

# friday Review

THE HINDU

## Celebrating the Margam

Nithyakalyani reiterates the timeless appeal of the Bharatanatyam repertoire **p2**

## Songs for the sojourn

Mahesh Kale's 'Abhangwari' recreates the journey to Pandharpur **p3**



## MEET THE CREATOR OF THE CATEMARIO METHOD

Italian classical guitarist Edoardo's unique module is aimed at learners **p4**



**Charumathi Supraka**

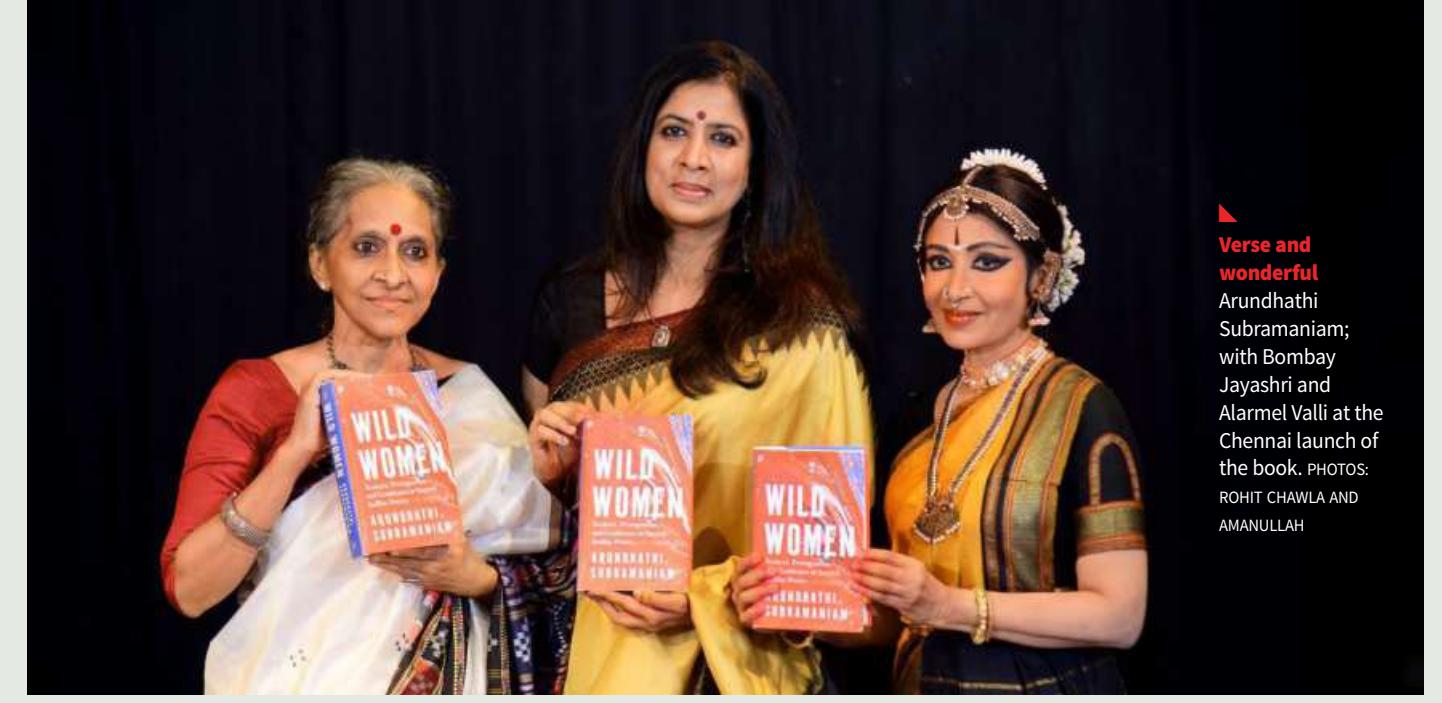
Poetry can be a refuge, but it could also pull the rug from under your feet – sending you flying or leaving you sprawled on the floor with your shattered assumptions. *Wild Women: Seekers, Protagonists and Goddesses in Sacred Indian Poetry*, the anthology of sacred Indian poetry edited by Arundhathi Subramaniam, deftly does both by the sheer power and range of voices it packs. The collection's overarching feminine voice overthrows all previously held ideas on what constitutes sacred poetry, uncovers a realm of experience never collated in one place before, gently, offers clues on redefining pathways to refuge.

At the Bengaluru book launch of *Wild Women*, she wanted to showcase the work of women of "different temperaments, backgrounds, orientations and women who had made very different life choices". Thus, in this book, "you will find the voices of Buddhist nuns alongside that of vedantins, bhaktas, sufis, tantrikas and more. You will find poets – some cerebral, some devotional, some meditative and others more ecstatic."

Whether they wore ochre, blue jeans or just their own skin; whether they walked

I have not bowed,  
I never will  
The one who listens  
Is resplendent, within me  
That is worship, that's  
what I do  
The sword of meditation  
slung by my side  
I mount the horse of twin  
breaths  
The veena of the oriole's  
song fills the air  
The conches resound all  
around  
Cymbals ring, river of  
practice springs forth  
That is how I worship Shiva

Rupa Bhawani (Kashmiri poet,  
17th Century CE, translated  
by Neerja Mattoo)



**Verse and wonderful**  
Arundhathi Subramaniam; with Bombay Jayashri and Alarmel Valli at the Chennai launch of the book. PHOTOS: ROHIT CHAWLA AND AMANULLAH

# Paradise gained

Arundhathi Subramaniam's search for the many unheard voices of sacred Indian poetry culminates in the book *Wild Women*

alone, with a religious order or as householders with their partners as spiritual companions – she "wanted to honour the choices of each of these spiritual seekers."

In an e-mail interview, Arundhathi shares that the seed for this book was sown when she was working on an earlier volume of Bhakti poetry, *Eating God*. It bothered her that the celebrated women saints she read about "seemed to be pious devotees, serene songsters and docile followers... never presented as fierce spiritual warriors, wise foremothers, glorious ancestors."

The specific idea for this anthology, however, was born when she curated a Music and Sacred Poetry festival, entitled *Wild Women*, at Mumbai's National Centre for the Performing Arts in 2019. As the festival took shape, she discovered a "vast number of largely undocumented, unknown women – wild, wise and wonderful... who have been ignored or utterly erased

by religious and rationalist narratives. The intensity, passion and irreverence of their work took my breath away!" she says. Wanting to know more about this "vast mystic sisterhood," she set about creating a work that would "acknowledge their uniqueness and celebrate them in polyphony."

**The challenges**  
The challenges were plentiful however. "I had no grant, no fellowship. It was a passion project – perhaps a lunatic project in some ways, sustained largely by my own eccentric curiosity. Other than the rigours of research, it also meant commissioning translations, which entailed endless email exchanges with translators. The content of this correspondence ranged from discussing broad approaches to translation to sometimes fretting over a single word," says Arundhathi. The "biggest challenge was the magnitude," with the compact list swelling to 56 poets! Though she



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enjoyed "the immersion and discovery, the unrelenting, interminable" nature of the project left her frustrated. "I considered abandoning it a few times... but the poems of some of these extraordinary women – Bhadda Kapilani, Lakshminkara, Jiradei, Janabai, Shenkottai Avudai Akkal, Habba Khatun, Tarigonda Venkamamba, among others, drew me again and again. And muttering under my breath, I would resume the journey!" she says.

For her, the greatest gift of this journey has been the

women themselves – "fierce, courageous, sometimes outrageous – not demure or domesticated but with spine, nerve and astonishing chutzpah." The project became "a way of re-drawing a family tree, reclaiming a lost genealogy, an erased history of female mentorship."

Arundhathi exults in the gifts showered by poets like Punnika, the slave girl and Buddhist nun, who confronted a ritualistic Brahmin with questions on karma 2,500 years ago, or in the voice of 17th century Kashmiri mystic, Rupa Bhawani, who declared she would never bow to the divine because she was aware of the sacred within her. "In a fragmented world, it helps to be reminded of those who refuse to separate flesh and spirit," says Arundhathi, "women, who acknowledge the wisdom of their bodies and puncture orthodox ideas around saliva and menstruation."

While the first section of *Wild Women* packs more than a punch in how it conveys the voices of women who owned their skin in all fullness, the second section of the book spotlights women as protagonists and not poets. The third section spotlights the Goddess – "one wild woman who never quite goes away."

This book is a rare treasure because it remedies centuries of omission and erasure. It does not take out a flag march, but instead, sings out loud in celebration. The colours it throws into the air – if we could call the poems that – are of too many shades to be named. And yet, the unquestionable success of this book is in how it drenches us in those hues – leaving us both content and newly restless.

## CULTURE BRIEFS

### Nagaswaram festival

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha inaugurates its Nagaswaram and Tamil music festival on July 22, 6 p.m. V. Ramaswamy, managing director, Bhagya Construction presides and confers the title 'Vani Vadhy Kala Nipuna' upon senior nagaswaram vidwan Seshapatti Sivalingam and 'Vani Laya Kala Nipuna' on senior tavil vidwan Thirunageswaram T.R. Subramanian. A series of nagaswaram concerts by both established and young artistes will be presented from July 22 to 24 and music recitals on July 25 and 26.

The series begins with Tiruvannamalai P. Balaganesan's nagaswaram recital on July 22, 6.45 p.m. He will be supported by B. Bageswari, B. Harini and B. Kanimozhhi.

Schedule: July 23, 6.30 p.m.: Mylai M. Karthikeyan and Koleri G. Vinod Kumar. July 24, 6.30 p.m.: T.K.R. Ayyappan and T.K.R. Meenakshi Sundaram.

The Tamil music festival will feature the following concerts: July 25, 5 p.m.: C.R. Vaideyanathan and 6.45 p.m.: V. Sankaranarayanan. July 26, 5 p.m.: Salemi Gayathri Venkatesan and 6.45 p.m.: Chinmayi Sisters. Venue: Vani Mahal, T. Nagar.



### Music, dance and theatre

Dancer Divya Kasturi's Srinidi, a cultural trust, conducts its annual festival on July 21 and 22 at P.S. High School, Mylapore. Organised in association with Brahma Gana Sabha, it will begin with the presentation of the Srinidi Lifetime Achievement award to musician Janaky Ramanujam, in the presence of art patron Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti, and senior dancer Parvati Ravi Ghantasa. Jaya Mahadevan, former Head of Programmes, AIR, Chennai, will felicitate. This will be followed by Bengal T. Guhan's nagaswaram performance (4.15 p.m.) and Jayanthi Subramanian's Kala Darsana will present 'Kapali - Arupathuvaar' (5.30 p.m.). Day two will feature Bosskey's 'Humorology - Motivation through humour' (6.30 p.m.) and 'Sixer' - a collection of six short plays by Theatre Marina (7 p.m.). The festival is open to all.



### An ode to the guru

Senior artiste Sailaja's dance academy, Sailsa Sudha, will present 'Natya Rasaprabandha' in memory of the legendary guru K.J. Saras, on July 20, 5.45 p.m. Titled 'Guru Samarpam', the evening will feature the Bharatanatyam performance by Sailaja and her students. Venue: Rasika Ranjani Sabha.



### Dance tribute

Bharath Kalachar in association with Abbas NTFans and Sivaji Ravi present the premiere show of Radhika Shurajit's 'Mannava Vandhanadi', a natya tribute to legendary actor Sivaji Ganesan on his 23rd memorial day on July 21 at 6.30 p.m. at Sri YGP Auditorium, T. Nagar. The non-ticketed event, curated and choreographed by Radhika, will present some of the popular songs of the actor through Bharatanatyam.



### Back after 14 years

Natakhapriya, S Ve Shekher's well-known drama troupe, will present *Mahabharathathil Manganaihtha*, a social, historical and sci-fi play, on July 20 and 21 (7 p.m.) at MGR Janaki College auditorium. The play has been revived and being staged after 14 years. It was first performed on March 13, 1980 at Mylapore Fine Arts Club. The play travels back in time to the period of the Mahabharatha, Shahjahan and Kattabomman when a scientist's son consumes time capsule pills. After living in the past, the boy consumes another pill and the play then travels forward to 5054.



Graceful Shirisha Shashank. PHOTO: M. SRINATH

## A seamless blend of bhavas

Shirisha performed at the Music Academy's mid-year dance festival



## The timeless appeal of the Margam

Nithyakalyani Vaidyanathan's performance showed how the traditional repertoire balances the dance form's various elements

### V.V. Ramani

**I**t is not just the past six months of rehearsals, but many years of rigorous training I received from my guru in my early years, which has given me the strength and stamina to present the margam today" said Nithyakalyani Vaidyanathan at the start of her Poorna Margam performance for Natyaramgam at Narada Gana Sabha mini hall.

At a time when sustaining audience's attention is a daunting task, Nithyakalyani held their interest for two-and-a-half hours.

Given her experience, it was no surprise to see the core elements of Bharatanatyam – adavus, attami and teermanams – presented with finesse. The performance was backed by nuanced abhinaya and fine selection of songs.

The opening pieces, an alarippu in Tirsa Dhruba tala (choreographed by Adyar Lakshman) and the jathiswaram (choreographed by Kanjeevaram Ellappa Pillai) ushered in the rhythmic energy. This was followed by the popular sabdam 'Sarasijakshudu'.

**Layered with abhinaya** K.N. Dhandayuthapani Pillai built a grand edifice of musical aesthetics in his Navaragamalika varnam 'Swamiyai azhathodi vaa', weaving appropriate ragas to suit the mood of the lyrics.

The dancer's experience once again came to the fore in the Behag tillana, which

**Expressive**  
Nithyakalyani's abhinaya conveyed the essence of the lyrics. PHOTO: R. RAGU

vara' in raga Kalyani, and the Patnam Subramania Iyer's javali, 'Appudu manusu' in raga Khamas, the dancer showcased various nayikas with shades of contrasting emotions. But the highlight was the Kshetrayya padam 'Ninmu joochi'. Radha Badri's soulful singing enhanced its appeal. The padam describes the nayika's reaction as the hero returns home after a long time. Nithyakalyani's apt abhinaya let the audience experience the nayika's emotional state.

The dancer's experience once again came to the fore in the Behag tillana, which

was performed at a pace in which one could enjoy the rhythmic beauty of the piece.

The musical ensemble consisted of Jayanthi Subramaniam on the nattuvangam, Radha Badri on the vocal, K.P. Nandini on the violin, Guru Bharadwaj on the mridangam and Sruthi Sagar on the flute.



### Choodamani awards

Sri Krishna Gana Sabha will confer the Nrithya Choodamani title on Bharatanatyam exponent and founder of Natya Vriksha Dance Company Geeta Chandran and the Sangeetha Choodamani on well-known Carnatic vocalists Ranjani and Gayatri at its 68th Margazhi Mela in December 2024. Geeta will be the 56th recipient of the honour while the RaGa sisters, the 61st recipient of the award.

### Dedicated to Dikshitar

Veenavaadhin Sampradaya Sangit Trust will launch the year-long 250th birth anniversary celebration of Muthuswami Dikshitar on Guru Purnima day (July 21) at the Murugan temple in Tiruttani. It is at this temple that Dikshitar composed his very first song 'Sri nathadhi gurugo jayati jayati'. Eminent veena artistes and founders of the Veenvaadhin Trust J.T. Jeyaraaj Krishnan and Jaysri Jeyaraaj Krishnan will render this composition along with their disciples at the temple. An upanyasam on Dikshitar by Dushyant Sridhar, explanatory concerts by senior vocalists such as Neyveli Santhanagopalan and Abhishek Raghuvaran, an akhandam featuring talented artistes, chamber concerts and workshops on Dikshitar kritis will be held in the subsequent months. The trust also plans to conduct interactive sessions at educational institutions and a global-level competition on Dikshitar kritis.



### The guru-sishya bond

The guru-sishya tradition is not just a method of teaching but a bond that transcends time. To celebrate this bond, veteran dancer-teacher Vyjayanthi Kashi conceptualised 'Mulam', a national seminar and dance festival, eight years ago. It features seminars, discussions and dance performances by eminent gurus and students. The panel discussion by gurus and shishyas addresses various issues.

The ninth edition of 'Mulam - the Root' will be presented by Shambavi School of Dance on July 20 and 21 at Kondajji Basappa Auditorium, Bengaluru. The two-day event brings together artistes from different dance forms to share their experiences followed by their performances.

Day one begins with a discussion on 'Navigating through the ever-changing dynamics in the guru-sishya relationship' (4.30 p.m.) featuring Sandhya Udupa, Avijit Das and Avani Gadre as panelists followed by their respective Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and Kathak performances (6 p.m.). Nagesh V. Bettakote, Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Gangubai Hangal Music and Performing Arts University, Mysuru, will be the chief guest. The panel discussion continues on day two with Kuchipudi dancer Geetha Padmakumar, Odissi dancer Sharmila Biswas and Kathak dancer Mysore B. Nagaraj participating as speakers (4.30 p.m.). The session will be followed by their performances at 6 p.m. Vidya Rao, Head of Department of Performing Arts and Cultural Studies, Jain (deemed to be) University is the chief guest. For details call 98869 56596 / 9448146110.

### Music contest

The Indian Fine Arts Society's annual music competition will be conducted on September 1, at Ethiraja Kalaya Nilayam, Alwarpet. Application forms are available at the office. The same can either be downloaded from the society's website or through mail ifas75@rediffmail.com. Last date of submission is August 15. For details contact 78457 55481/87544 37939.

### Vocal solo

Arunachala Ramana Sangeetha Sabha will feature the following concerts at Arkay Convention Centre on July 21. Schedule: 4.30 p.m.: Abhishek Ravishankar (vocal) with Deepika Venkatraman (violin) and Kishore Ramesh (mridangam); 6.30 p.m.: Ashwath Narayanan (vocal) with B. Ananthakrishnan (violin) and Sumesh Narayanan (mridangam). The concert will be held under the auspices of Madhuradhwani.

## Promising note

Nanditha Kannan's rendition was a proof of her training and lineage



Young team regale Nanditha Kannan with Chinmayi on the violin and A. Vamsidara on the mridangam. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

### H.Ramakrishnan

In a technologically driven world, it is heartening to see several promising young artistes learning directly from gurus. Watching Nanditha Kannan's vocal recital for Pushkaram Trust recently, I thought about the care and attention her guru, violin exponent R.K. Shriramkumar, would have bestowed upon her.

Nanditha's exhaustive Kalyani essay, preceding one of Dikshitar's masterpieces 'Bhajare re chittha balambikam', was indicative of her training. Her creative instincts came to the fore in the Madhya sthayi phrases. This composition in Misra Chapu, on the goddess at Vaithiswaran koil, was the highlight of the concert and was in the second Vibhakti. Many names of Devi that Dikshitar has used in this kriti are from Lalitha Sahasranamam. The devotional bhava of the kriti was in full bloom in the niraval and swaraprasrata at 'Devim sakthi bijodhbhava'.



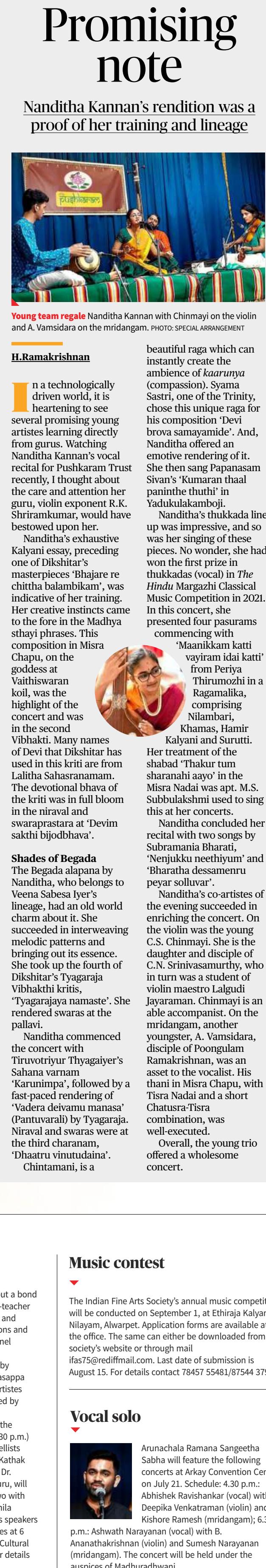
'Maanikkam katti vayiram idai katti' from Periya Thirumozhi in a Ragamalika, comprising Nilambari, Khamas, Hamir Kalyani and Surutti.

Her treatment of the shabd 'Thakur tum sharanahi aayo' in the Misra Nadai was apt. M.S. Subbulakshmi used to sing this at her concerts.

Nanditha concluded her recital with two songs by Subramania Bharati, 'Nenjukku neethiyum' and 'Bharatha dessamemu peyar solluvar'.

Nanditha's co-artistes of the evening succeeded in enriching the concert. On the violin was the young C.S. Chinmayi. She is the daughter and disciple of C.N. Srinivasamurthy, who in turn was a student of violin maestro Lalgudi Jayaraman. Chinmayi is an able accompanist. On the mridangam, another youngster, A. Vamsidara, disciple of Poongulum Ramakrishnan, was an asset to the vocalist. His thani in Misra Chapu, with Tirsa Nadai and a short Chatusra-Tirsa combination, was well-executed.

Overall, the young trio offered a wholesome concert.



### CALENDAR



Carnatic vocalists Ranjani and Gayatri at its 68th Margazhi Mela in December 2024. Geeta will be the 56th recipient of the honour while the RaGa sisters, the 61st recipient of the award.



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