge, the Madras High Court, will preside. Events on July 20 include Vedic chanting at 9 a.m. followed by Veda Mahatmyam at 11.30 a.m. R. Krishnamurthy Sastry, former Principal, Madras Sanskrit College, will preside.

## Music contest

The Indian Fine Arts Society conducts the annual music competition on September 6 at Ethiraja Kalyana Nilayam, Alwarpet. Last date is August 15. Application form can be downloaded from www.theindianfineartsociety1932.com or can be obtained from the office. For details contact 78457 5548 or 87544 3793.

## Garuda sevai

At Sri Kariyamanikkam Perumal temple, Mambakkam village, Chingleput district, the Garuda Sevai utsavam will be held on July 20, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Processional deities from 12 temples in and around the village will be taken out on the Garuda mount during the occasion.

# Young brigade to the fore

Kedaram's 10th year festival showcased the unique appeal of a Carnatic group kutcheri

**H. Ramakrishnan**

**K**edaram celebrated its 10th anniversary with a series of music concerts. The inaugural performance was by a group of four up-and-coming musicians. One felt skeptical initially about the idea of bringing together a young team belonging to different schools. However, the quartet rose up to the challenge with their synchronised rendition.

Nandita Kannan, Shakthi Muralidharan, Dhanush Anantharaman, Nirajan Dindodi and Charulatha (veena)



In sync (From left) Nandita Kannan, Shakthi Muralidharan, Dhanush Anantharaman, Nirajan Dindodi and Charulatha (veena). PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

compromised with. There was ample opportunity for each to showcase their individual manodharma and competence in alapanas and swaraprastaras.

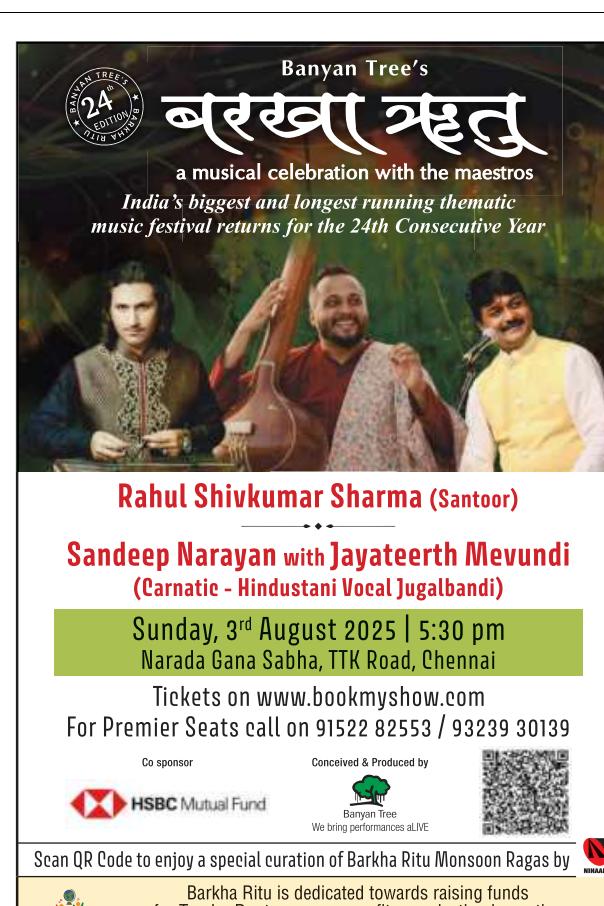
Aptly commencing with 'Guruleka eduvantu' in Gowrimohari (Khanda cChapu) by Tyagaraja, they took turns to render the kalpanaswaras. This was followed by the Kalyani alapana, led by Sakthi. The ensemble uniquely included the veena (played by C. Charulatha) instead of the usual violin accompaniment. It added to the melody. Her Kalyani raga essay was enjoyable. 'Birana varalicci brovumu' (Adi tala, tisra nadai), by Syama Sastry, was the chosen kriti. The musicians took turns to render niraval and swaras at 'Puraani madhuravaani'.

Dikshitar's rare composition, the sixth GuruGuba Vibhakti kriti in Purvi raga, was a pleasure to listen to. It was followed by Papanasam Sivan's bhakti-laden kriti in raga Marga Hindolam, 'Thunai purinthalur karunai madhava'.

The *pièce de résistance* of the concert was Tyagaraja's masterpiece 'O, rangasayi' in Kamboji. The raga alapana, led by Nandita, was a nice blend of long and short phrases. Charulatha's adherence to tradition came through in her response on the veena. She effectively conveyed the essence of the raga. The quartet's synchronised rendition drew up picture of the Bhoolaka Vaikuntam – Srirangam. Each came up with their distinct approach to the niraval and swaras.

Aduthurai Guruprasad on the mridangam and Sriman Raghu Krishnan on the ghatam showed their command over laya during the thami.

After the Virutham, the group sang Sringeri Acharya Sri Bharati Thirtha Mahaswami's 'Bhajare lokagurum' in Khamas. Thayumanavar's 'Angai ludemular thoovi' was rendered in ragas Chenjurutti and Nadanamakriya set to a rare Chanda tala. The concert concluded with Samartha Ramadasa's abhang.





Neha Kirpal

In a fast-paced world, where gadgets and technology dominate our lives, stories and theatre can play a powerful role in connecting us to ourselves.

Delhi-based theatre collective, Storee ki Boree, recently staged its latest production, *Ka Se Kahani*, at the LTG Auditorium, Mandi House. A heart-warming story set in a village backdrop, the play is about love, learning, second chances and the magic that happens when generations truly connect. It traces the quiet yet radical journey of Vijaya, a 60-year-old woman at a village in North Karnataka, who decides to learn to read, guided by her granddaughter, Seeya. This theatrical adaptation was inspired by 'How I Taught My Grandmother to Read' – a short story by well-known author Sudha Murty.

Directed and designed by film and theatre actor, Munish

# Transformative tales

Theatre collective, Storee ki Boree, reiterates the power of storytelling

Sharma, the production weaves together dialogue, movement and music to create an immersive experience that resonates with audience across ages. Dialogues are by Mrinal Mathur and dramaturgy support by Kavitha (Vishwa Shilpi Art Consultation, Bengaluru).

As a storyteller and an educator, *Ka Se Kahani* reminded me how stories, when told right, can be gentle



revolutions," says Shraddha Gupta, founder of Storee ki Boree.

When Shraddha returned from London, her children had "nothing but malls for entertainment", she felt the need to tell them about our



**Playtime** From *Ka Se Kahani*, a theatrical adaptation of Sudha Murthy's short story 'How I Taught My Grandmother to Read'.  
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**Playtime** From *Ka Se Kahani*, a theatrical adaptation of Sudha Murthy's short story 'How I Taught My Grandmother to Read'.  
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

introducing a technique called dramascope, where the sets spanned across the entire stage with a stereophonic sound system.

National Theatres completed its Silver Jubilee in 1979. A committee with Justice S. Mohan as the chairman, V. Emberumanar Chetty as the secretary and dignitaries such as C.R. Pattabiraman, MAM Ramaswamy, V.G. Panneerdas and Sowcar Janaki was formed to celebrate the occasion and a grand function was held in April 1980.

In 1991, Manohar was appointed the secretary of the Iyal Isai Nataka Mandram by former Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa, who professed an ardent admiration for his plays. It was also at her behest that he staged *Thirunavukkarasar* in 1994. Presiding over a performance in November of that year, she bestowed the title of *Nadaga Chemmal* on him. The music for the production was composed by violin maestro Kunnakudi Vaidyanathan, who was then the president of the Iyal Isai Nataka Mandram. In 1992, the government also produced *Velicham*, a play on prohibition under Manohar's guidance.

Manohar was also bestowed with titles such as *Nataka Thilakam*, *Nataka Kala Chakravarthy* and *Nataka Kavalar*. He passed away in 2006. Today, his memory and legacy is kept alive by his nephew S. Shivprasad and grand-daughter S. Sruuthi, who have revived some of his plays such as *Dronar*, *Kadaga Mudhreyan* and *Chanakya Sabadham*.

# The stage, his world



CONTINUED FROM  
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*Ilankeswaran* was written by Thuraiyur Murthy. Premiering in Madras in 1956, it had a tremendous run in India as well as abroad, in countries such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore – with nearly 2,000 shows being performed over the next three decades. It was based on a version of the *Ramayana*, which portrayed Ravana as the father of Sita and attracted its share of controversies too. Manohar went on to produce plays such as *Indrajith*, *Narakasuran*, *Sisupalan*, *Chanakya Sabadham*, *Malik Kafur*, *Dronar*, *Soorapadman*, *Kadaga Mudhreyan*, *Ottakoothar* and *Viswanmitrar*. In all, National Theatres had 31 plays and around 7,950 shows to its credit. The audience was held in thrall as much by the acting and as by the grandiose on the stage. Special effects employed to portray scenes, left them baffled too. Separate rehearsal sessions, spanning two to three days, were held exclusively for the technical team to execute the trick scenes.

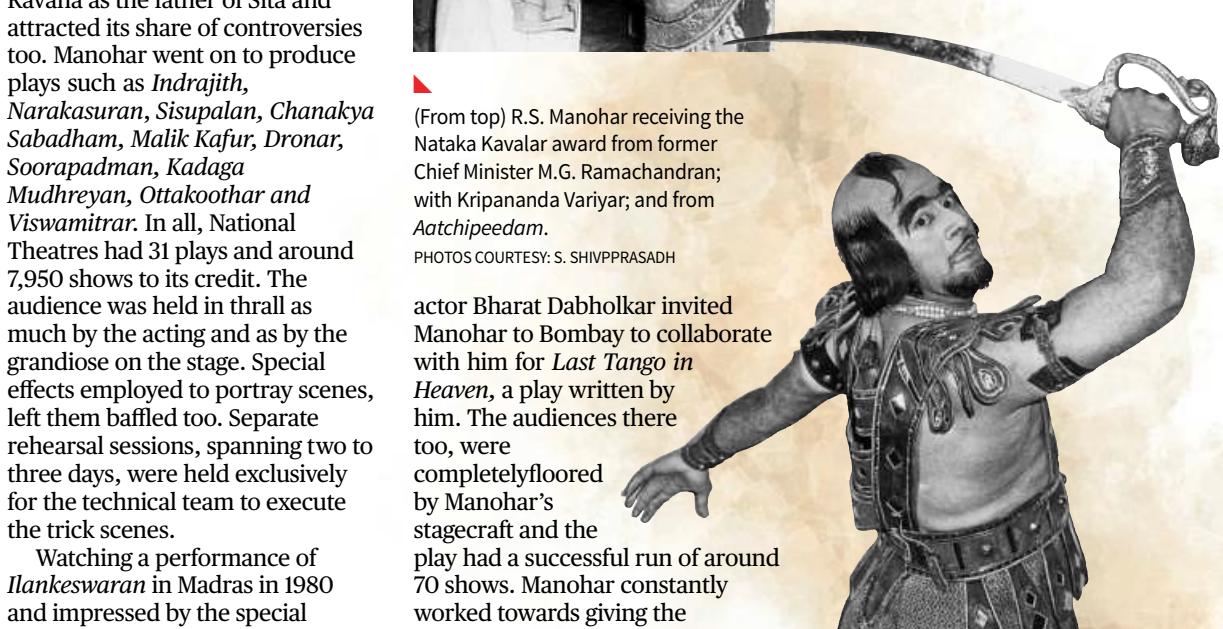
Watching a performance of *Ilankeswaran* in Madras in 1980 and impressed by the special effects, the famous ad-man and



(From top) R.S. Manohar receiving the Nataka Kavalar award from former Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran; with Kripavari Variyar; and from Aatchipeedam.

PHOTOS COURTESY: S. SHIVPRASADH

actor Bharat Dabholkar invited Manohar to Bombay to collaborate with him for *Last Tango in Heaven*, a play written by him. The audiences there too, were completely floored by Manohar's stagecraft and the play had a successful run of around 70 shows. Manohar constantly worked towards giving the audience a unique experience,



rich culture and heritage. The journey began at a nurturing space called Learning Tree, where she worked with children and discovered the power of listening. "When you truly listen, you see how deeply children feel and how naturally they express themselves through stories. That's what led to Storee ki Boree," she says. Known for its emotionally rich, child-led storytelling, it honours the child's voice – not just as performers, but as storytellers in their own right.

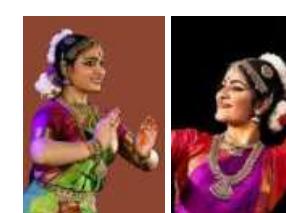
Since 2008, Storee ki Boree has staged more than 50 original productions in over 11 cities and has trained more than 10,000 children and adults through its theatre and storytelling workshops. From *The Nutcracker* to *Krishna Katha*, it has hosted everything from mythology to modern tales. For instance, *Ramlila*, which has had over 200 housefull shows, is a nice blend of mythology and modernity told with humour and imagination. Further, *Kabuliwala*, a Tagore classic, has been equally loved for its emotional depth and simplicity.

**Pause and reflect**  
The team consists of not just theatre-makers, but also passionate educators, artistes and child-development specialists, who believe in the transformative power of stories. "Our goal has always been to nurture self-expression while building trust, awareness and respect in every interaction – on and off stage," says Shraddha. Alongside theatre, they also design leadership workshops to help build confidence, communication and empathy in children. The collective's work is informed by its understanding of child protection and safety frameworks, such as PCSO, which helps them ensure emotionally and physically safe spaces for every child.

## CALENDAR

### Dance festival

Kalakshetra Foundation presents Kala Mela, a two-day dance festival, on July 19 and 20, at Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium, Tiruvannamalai. Day one will feature a Kathak performance by the students of Kathak Kendra, New Delhi, 'Rukmini Kalyanam', by Kalakshetra Foundation will be presented on day two. Time: 6 p.m. Tickets on mndm.in



### Bharatanatyam performance



### Debut

Srinidhi Nandhagopal and Aadarsh Nandhagopal, disciples of Sridevi Nrithyalaya, will present their Bharatanatyam arangetram on July 20, 9.30 a.m., at Rasika Ranjani Sabha.

### Celebrating Dikshitar

As part of Veenaavadi Sampradaaya Trust's Samvatsara Mahotsavam, being held to commemorate the 250th birth anniversary of Muthuswami Dikshitar, the following events will be held on July 20 from 9 a.m. to 6.35 p.m., at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. Nagaswaram, vocal and instrumental concerts will be featured on the occasion. The day-long event will conclude with Sowmya's vocal concert at 6.35 p.m.

### Themed on Syama Sastri

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha has organised the following programmes at Vani Mahal, T. Nagar. Details: July 19, 6.30 p.m.: N.J. Nandini's concert, featuring the kritis of Swati Tirunal. She will be accompanied by Raghu (violin), Praveen Sparsh (mridangam) and Vishnu Kammath (kanjira).

### Memorial concert

Chennai Fine Arts in association with Ganakanidhi Vinjamuri Dr Varadaraja Iyengar Memorial Trust, celebrates the 110th birth anniversary of musician Vinjamuri Varadarajan Iyengar with a special vocal concert by Kalyanapuram Aravind today, 6 p.m., at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. H.N. Bhaskar on the violin, Srimushnam Rajarao on the mridangam and B. Shree Sundarkumar on the kanjira.

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