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THE HINDU

Ragas in a new light
Candlelight Concerts come to town with a Carnatic-themed show **p2**



FIFTY YEARS OF A CLASSIC

Revisiting the making of *Sholay* that changed the course of Hindi cinema **p4**

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Dance forms around the world are marked by uniqueness, owing to the traditions and cultural contexts in which they have evolved. While efforts have been made to preserve the distinctive character of each, little attention has been paid towards identifying the universal elements that connect them. It is often said that all forms of music, despite their diversity, can be comprehended through the seven notes. What, then, is the equivalent in dance? This basic question, posed by Jayachandran Surendran, senior dance research scholar and lecturer at IIT Hyderabad's Centre for Exact Humanities, led him to explore form-neutral and style-neutral universal fundamentals for dance.

Jayachandran's decades of research led to the development of a pedagogical tool aptly named ATAM (meaning 'motion' or 'movement' in Tamil, at a fundamental level), the first of its kind to receive a design patent in India. He explains, "I observed that three parameters are universally present across all dance forms – postures, transitions between postures, and the rhythm in those transitions. Since my approach is based on the affordability and degree of freedom of each joint in the body, with a special focus on the lower half of the body, the tool can technically be applied to all kinds of movement. Movement is a common thread that runs through human activities such as sports, yoga, martial arts, dance, and theatre."

In Bharatanatyam, the basic unit of movement is called an 'Adavu'. Interestingly, he points out that the term 'Adavu' is not exclusive to Bharatanatyam; it is also used in



How an IIT professor plans to change classroom learning with ATAM, an innovative teaching tool

Decoding dance

traditional Indian martial arts such as Kuthuvarisai and Silambam. He argues that an Adavu is not intrinsically artistic; rather, it is a way of breaking down movement into smaller, functional units for pedagogical purposes. It is the intent of the movement which imports artistry to Adavu.

"Postures are common across various movement disciplines. The fundamentals of the classical dance forms have been assimilated also from the movement knowledge bank of martial arts and yogasana traditions. However, what differs across several movement systems is the *transition* – what happens between postures. While posture training forms the bedrock of dance learning, transitions are often absorbed through observation."

The ATAM tool, according to Jayachandran, isolates these transitions, and teaches them separately, offering students a

more conscious understanding of movement flow.

So, how is the ATAM tool designed? To make it child-friendly, Jayachandran mapped six postures onto the six faces of a dice. There are three-coloured dice: black for standing postures, red for half-sitting, and blue for full-sitting.

Dice are placed in white holders for on-beat movements and black holders for off-beat. Two dials are used – one indicates foot positions (right, left, both) and transitions (like stamping, placing, turning, sliding, or jumping, each shown by a colour), while the other specifies torso angles in 45-degree increments. These dials too are placed in white or black holders based on beat alignment.

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► **An Ode to acharya**
Vidhun Kumar, Uma Govind and Sibi Sudharshan at the inaugural performance.
PHOTOS: M. SRINATH

Natarangam's annual festival began with a production themed on Adi Sankara

Steps to a higher realm

Srividya

Natarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha, conducted the 27th annual thematic Bharatanatyam festival from August 14 to 18 at Narada Gana Sabha.

The theme chosen for this year was 'Acharya Bharatham', which reiterated that spiritualism is the bedrock of Indian culture.

The five-day festival highlighted the life and teachings of five acharyas. Day one featured artistes Vidhun Kumar, Uma Govind and Sibi Sudharshan. Their performance was themed on Adi Sankaracharya.

The introduction by Dr. Sudha Seshayyan about acharyas and the Advaita

philosophy of Adi Sankaracharya set the tone for the presentation.

The performance began with Pranava Mantram 'Om', followed by the Gayatri Mantram and a Ganesha vandanam, which was an invocatory nritya piece,



marked by clarity of adavus and hasta mudras.

By way of recreating the disciplined life of the Vedic age, the dancers depicted people living in solidarity and performing rituals. Soon there is disparity and people take to *durmargas* leading to a lot of

chaos. This is when Dakshinamurthy takes the form of Sankara and is born to reinstate dharma. The dancers depicted the incident where the crocodile grabs Sankara's foot and releases it only when his mother grants him permission to become a sanyasi. Vidhun was impressive as Sankara.

Sankara now goes in search of a guru and approaches Govinda Bhagavathpada, who enquires who he is. Sankara recites the Nirvana Shatakam to convey that he is pure consciousness. The guru understands that he is Sankara and takes him as his shishya. Having mastered the Advaita philosophy from his guru, Sankara writes the bhashyam of the Brahma Sutra and other religious texts and spreads the message to the world. Sankara's realisation of true

wisdom comes across when he asks a chandala, who crosses his path, to move aside. He, in turn, asks him if he should move his body or his consciousness. This makes Sankara fall at his feet.

The interesting debate between Sankara and Mandana Misra reflected the spirit of the vedic age. Sibi as Madana Misra played his part well. Ubhaya Bharathi, wife of Mandana Misra, is asked to judge the debate as she is an expert in both Mimamsa and Advaita.

Uma Govind as Ubhaya Bharathi brought out the quiet confidence of the character. Though Sankara wins the debate, Ubhaya Bharathi refuses to accept him as a *sarva gyani* as he has never experienced the sensual pleasures of a *grihastha*. Sankara then does Parakayapravesha, entering the body of king Amaru. The piece that followed, performed by Vidhun and Uma and choreographed with great care, conveyed the sensual joys experienced by the king and the queen. Sankara returns to his original body and states that he has experienced and renounced the sensual pleasures of a *grihastha*. Now, both Madana Misra and his wife become his shishyas.

Then followed a depiction of the shanmatas and Sankara unifying them as manifestations of the formless *Brahman* (connection with the divine). Sankara does the four *mata sthapana* and attains the *sarvasya peetam* status.

The production concluded with Sankara's popular composition 'Bhaja Govindam,' where he stresses the need for people to give up worldly pursuits to understand the need to connect with the *Brahman*, making it relevant to the present generation.

The music scored by Rajkumar Bharathi deftly highlighted the mood of each scene. The orchestra led by Jayasree Ramanathan on the nattuvangam, Venkateswaran Kuppuswamy (vocal support), Venkatesan Vedakrishnam (mridangam), Soundarajan (veena) and Hariprasad (flute) helped enhance the divine experience.

The choreography was done under the guidance of the dancers' gurus – Priyadarsini Govind and V. Mythili.

The production was a good start to rasikas' journey into the world of acharyas.

CALENDAR



Celebrating Odissi

The 14th edition of Naman 2025 — an annual Odissi dance festival, curated and presented by Nrityantar Academy of Performing Arts, Bengaluru — will be held on August 24 at ADA Rangamandira, J.C. Road, at 5 p.m.

Since its inception (2010), Naman aims to pay a tribute to legendary gurus and practitioners of Odissi dance. 'Naman,' means 'salutation,' and the event brings together varied styles and schools of Odissi, offering a platform for traditional and contemporary interpretations of the dance, says Madhulita Mohapatra, dancer-choreographer and founder of Nrityantar. She is also a recipient of Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar from Sangeet Natak Akademi, IIV She Inspires Award 2024 by the U.K. Parliament and the Kempegowda Award.

This year's festival line-up is as follows:

Draupadi's Mahabharata , choreographed by Madhulita, will be presented by Nrityantar. "This is an emotionally-layered work that re-imagines Mahabharata through the eyes of Draupadi, exploring themes of justice, duty, dignity, resilience and the moral dilemmas that continue to speak to us today," explains the dancer. Music is by Rupak Kumar Parida, rhythm by Guru Dhaneswar Swain and poetic contributions by Ashtavadhani Balachandra Bhat (Sanskrit) and Kedar Mishra (Odia).

This will be followed by a solo Odissi recital by Guru Gajendra Panda — a leading exponent of Guru Debaprasad Das style of Odissi and the festival concludes with a performance by the Soor Mandir Dance Ensemble from Cuttack, directed by Guru Jyotsna Sahoo.

The festival is open to all.



Dance festival

Kalakshetra Foundation presents the second season of 'Kala Mela', a two-day festival of Indian classical dance. It will be held on August 23 and 24, 6 p.m., at Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium. Day one will feature 'Guru Samarpanam - A strand of radiant gems strung by timeless masters in the sacred art of Bharatanatyam', to be performed by the students of Kalakshetra Foundation, and day two will have Veena Murthy Vijay and disciples from Shri Rajarajeswari Kalaniketan present 'Bhama Kalapam', a Kuchipudi performance. Tickets available at mdnd.in

In the glow of ragas

Candlelight Concerts presents its first Carnatic-themed show by flautist J.A. Jayant

Lavanya Narayanan

Last November, Candlelight Concerts made its debut during Margazhi festival in Chennai, a city known for its inclusion in UNESCO's Creative Cities Network for Music.

Candlelight Concerts, helmed by Live Your City, has till date hosted over 20 shows in Chennai. And is now gearing up for another stellar performance. Titled 'Candlelight Shruthilaya – Tribute to Carnatic Legends', it features flautist J.A. Jayant and will be held at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan on August 22 (5.30 p.m.).

Candlelight Concerts, as the name suggests, is known for its candlelit ambience. It has been presenting shows themed on different genres, singers and composers. "We provide a quiet, focused and contemplative space lit by LED candles," says Pranjal Begwani, team lead (India), Candlelight.

Talking about the show,

Jayanth says, "One's music is often influenced by the ambience. Hence, it's important to curate Carnatic concerts in beautiful spaces, which offer a visual appeal. It impacts the way the audience absorbs, understands and reacts to the music – from an upbeat Kamboji and a powerful Thodi to a lilting Behag. This concert will be an

experience unlike any other."

According to Pranjal, "The city's musical identity is respected worldwide, and in this space, our aim is not to compete with traditional forms, but to complement them with a new and distinctive format. Collaborating with Jayanth for Candlelight's first-ever Carnatic-themed concert worldwide reflects our commitment to showcase local artistes, whose music bridges the classical and the contemporary."

The team has worked with Jayant twice – a concert at the Museum Theatre, Egmore, alongside his fusion band, Hues and Harmony (Indian Bamboo Flute Project) earlier this year, and another set of shows in May.

The upcoming concert, says Jayant, will be a proper Carnatic kutcheri with well-known and rare kritis. "There will also be an unexpected twist, which I hope the audience enjoys."

The concert comprises two sets. The Carnatic segment will have Jayant performing with N.C. Bharadwaj on the mridangam. The second segment 'A tribute to A.R. Rahman' (8 p.m.) features V.G. Vigneshwar on the keyboard and Praveen Narayan on the tabla.

Tickets on LiveYourCity.



► **In a new setting**
J.A. Jayant.
PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



► **wide repertoire**
Archana and Samanvi accompanied by Aduthurai Guruprasad (mridangam), S. Harikishore (kanjira) and Haritha Narayanan (violin). PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Krishna as the muse

Archana and Samanvi's concert featured kritis by different composers

Aishwarya Raghunathan

The Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha's Sri Jayanthi festival featured Archana and Samanvi. The vocalists demonstrated how Krishna has inspired a wide body of compositions. Their choice of repertoire, spanning Muthuswami Dikshitar's kritis, Purandaradasa's Devarnamas, Oothukadu Venkata Kavi's creations, Papanasam Sivan's Tamil pieces, and the devotional Pasurams of Andal and Ashtapadis of Jayadeva, offered variety. They were supported by Haritha Narayanan (violin), Aduthurai Guruprasad (mridangam) and S. Harikishore (kanjira).

The concert opened with Oothukadu's 'Ranganatham anisham', a kriti known for featuring the names of azhwars and other devotees of Vishnu in one of its charanams, set in Gambhira Nattai. True to the composer's

characteristic verve, the piece unfolded on a vibrant note, setting the tone for the evening.

From there, the duo moved to Purandaradasa's 'Gopiya bhagyavidu' in Kapi Narayani, tuned by their guru Arvinda Hebbar. The composition dwells on the *bhagyam* of Yashoda to bathe little Krishna, sing him lullabies and shield him from the evil eye.

The next segment featured Dhanyasi, with Samanvi shaping a thoughtful alapana that was ably supported by Haritha. This was followed by Sivan's 'Balakrishnan padamalar'.

There were occasional moments of vocal misalignment when the singers didn't seem to be in sync. The percussionists lent a lively support. The niraval at 'neela mugil pol azhagan' was engaging and flowed into a round of kalpanaswaras.

The concert then moved to Dikshitar's 'Krishnananda mukunda murare' in Gowli Pantu,

distinguished by its use of shuddha madhyamam.

Archana's alapana in Karaharapriya carried weight, though she briefly paused midway before resuming. The violin's responses were pleasing, setting the stage for Oothukadu's 'Rasa keli vilasa', the main piece of the day. While the charanam saw both vocalists momentarily falter over the 'sahrda hrddi' passage and correct themselves, the kalpanaswaras in two kalamas were neatly executed. The segment concluded with a lively tani, where the mridangam and kanjira engaged in spirited dialogue.

To conclude, the vocalists chose two lighter yet substantial compositions – Andal's 'Karpooram naarumo' from Nachiyar Tirumozhi was sung in Khamas with charm, followed by Jayadeva's 'Nijagada sa' in Sindhubhairavi. Both pieces made for a fine finale to a concert dedicated to Krishna.

Shailaja Khanna

Small intimate music soirees or baithaks are once again becoming the go-to space for lovers of classical music, particularly in the national capital. These were held in drawing rooms, or private gardens, followed by a leisurely meal and interaction with the performer. The audience was an elite gathering of friends of the patron.

Author and connoisseur Shiela Dhar in her anecdotal books on music has written about these gatherings in Delhi. Families such as Shrirams, Mathurs and Bahadurs used to regularly hold baithaks in their homes. The evenings were elite and exclusive. In the 1960s, thumri exponent Naina Devi used to host baithaks at her residence that were both popular and well-attended. In recent times, Vinod Kapur and Anita Singh amongst others have been organising such gatherings. Popularly known as VSK Baithaks, host Vinod Kapur has featured many renowned artistes at his baithaks.

In the last one year, young music lovers-turned-curators have joined the bandwagon, shattering all norms of a traditional baithak. Ticketed baithaks, open to all, targeted specifically to a young generation, who may not have had any exposure to classical music, are rapidly gaining popularity. The tickets priced Rs 1,500 and above don't seem to deter young listeners curious to experience this intimate and informal concert setting. No longer called just baithaks, they go by trendy names in English such as Upstairswithus and Evenings Unplugged.

Artists too view this as a welcome space and are even willing to charge less to



Inside new-age baithaks

Hosted by young curators, these informal sessions now offer soulful music with home-cooked meals

encourage such ventures. But the new-age baithaks pose a different kind of a challenge to them. These sessions now attract a mixed audience, including first-time listeners. So performers have to tailor their concerts to appeal to a diverse group.

Upstairswithus in Vasant Kunj has organised more than nine concerts in a span of

six-months. Though the space is small and located on the top-floor of an apartment without a lift, the warmth of the hosts – Sukanya and Tejas – draws in the audience.

“Combining a home-cooked meal with the ticket is a must,” says Sukanya, who explains that for young listeners, “going back home to order a meal could be tedious.” This also

gives listeners an opportunity to meet, eat together and discuss music. Upstairswithus also allow their dogs into the concert space, somewhat controversially marketing this as an additional treat. The U.K.-based sarodist-composer Soumik Datta, who performed here recently, bravely managed with the basic home amplification sound system

available. The success of their venture has encouraged Sukanya to hold training sessions on how to conduct a baithak and also weekend vocal training workshops. Going forward, the couple plans to introduce Upstairswithus merchandise. The aim seems to be to keep adding new listeners.

Operating out of Dwarka, a suburb in Delhi, Evenings Unplugged is another venture by music lovers, Varun and Soumya. As a child, Soumya was introduced to baithaks in Bhilai (Madhya Pradesh) and regularly attended them at Acharya Bimalendu Mukherji's house. Since she wanted her two-year-old son also to have the same exposure to classical music, Soumya decided to hold baithaks.

Evenings Unplugged also caters to listeners who are not very familiar with the art form. Recently, sitarist Soumitra Thakur played some excellent

House of music Soumik Datta and Zuheb Ahmed at Upstairswithus; and (below) Soumitra Thakur at Evenings Unplugged. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



In the 1960s, thumri exponent Naina Devi used to host baithaks at her residence that were both popular and well-attended. She also inspired many others to organise such gatherings.

music while explaining the nuances to the audience. The professional sound system enhanced the concert experience. Here too, the evening included a simple home-cooked meal and an interactive session between the performer and the listeners.

According to Varun, since there are hardly any classical music concerts happening in Dwarka, “we thought of baithaks to reach out to music lovers in the locality.”

Speaking after the performance, Soumitra said, “Young artistes like me have to create opportunities for themselves. They have to devise ways to bring new listeners into the fold. Soumitra, who has founded ‘Siddhirasa’, himself hosts baithaks in Greater Kailash colony. “This tradition will help preserve the soul of classical music. I feel music finds its truest expression in such an ambience,” he added.

Other baithaks that have sprung up in Delhi include Naadyatra in Gurgaon; and the common thread amongst these appears to be the emphasis on ticketing the concerts. It also seems that music lovers are growing weary of listening to the same set of artistes in impersonal auditorium spaces. They feel baithaks' simpler setups offer a more meaningful experience.



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The tool is intended primarily for children and beginners in dance to develop dance literacy. Jayachandran explains, “Dance literacy involves training the body and mind to overcome unfamiliarity with movement. It is about developing awareness, control and comfort in one's body through dance – not about performance, but about internalising movement as a language.”

In classical dance training, the body is often conditioned to repeat only certain combinations of movements. However, with the ATAM tool, all possible combinations within six basic postures are explored, fostering openness and flexibility in posture practice. “For children, no movement sequence is considered inherently right or wrong. If a particular combination already exists in a known dance form, we simply acknowledge it and move on. For those that do not have an existing name, we try to name them or inform them if a name already exists. As practice progresses, a two-beat movement may evolve into a three-beat one, and the number of possible combinations grows exponentially,” he says.

An interesting aspect of this approach is the reversal of traditional classroom dynamics. In conventional dance teaching, the teacher is highly active in planning, while the student's role is more passive. Here, while using the tool it is the opposite – the



Jayachandran Surendran, IIIT professor, who has developed ATAM. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

teacher remains mostly passive, keenly observing, intervening only when necessary. The children stay deeply engaged, often in pin-drop silence, with their attention fully focused on the tool.

In the traditional knowledge system of the Natyasastra, the way we read the śāstra often influences how we understand it. For instance, when the Natyasastra speaks of five shanaka postures, we tend to view them as distinct, fixed reference points. However, as a researcher, Jayachandran observes that there are many possible subtle in-between postures that the śāstra-kāras may not

have explicitly mentioned, but left the practitioner to posit. He believes it is the responsibility of practitioners to explore and identify these transitional forms. Movement from one posture to another in dance involves not just fixed positions, but reference points, functional shifts, and continuous curves. Jayachandran's approach includes identifying “pivotal index values” to map these transitions – such as naming a movement like Valithoruham as part of a larger curve. Instead of memorising each movement individually, he proposes understanding the frequency range and pattern of the movement like a graph or a curve, making the process more intuitive and less reliant on rote memory.

While posturing, transitions, and rhythm are common across all dance forms, the next question arises – can abhinaya also be brought into this framework? Says Jayachandran, “Training typically involves the anga, upanga, and pratyanga, with focus on both freeze points and transition points. Multiple modules can be developed to train different aspects – pure movement, abhinaya, and musicality. In the current system, pure movement training has been divided into upper and lower body segments. The research primarily concentrates on the lower half, as it forms the foundation of movement vocabulary. Even this area alone is highly complex, with a huge number of probable combinations. The upper body, especially in the context of nritya, remains an area to be explored. Extending this further to mukhaja abhinaya and other expressive elements opens up the possibility for creating a completely new movement vocabulary. What is currently being developed can be seen as a prototype that lays the groundwork for future expansion.”

Physically, the tool takes the form of a dice with posture stickers and a board with rotating dials placed at pivot points, resembling a Pallanguzhi board. This tangible setup is designed especially for children, offering a screen-free alternative to digital apps and helping to reduce screen time. A web-based app version is currently under development for further expansion. Ultimately, ATAM aims to provide a non-hierarchical, exploratory learning environment, especially for children, where movement is play, inquiry, and self-expression. A live demonstration, Jayachandran notes, is the best way to understand its potential.



Voice and visibility Shilpa Mudbi with Adithya Kothakota; and (below) with Ramakka at Centre for Community Dialogue and Change (CCDC). PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A duet with a purpose

The concert, *Ramakka and I*, unveils the trials and triumphs of Karnataka's Jogati community

Shailaja Tripathi

Shilpa Mudbi Kothakota (researcher, singer, performer, theatre artiste, and documentary filmmaker) and Jogati Ramakka (transgender woman and folk artiste from North Karnataka) share a great camaraderie. The two have now devised a concert, Ramakka and I, featuring themselves. It was recently presented by the Centre for Community Dialogue and Change (CCDC) at the Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru.

Earlier, they also performed at Suchitra Cinema and Cultural Academy. The concert, held in an intimate setting, turned out to be a dialogue between the artistes and the audience.

“We are not always looking to take it to the proscenium. We are more interested in talking about the song and why it is being sung. It means so much to a community,” says Shilpa, who has also learned to play instruments such as choudki and tuntuni. She even organises choudki workshops to encourage people to learn to play it.

Shilpa has always been invested in the lives of Jogatis – transgender individuals and folk artistes dedicated to the worship of goddess Yellamma – a marginalised community. In 2012, Shilpa set out to document the forgotten or vanishing folk art forms of Karnataka, and in 2017,

along with her husband Adithya Kothakota, established the Urban Folk Project. The aim of the project is to highlight Karnataka's lesser-known art forms in urban settings and to represent varied communities.

Growing up in Bengaluru, Shilpa felt a disconnect between urban and rural life. She was drawn to folklore while exploring



her own Dalit-Bahujan roots. While working on a play about the Sri Lankan civil war in Puducherry, she engaged with the folk forms of Yellamma, practised in North Karnataka. In this ritualistic performance, Jogatis and Devadasis sing and dance, depicting Renuka Yellamma's life story and narrating how Renuka, mother of Parasurama, transformed into the revered Yellamma.

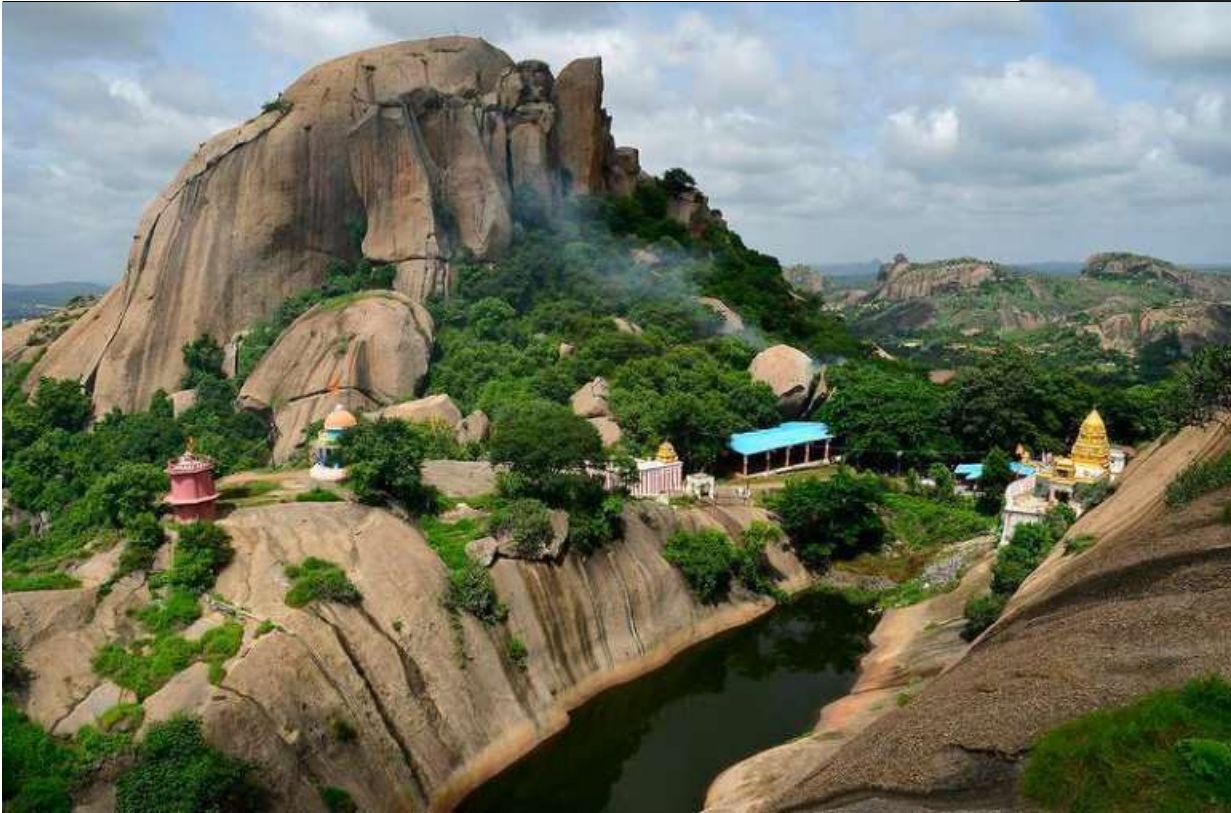
Talking about the idea behind launching the Urban Folk Project,

Shilpa says, “People who earn the most from folk performances are not those who have been practising them for generations. There is not much understanding about what is folk and who it belongs to.”

Shilpa, along with her family, left the hustle and bustle of Bengaluru to make Kalaburagi their home and built a space for research, performances, residencies, and workshops that delve into the world of Jogatis. Before that, for two years, Shilpa and Adithya conducted Yellamma storytelling sessions at the Cubbon Park Bandstand in Bengaluru. During the pandemic, through the Urban Folk Project, they live-streamed their sessions from Kalaburagi.

Shilpa met Ramakka in 2019, when the duo recorded 'Aadi baa magane Raama, Noduve kannina tumbaa' (Come, my son Rama, let me look at you to my heart's content). Little did they know that the song would go viral and was later included in the Kannada film *Oorina Gramastharalli Vinanthi*. The song was sung by Jogatis – Ramakka, Manjamma, Anjalamma, and Gowramma.

Having spent years with jogatis, Shilpa is aware of their struggles too – they are feared yet bullied, have interpersonal rivalries and are vulnerable to diseases. “I have interacted with them so much that I have come to understand what sexuality and gender mean,” says Shilpa.



Anuj Kumar
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Fifty years after it first swept the nation, *Sholay* remains a sensory experience like no other. Like the inebriated Veeru (Dharmendra) shouting from atop a water tank in the weary lanes of Ramgarh, its story brims with drama, emotion, and action – this Trioka has made mainstream Indian cinema a global force. The 4K restoration amplifies every detail: adding thump to Gabbar Singh’s (Amjad Khan) and Thakur Baldev Singh’s (Sanjeev Kumar) footsteps, a fresh zing to R.D. Burman’s iconic music, and a brighter glow to Basanti’s (Hema Malini) rustic charm. Yet beyond the spectacle, it is the portrayal of a village grappling with anxieties, anger, and change that remains as potent today as it was half a century ago.

Released on August 15, 1975, in the midst of the Emergency, this subversive tale arrived on screens at a time when the moral ambiguity of its heroes perhaps struck a chord with audiences weary of the one-dimensional righteousness of its stars.

Revenge drama
At its heart is Thakur, a retired police officer shaped by a bygone era, failed by the very system he once served. After suffering a personal loss at the hands of Gabbar, he chooses not to approach his former colleagues in khaki. Instead, reposes his faith in

Revisiting Ramgarh

As *Sholay* completes 50 years, we look at how the classic made history in every way and continues to inspire filmmakers

two winsome crooks – Jai (Amitabh Bachchan) and Veeru – to get him justice.

These petty outlaws, themselves outsiders, become the arms of a morally upright man whose limbs were dismembered by a cold-blooded bandit. It is a gripping reimagining of the body politic that may have proved cathartic for an audience struggling to find ways to combat corruption and high-handedness in daily life.

Five decades later, the purpose of the Thakur seem relevant, the camaraderie between Jai and Veeru hasn’t lost its charm, tears for Radha’s (Jaya Bachchan) fate haven’t dried and Gabbar continues to evoke the fear of the unknown.

Of course, writers Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar (famous as Salim-Javed) drew inspiration from *Seven*

Samurai and the American Westerns. They also drew characters from *Gunga Jumna* and *Mera Gaon Mera Desh*. But in creative cultivation, it’s not the seeds that matter – it’s the harvest that endures.

Sholay was not the first film to explore themes of dacoits, revenge and friendship; nor a first where horses galloped parallelly to railway wagons. But the way all of it came together in *Sholay* has kept generations hooked. From Raj Kumar Santoshi, Anurag Kashyap, Vishal Bhardwaj to S.S. Rajamouli, the recipe has inspired the cinematic gaze of filmmakers.

The year 1975 was a watershed year for Hindi cinema. After placing the character of a ‘mother’ at the centre of the narrative with *Deewar*, Salim-Javed rewrote the



Cult classic (Far left) The film put Karnataka’s Ramnagara, where it was shot, in the spotlight; and stills from the film. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & THE HINDU ARCHIVES



dialogues such as – ‘Kitney aadmi they’ and ‘Saab, maine aapka namak khaya hai’ – in the living rooms and neighbourhood pan shops. The film also turned its side characters – Soorma Bhopali and Sambha – into household names. Interestingly, unlike many films of its era, *Sholay*’s songs may feel somewhat dated today, yet its writing continues to invite fresh interpretations.

Subtle message
Salim-Javed aimed to tell a great story with compelling characters. Yet, woven between the lines of this fast-paced entertainer are subtle reflections on lawlessness and community resilience – themes as relevant to contemporary debates on justice and morality as they were in the 1970s. Its characters speak to you, and the revenge at the heart of the story invites re-examination in its social and political context. Here, every character has a back-story, except for the villain. Was Gabbar a product of backward-class resistance, asking for the upper-caste Thakur’s ‘hands’ as an assertion of his place in the socio-political hierarchy? Was this the reason that the ruthless Gabbar became a much-loved villain? When

rules in *Sholay* by removing the mother-figure from the picture and striking a balance between melody and malevolence, songs and dialogue. *Sholay*’s LPs played even

Thakur invokes the ‘iron-cuts-iron’ principle by setting Jai and Veeru against Gabbar, does it imply the caste equations and social justice politics that would shape the future?

When Imam Saahib asks: “itna sannata kyun hai bhai (why there is so much silence)” after his son is killed by Gabbar’s men, it breaks the stereotype that, for a devout Muslim, religion comes first. Here, the old man sacrifices his son for the welfare of his village. We also mourn for Jai’s unfinished story with the widowed Radha. Was it because the society was not prepared for widow remarriage? However, the film then portrays Basanti as a working woman in a rural setting. Social and political correctness evolve, but heartfelt emotions remain unchanged.

Right after the massacre of Thakur’s family, Helen’s *Mehbooba Mehbooba* number softens the blow. Soon you realise nobody can hold a gun like Amitabh Bachchan – it feels like an extension of himself. When he flips the coin to decide who will stay back to fight the dacoits, it’s evident that he is the film’s head, while Dharmendra is its heart. Amidst all the dialogue-baazi, Jai’s quiet arrival riding a buffalo and Radha’s subtle half-smile create a silence that lingers long after.

Speaking about Salim-Javed’s contribution, Ramesh Sippy once told me the narrative was so strong on paper that the film would have worked, irrespective of who directed it.

It was one of the first films to be shot entirely outdoors and Ramesh worked with a cameraman who had never worked outdoors before. Dwaraka Diwecha was a master of indoor shooting. Such was his mastery over cinematography that when the director would say the word, ‘cut’, and look at him for confirmation, he would move the camera without looking into it. However, for *Sholay*, Dwaraka researched thoroughly to bring Ramesh’s vision alive.

Can a *Sholay* be made again? Maybe not. In polarised times, the temple-scene where Dharmendra gives voice to the idol of Shiva, would cause an uproar. People might ask the surnames of Jai and Veeru and identity politics would come into play in the battle between the Thakur and Gabbar. The ‘greatest story ever told’ would have been reduced to a woke essay. Moreover, no corporate entity today would back a film whose budget more than doubled during the shoot.

Narendra Kusnur

India’s jazz community will know composer and keyboardist Dinshah Sanjana as the man behind the fusion group Divya, which hit the headlines in 1987 with the album *Madras Café*, and gained acclaim for the follow-up *Kumbhamela* a decade later. Having moved from Mumbai to Los Angeles in 1999, he continued with music production and instrument retail, but his dream was to create tunes close to his heart.

Dinshah has thus teamed up with drummer Matthew Baker to release the jazz-fusion album *369 Hertz*, under the name Freakquency. Containing 12 tracks, it has been put out by Moment Music, which he and Baker launched 12 years ago. The line-up is a mix of musician-friends he made during his stay in the U.S. and artistes he met online. The Indian musicians include sarod player Praashekh Borkar and Roshan Mandayam, who appear on the tune ‘Nayan’, and Hari Kumar Sivan, who plays on the title track.

“These two pieces are a nod to my past, but on the others, I have used music from different parts of the world. I wanted to use my friend Shekhar Borkar on the sarod, but his son Praashekh, now based in Perth, Australia, is more used to the digital methodology,” says Dinshah. ‘Nayan’ has elements of raag Sindhu Bhairavi on the sarod and violin, but his son Praashekh, now based in Perth, Australia, is more used to the digital methodology,” says Dinshah. ‘Nayan’ has elements of raag Sindhu Bhairavi on the sarod and violin, but his son Praashekh, now based in Perth, Australia, is more used to the digital methodology,” says Dinshah. ‘Nayan’ has elements of raag Sindhu Bhairavi on the sarod and violin, but his son Praashekh, now based in Perth, Australia, is more used to the digital methodology,” says Dinshah.

Since we call ourselves Freakquency, the title *369 Hertz* went perfectly with our sound.”



United by sound

The new jazz-fusion album 369 Hertz and its Indian connection

Dinshah had started writing the songs in 2019, but things got stalled because of the pandemic. He faced some health issues, and after recovering, got down to the album. He says, “I wrote all the compositions and Matthew, the rhythm arrangements. We have known each other for over 20 years. During lockdown, we interacted virtually with many musicians. There was this fantastic Russian bassist Anton Davidyants, who readily agreed to play on a few tracks. Some musicians were from Los Angeles, whereas others from Munich or Paris.”

First virtual collaboration
It was the first time Dinshah worked virtually. He explains, “I

am used to musicians sitting with me in the studio, discussing and improvising, rather than going back and forth through files. But one has to change with the times.”

Dinshah has been involved with music since the early 1980s. Besides Divya, he was associated with bands Ji Whiz, Holy Smoke and Ultimatum. His preference was always jazz and fusion. Divya was formed by Dinshah and Sandhya Sanjana with a view to fuse jazz with Indian elements. They recorded their first album *Madras Café* in 1986 and released it the following year. It was recognised for its balance of sounds and technical wizardry. Besides Dinshah, it featured Roy Venkatraman on the guitar, C.P.



Sriram on the violin, Shernol Mathias on the bass, Fazal Qureshi on the tabla, Bondo Fernandes on the percussion and

Jazz story Dinshah Sanjana and drummer Matthew Baker. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Sridhar Parthasarathy on the mridangam, with vocal inputs by Sandhya Sanjana and Shankar Mahadevan. The album is now available on the streaming platforms through Sony Music.

With the organisation Jazz India promoting local artistes, Divya got a chance to perform at the John Coltrane Jazz Festival in Los Angeles, after the great saxophonist’s wife Alice Coltrane saw them play in Poland. Besides the US and Europe, they toured Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and the erstwhile Soviet Union. “Jazz India’s Niranjan Jhaveri helped us get a lot of shows abroad. The late 1980s and early 1990s were good for the kind of music we made, but by the end of the decade, Bollywood and some Indipop were the only things that were being pushed,” he points out.

Divya’s line-up kept varying, and newer entrants included mridangam player Viveck Rajagopalan and drummer Sanjay Maroo. In 1998, the line-up had Dinshah, Sandhya Sanjana, guitarist Paresh Kamath, bassist Naresh Kamath, American saxophonist Carl Clements, kanjira player Selva Ganesh and drummer Kurt Peters. Dinshah and Sandhya also recorded a soundtrack album for the UK’s Channel 4 series *Ramayana: A Journey*.

Dinshah’s latest project Freakquency has obviously given him a new high. He’s also happy with the quality of independent music that’s coming out in India these days. He says, “It may be a good time to collaborate with some younger musicians here. I’m also thinking of releasing *Kumbhamela* digitally.”

CALENDAR

Endowment concert

The Music Academy has organised a special vocal concert by Delhi P. Sunderarajan today, 6 p.m., at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. He will render Sanskrit compositions on the occasion. M.R. Gopinath (violin) and Shertallay R. Ananthakrishnan (mridangam) are the accompanists. Programme is organised under the endowment, instituted by Engikollai Dr. C Krishnan in memory of Sri Chidambara Ganapatigal and Smt. Meenakshi Chidambaram.

Vocal solo

Musiri Chamber presents the vocal concert by Aishwaya Shankar on August 23, 6.01 p.m. She will be accompanied by Shriramkumar (violin), Arun Prakash (mridangam) and Krishna (ghatam). Venue: 48/2, (old no: 28/2), Musiri Subramaniam Road, Mylapore.

Madras Day special

Madhuradhwani celebrates Madras Day with a special line-up to take place at Arkay Convention Center, Mylapore. Details: **Today**, 5.30 p.m.: T. Krishnakumar’s ‘Aachiyin 1000 Achariyangaal: The life and times of Manorama’; 6.45 p.m.: Venkatesh Ramakrishnan’s ‘Madras Masala: The Intrigues, Eccentrics, and Scandals That Shaped a City’. **August 23**, 6.15 p.m.: Ekaika Raga Kritis of Tyagaraja (Series 04) will feature Sri Ram Parasuram. **August 24**, 5.30 p.m.: Sridhar Venkatraman’s ‘Celluloid Republic: 50 Years of Tamil Cinema and the Making of a People’s Identity’; 6.45 p.m.: Jayaraman Raghunathan’s ‘Glimpses of Old Madras Through the Journals’. **August 25**, 5.30 p.m.: Justice Prabha Sridevan’s ‘Favourite Food Memories in Madras’ and 6.45 p.m.: Chithra Madhavan’s lecture ‘Interesting temple inscriptions of Chennai’.

Book release

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore, will be releasing *Ramayana*, the Tamil version of author Kamala Subramaniam’s book *Ramayana*, on August 24, 6 p.m., at Bhavan’s main auditorium. Originally written in English, and published in 1981 by Bhavan, it is translated into Tamil by Mythili Swaminathan. N. Ravi, chairman, Bhavan’s Chennai Kendra, will release the book, the first copy of which will be received by Dr. Sudha Seshayyan, former vice-chancellor, MGR Medical College.