

fridayReview

THE HINDU

Women power in Koodiyattam
Mythological tales are being given contemporary interpretations **p2**

Communicating through colours
Maharashtra's Chitrakathi artistes tell stories through paintings **p3**



THE SINGING STAR OF TAMIL CINEMA

In his birth centenary year, recalling how T.R. Mahalingam carved his own niche **p4**

Historian Katherine Butler Schofield's latest book documents the influence of Mughals on Hindustani music

Notes from the archives

Shailaja Khanna

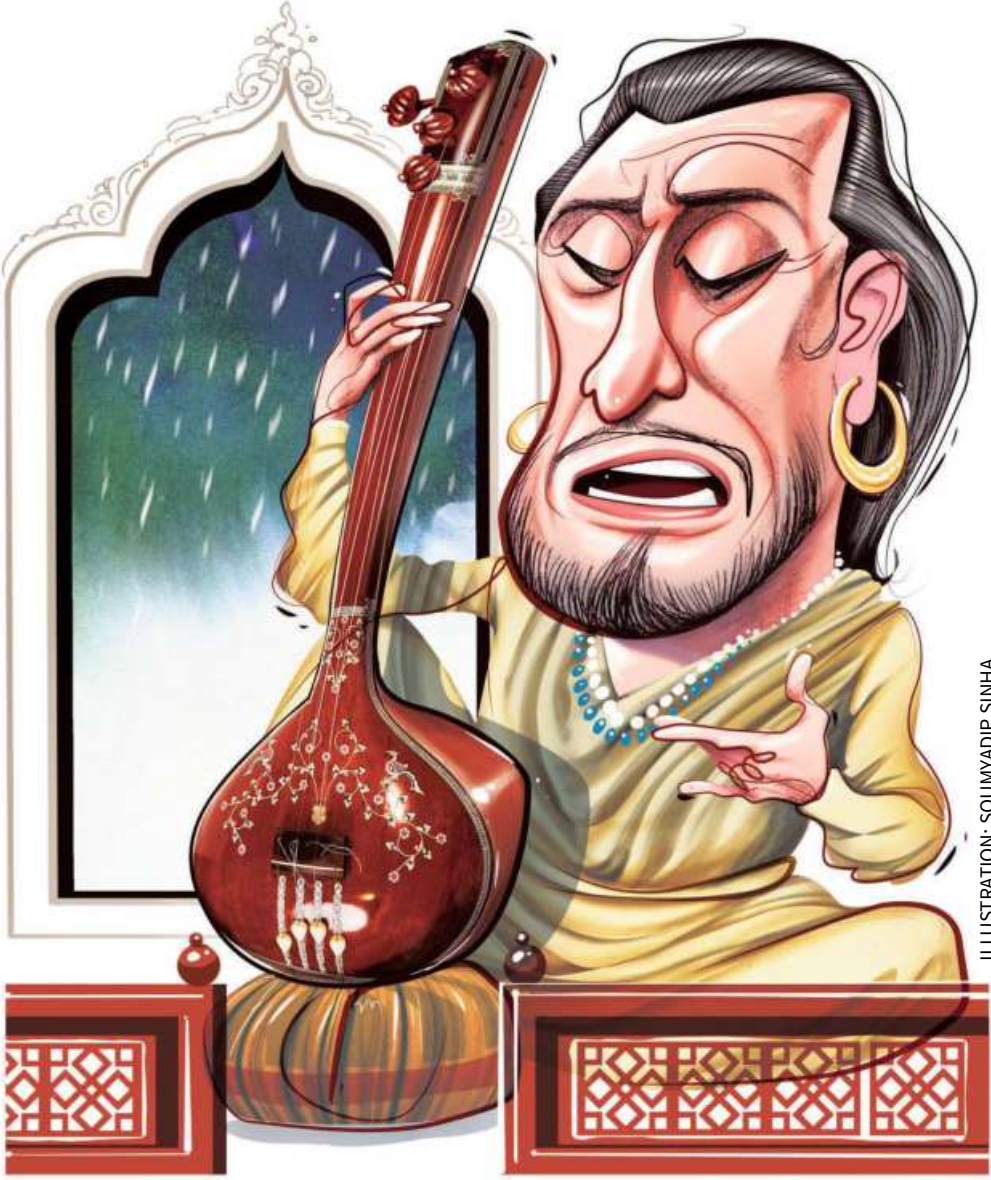
Katherine Butler Schofield's latest book, *Music and Musicians in Late Mughal India*, is an invaluable addition to the few available on Indian music. The book is not only an evidence of her scholarship and intensive research in a subject that many know nothing about, but is also a riveting page turner. The music of that era comes alive in her evocative writing. The book could be as interesting to a lay reader as to a musician or scholar of music.

Katherine's connection with Indian music began while training as a viola player in Australia, where she had friends who had grown up in India. This led to a love for Hindustani music and its fascinating history. Katherine heads the department of music at King's College in

London. This is her third book and through tales about alluring courtesans and legendary ustads, She has traced what happened to music and musicians in the turbulent transition from Mughal to British rule.

Confining herself to the period between 1748 and 1848, "one of the most significant periods of change for Hindustani music", Katherine rues that despite this, the period has never been "properly mapped". The reason is "a pervasive belief" that the musicians of the era were ignorant about the significance of documentation. Hence, the 2000-year-old tradition of writing sangita shastras stopped during this period. However this assumption has been proved wrong by modern researchers, and this book relies on music writings by these so-called ignorant musicians, most of which "languished in the archives unnoticed".

Six essays dealing with different subjects, and belonging to different time zones and



regions have been skilfully linked. In 1752, Inayat Khan Rasikh wrote the first-ever biographical collection (*Tazkira*) on musicians. Rasikh created a record of musicians from Akbar to Aurangzeb's reign – "the golden age of the Mughal empire and of Hindustani music."

The longest entry in this book deals with an anecdote from the life of Khushhal Khan 'Gunasamudra' (1675), the great grandson of Mian Tansen. His father Lal Khan was so talented that when Tansen heard him sing, he sent his son Bilas Khan to train under him, and later made Lal Khan part of his family by getting Bilas Khan's daughter married to him. Interestingly, 400 years ago talent was recognised and musical training was not confined to the family. Lal Khan went on to become the chief musician in Shah Jahan's court, a position given later to

Tansen's historical interventions helped shape Hindustani music in the Mughal period.

his son, Khushhal. Musicians at the time stood and sang. Rasikh writes of the young Khushhal and his brother Bisram standing on the edge of the carpet, beneath the emperor's throne, playing the 'tambur' and lending their voice in accompaniment to their father's. The carpet has been described by the inimitable Ustad Sadarang, who came into the field later, as "only he who does not place a foot outside of the carpet will earn the royal mantle of high distinction."

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Best foot forward

G.V. Pranaudi handled with confidence the elaborate pieces in her recital

V.V. Ramani

An alarippu interspersed with a Tiruppugazh made for a vibrant opening piece in the Bharatanatyam performance by Pranaudi, a student of Urmila Sathyanarayanan, at Mylapore Fine Arts Club recently. The clarity of movements in her adavu patterns and firm footwork were the highlights here. ‘Angayarkanni’, the popular Ragamalika varnam composed by Lalgudi Jayaraman, was chosen as the centrepiece of the performance and a statuesque pose at the outset established the imagery of goddess Meenakshi. The narrative of Meenakshi’s birth, early years of her training in all aspects of warfare and playing with friends were some of the



interesting sancharis depicted. The transition from a warrior princess to someone who experiences love when she meets Shiva was portrayed with sensitivity. The valour of Meenakshi

and her wielding of various weapons was depicted in a powerful manner but the dancer needs to be conscious about not overdoing the actions. The jathi korvais were too long and rendered at a fast

pace. The dancer coped well with the speed. However, the movements lost grace. The rapport among the musicians was evident throughout the recital. The rhythmic flourishes on the

Finesse G.V. Pranaudi. PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

mridangam before the charanam and the melodic embellishments by the violinist and flautist livened up the musical expressions of the vocalist. The ensemble consisted of Chitrambari Krishna Kumar on the vocals, Sai Kripa Prasanna on the nattuvangam, Guru Bharadwaj on the mridangam, Kalaiarasan on the violin and Sruti Sagar on the flute.

Interesting imagery Repeating the first line of the song ‘Bho shambho shiva shambo swayambo’ for depicting each attribute of Shiva’s imagery was an interesting touch to this Swami Dayananda Saraswathi composition in raga Revathi. The philosophy behind the universal concept of ‘Brahman’ was explored with small stories of human interest along with references to the five elements that were incorporated in Annamacharya’s composition ‘Brahmamokate para’. Pranaudi next took up ‘Varanam Ayiram’ from Nachiyar Thirumozhi. Dressed as Andal, she portrayed with finesse the innocence, dreams, passion and excitement of a girl in love. The Kalinga Narthana thillana composed by Oothkadu Venkatahavi in raga Gambira Nattai lacked the vigour the composition warranted. Instead of overtly philosophical compositions, the young dancer could have chosen some lighter pieces to explore ideas and emotions better.

Changing tunes

Using the flute to present fresh perspectives in manodharma

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Palakkad Sreeram, who is a versatile musician and playback singer recently presented a flute recital for Madhuradhwani. The concert was organised in remembrance of maestro T.R. Over the last century, innovations have been made to make the flute more suitable for Carnatic music. From Sarabha Sastri, Tirupamburam Swaminatha Pillai and Sanjeeva Rao to Flute Mali and N. Ramani, each exponent of the instrument made their own unique contribution. Sreeram developed the ‘singing flute’, which enables finer musical nuances to be played on the flute. Sreeram began his concert with Muthuswami Dikshitar’s



Creative Palakkad Sreeram with M. Vijay (violin), R. Ramesh (mridangam) and Sunil Kumar (kanjira). PHOTO: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

‘Sree mahaganapathi’ in Gowlai. Ending the kriti with some brisk kalpanaswaras, the flautist proceeded to Tyagaraja’s magnum opus ‘Endharo mahanubhavulu’ in Sree raga. Listening to both the pieces, one realised Sreeram’s efforts in coming up with a detailed presentation of the ragas. The pleasant *naadam* of the instrument combined with Sreeram’s attention to detail using appropriate prayogas in the ragas lent an edge to the concert. He chose the 71st melakarta

raga Kosalam for alapana. Beginning the alapana with a set of phrases that deceptively resembled Kalyani, the artiste went on to introduce the jeeva swara of the raga, which is the shatshruthi rishabham, to highlight its prominence. He skilfully performed grahabedam, shifting the notes to yield other melakarta ragas such as Kiravani and Hemavathi. The violinist M. Vijay in turn presented an alapana that was equally intricate. Koteeswara Iyer’s ‘Ka guha shanmukha’ was the kriti. Moving on to Kiravani, which was the main raga for the evening, Sreeram rendered an engaging, long alapana incorporating the many facets of the raga. A set of winding phrases centred around the rishabham across octaves stood out. Every phrase challenged the violinist and Vijay creatively matched up to Sreeram in every way possible.

Wider reach Sreeram exploits the instrument to bring in fresh

perspectives in manodharma and this ensures that his music reaches the audience well, which is a necessity for any instrumental performance. The main composition was Surajananda Swamigal’s ‘Samaganapriyakaram’, which was tuned by the renowned vocalist and musicologist T.M. Thyagarajan. Set in Misra Chapu, the chittaswaram in the anupallavi is one of the special features of this piece. Both the Kosalam piece as well as this composition are relatively less heard. Hence were good choices to offer variety to the rasikas. The mridangam was played by R. Ramesh and the kanjira by Sunil Kumar. The accompanists provided fine support and presented an admirable tani avartanam, which proved to be appealing to listeners since the tala was Misra Chapu. Sreeram ended the concert with a thillana in raga Bindumalini and ‘Bhaja bhaja manasa’ in Sindhubhairavi.

CALENDAR



Music workshop

As part of the 96th birth anniversary of legendary Carnatic musician M.L. Vasanthakumari, the GNB-MLV Gurukul has organised a music workshop between June 15 and June 30. Spread over three modules, the sessions will be conducted over three weekends by Trichur V. Ramachandran, Charumathi Ramachandran and Shubasree Ramachandran. The first module will be held on June 15 and 16, 8.30 p.m. The June 15 session will be conducted by Charumathi and Shubasree, who will be teaching kritis by Swati Tirunal, Patnam Subramania Iyer, Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa. Trichur Ramachandran’s session, the next day, will deal with four kritis of GNB. Module 2, (6.30 a.m. - 8 a.m.) will feature the workshop on kalpanaswaras and raga alapanas by Charumathi and Shubasree on June 22, and that of Trichur Ramachandran on June 23. Module 3 will have Charumathi conducting her session on compositions by Ambujam Krishna and other Tamil light classical songs on June 29 at 6.30 a.m. Shubasree will talk about the popular tukkadas and ragamalikas of GNB and MLV on June 30 at 6.30 a.m. For more details contact 99629 28946 or mail to charumathiramachandran@gmail.com.

Vocal concert



The Music Academy has organised a special concert featuring the compositions of Mysore Sadasiva Rao, Mysore Jayachamaraja Wodeyar and Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavata. Taking place today at 6 p.m., the event will have Hemmige S. Prashanth presenting the kritis. He will be accompanied by N. Madan Mohan (violin) and Kumbakonam K. Swaminathan (mridangam). Venue: Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. The programme is organised under the endowment instituted by Chandrika Rudrapatnam.

Tamil play

Under the auspices of Narada Gana Sabha, thRee presents the Tamil play *Kaatchi Pizhaigalo* by V. Sreevathson, on June 15, 6.45 p.m. at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall.

Restoring the lost glory

Renovation work at Sridevi, Bhooodevi samedha Sri Neelamega perumal temple, Agrapharam, 5, Villiyannallur, Kuthalam taluk, is under way. Sri Neelamega Seva Trust, 5 Villiyannallur has undertaken the renovation work to restore the lost glory of this 300-year-old temple. On account of this, Balalayam was performed on March 20.



L. Bhuvaneshwari (left) and Sharanyaa Ganesan.

Dance recital

Natyarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha Trust, will feature the following Bharatanatyam performances on June 15 at the sabha mini hall. Sharanyaa Ganesan, disciple of Vidya Subramanian, will perform at 6 p.m. followed by L. Bhuvaneshwari, disciple of Roja Kannan, at 7.30 p.m.

Parshathy J. Nath

A young woman turns into a stone after her husband curses her because she was seen being intimate with another man, who had sneaked into her house disguised as her husband. The woman lies in the forest as a stone waiting to be redeemed from the curse. Most of us know this story of Ahalya and sage Gautama. But senior Koodiyattam artiste Usha Nangiar has come with a unique interpretation of this mythological tale. According to Usha, “When Gautama curses her, he says, Ahalya will suffer for four seasons alone and hungry. It means she isn’t a stone but just a woman caught in one.” Usha created the other Panchakanyas – Draupadi, Sita, Mandodari and Tara – with the same sensitivity. She wrote fresh attaprakarams (acting manual) adhering to Koodiyattam conventions for these characters. At the Panchakanya Koodiyattam Mahotsavam, which is being held at Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi in Thrissur till June 18, Usha,

The rise of the heroine

Koodiyattam exponents Usha Nangiar, Kapila Venu and Aparna Nangiar present women characters from mythology in a new light



Women power (From left) Aparna Nangiar; Kapila Venu; and Usha Nangiar. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES



along with young exponents Kapila Venu and Aparna Nangiar, will present her interpretations. Dearth of strong female characters in Nangiarkoothu (the solo woman performance form of Koodiyattam) led Usha to reimagine these five heroines. She used to see her male counterparts perform complex characters, and yearned to play layered roles that demanded the actor to engage in *sookshmaabhinaya* (subtle acting). In the 1980s, when Usha was getting trained in the art form, women performers were seen as mere storytellers. But when one looks at the history of Nangiarkoothu, you find strong women characters. “King Kulasekhara Varman, who was a patron of Koodiyattam, married a Nangiar artiste. Their patronisation ensured a range of female roles,” says Usha. **Learning from a legend** Usha’s training under the legendary Ammannur Madhava Chakyar helped her explore the form. For seven years, she stayed at the gurukulam. “He encouraged me to ask questions and be

imaginative. Though a hardcore traditionalist, his contemporary approach shaped by aesthetic sensibilities. He adhered to the text, but also made new discoveries in it. The respect he accorded to women characters in his presentations was something unusual. In Ammannur asan’s performances, Sita or Tara would be treated with the same dignity as important male characters.” Usha points out that when reimaging characters, one must know the their mind inside out and the multiple dimensions and meanings of a scene or an episode. Talking about the Panchakanya performances, the senior artiste stresses that it stays within the rules of Koodiyattam. “When I first showcased it, audiences felt that contemporary choreographies must be like this. We use the form as a medium to tell the travails and pains of these characters. Through such attempts, we also can come up with innovations. That’s how Koodiyattam as an art form can grow,” says Usha.



Nivedita Jayaram Pawar

When Ram effortlessly picks up the bow, strings it and snaps it into two pieces, the crowd assembled under the cashew tree bursts into a roaring applause. Sita then goes on to garland Ram amidst loud cheer and claps. We were witnessing a puppet show by Chetan Parshuram Gangavane at the luxury retreat Coco Shambhala in Sindhudurg. Post the show, Chetan proudly displays a series of colourful paintings called Chitrakathi. “When we think of tribal art forms of Maharashtra, it’s mostly Warli paintings. But Chitrakathi is a much older form of art from the state which sadly not many people know of,” says the 36-year-old, a third generation Chitakathi artist and puppeteer from Pinguli, a small village in Sindhudurg.

Hand-painted ‘Chitra’ means picture and ‘katha’ means story. Chitrakathi is a vibrant performance art of western Maharashtra, where stories unfold through hand-painted illustrations. The art was practised exclusively by the Thakar community, a nomadic tribe that moved from village to village regaling people with their colourful pictures and puppet shows. “Paintings of gods, kings, queens, demons and Nature were used to narrate stories from the

The canvas speaks

Efforts are on to revive Chitrakathi paintings, a tribal art, where colours tell stories



Ramayana and the Mahabharat. It was used not only for entertainment but to also spread social messages. Chitrakathi was our only source of livelihood,” says Chetan. The Thakars would

make 20-30 paintings depicting specific events such as swayamvar, sita haran and the war of Kurukshetra on paper and set it to music from tambura, veena and dumru. When the Maratha ruler

The art-life link (From left) A painting by Chetan Gangavane; Parshuram Gangavane has been touring the country to create awareness about this art form; and the Thakar Adivasi Kala Aangan Museum and Art Gallery in Pinguli. PHOTOS COURTESY: CHETAN GANGAVANE



Shivaji Shahaji Bhonsale heard of them, he not only rehabilitated the community from the forest to the village, but also patronised the art form by providing handmade paper for the paintings. He also recruited them as his spies. “So the Thakars moved from village to village, singing outside temples at night and mingling with villagers during the day. All the while they kept their ears peeled for information and reported anything suspicious to the king,” reveals Chetan.

Sadly the art form has lost its lustre. “Things changed with time. People didn’t treat us well when we visited their villages to perform. The Thakars then shifted from villages to towns and got themselves an education and jobs. Even today locals call us Adivasis and refuse to eat or drink at our home, despite the fact that foreign delegates and people from the rest of the country visit us and even stay with us,” says Chetan.

The Gangavane family is the last Thakar community still engaged in the centuries-old art form. In 2006, Chetan’s father Parshuram Gangavane converted a cowshed, at his family home in Pinguli, into a museum of art and artefacts. He has been touring the country, regaling people with his paintings and puppets. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 2021 for his efforts to revive the art form. Interestingly, the community came to limelight when the popular song ‘Aamhi Thakara Thakara, hya raanaachi paakharn’ (we are the Thakars, people of the forest) from the Marathi movie *Jait Re Jait Mar* released in 1977. Thakar Adivasi Kala Aangan

Museum and Art Gallery in Pinguli is a good place to initiate someone into Chitrakathi and other traditional art forms of the Thakar community. Apart from old paintings there are also ancient musical instruments created and used by the tribals. Most charming are the hand-carved wooden puppets. “The Thakars were also known for their puppetry or kalsutri bavlya. They used both string and shadow puppets to tell mythological stories and give out social messages. While the string puppets are made of wood and dressed up in colourful costumes to depict gods, demons and mythological figures, shadow puppets are made of leather beaten into thin sheets and then cut into patterns for various characters,” explains Chetan. The nimble manoeuvring of the strings by the artiste along with live singing and robust drumming create a riveting show.

Chitrakathi today Apart from churning out new paintings and touring the country with their puppets, the Gangavane family has been busy holding Chitrakathi painting workshops for the younger generation. While Chetan’s four-year- old nephew is wowing audiences with his amazing vocal acrobatics, his six-year-old daughter is a keen painter. But the ultimate aim of the family is to build Sindhudurg as a cultural hub of Maharashtra. “We want people to come to Sindhudurg not just for the fantastic beaches and the delicious seafood but also for art and handicrafts. We have so much to offer,” assures Chetan.

The many aspects of art



designers. This will be followed by the debut performance of ‘Mitra - The Colours of Love’ by Bharatanatyam dancer Suvin Prasad at 6 p.m. In the backdrop of Pride month, ‘Mitra’ explores the relationship between Varuna and Mitra. It is directed by Parshwanath Upadhye with resource help from Himanshu Srivastava. At 7 p.m., Kathak dancer Mahima Gulecha will present ‘Rooh’, which delves into the concept of divinity. The performance will be followed by a conversation with Gauri Diwakar, senior Kathak dancer and Mahima’s guru. Register at ops.aalap@gmail.com

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CALENDAR



Music retreat in Rishikesh

Retreats are gaining popularity in different fields of art. Apart from bridging the gap between art lovers and practitioners, they offer a space that nurtures creativity and freedom of expression. Abhijat Music Forum has been conducting music retreats for the past eight years in various cities across the country. For each retreat, the forum invites well known artistes This year, it has organised a three-day Residential Ragadarti Sangeet Sammelan at Vanprastha Ashram (on the banks of the Ganga), in Rishikesh from June 20 to 22. Around 25 well-known artistes such as Pt. Uday Bhawalkar, Suresh Talwalkar, Shruti Sadolikar, Ramdas Palsule, Padma Talwalkar, Manjiri Asanare, Shashwati Mandal, Vishwanath Kanhere, Yashaswi Sarpotdar and Yashwant Vaishnav will be participating in the retreat. They will perform, interact with listeners and discuss various aspects of Hindustani music. For details and to register call 98922 46917/77386 74321.

Girish Karnad’s play in Tamil

Theatre Marina in association with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai, brings *Anniyal*, an adaptation of Girish Karnad’s popular play, to the Chennai audience on June 21, 7.30 p.m. and June 22, 4.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m., at Bhavan’s auditorium, Mylapore. Originally written in Kannada as *Odakkalu Bimba* and in English as *Broken Images*, the play has been adapted into Tamil by Prasanna and R. Giridharan. . And this is the first play of Girish Karnad to be adapted into Tamil. *Anniyal* offers a unique experience as it has one person (Latha Venkat) playing a dual role. Tickets at BookMyshow.

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T.R. Mahalingam, whose centenary is on June 16, blazed a trail both as a singer and an actor



Suganthy Krishnamachari

Thenkarai Ramakrishna Mahalingam (TRM) was already a singing sensation on stage, when A.V. Meyyappa Chettiar cast him in the role of Krishna in the film *Nandakumar*, released in 1938, when TRM was only 14.

The legendary actor's first box office hit was Meyyappa Chettiar's *Sri Valli*, released in 1945. S.G. Kittappa, whom he admired, had popularised Kavi Kunjara Bharati's *Ellorayum polave* (raga Suddha Saveri) TRM sang it in *Sri Valli*. Like Kittappa, TRM sang at a sruti of *anju kattai* (G scale).

Mahalingam's next hit in 1947 was *Naam Iruvar*, also produced by Meiyappa Chettiar. He played the role of Sukumar, the hero. His son



Double role

was born while the film was being shot, and was named Sukumar. In 1948, TRM and AVM teamed up again for *Vedala Ulagam*, translated faithfully as 'Demon land', even in the 78 rpm record labels. It was a fantasy film that drew both children and adults in droves. Comedian Sarangapani's line "Idliyaare vaanga, vayathukkulla

ponga", became a kind of refrain in many homes, when idli was served.

TRM sang Bharati's 'Senthamizh nadenum podinile' as the title song. In another song 'Maha sugitha roopa sundari' sung by him, the hero serenades the heroine Rajeevi (actress Mangalam). Interestingly, this tune was used in the



Flashback (Clockwise from left) T.R. Mahalingam with P.U. Chinnappa; in a recording studio; with T.A. Jayalakshmi in *Naam Iruvar*; with M.V. Rajamma in *Gnanasoundari*; and from *Vedhala Ulagam*



Ilaiyaraaja song 'Madana moha roopa sundari' sung by Malaysia Vasudevan in the film *Indru Poi Naalai Vaa*. In the same year in Modern theatres' *Adithan Kanavu*, TRM sang 'Maduramaana ruchi ulladhe', which was popularly known as the 'palgova' song.

TRM soon became wealthy, and built a huge house in Royapettah High Road, which he named Sukumar Bhavanam. He owned 17 cars! Every time a new car arrived in India, he would buy it. Along with the car would come a scale model car for his son Sukumar to play with. Unfortunately, when things were going well for TRM, he ventured into film production, and incurred debts. But his luck turned for the better, when Kannadasan offered him the hero's role in his film *Malaiyitta Mangai*, in 1958. Kannadasan's son Gandhi says, "My father's script

was based on a story by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. He wrote 17 songs for the film. Father ignored warnings that the film wouldn't do well because Mahalingam was no longer in the limelight. Father paid him liberally, helping him settle his debts."

"Kannadasan gifted thatha one of his imported cars," says Prabha, TRM's granddaughter.



Kannadasan was so impressed with the Rafi song 'Muhabbat choome jinke haath' (film *Aan*; music Naushad), that he wrote a song in the same metre. MSV and TKR gave the first line a tune similar to the first line of the original. That song is the famous 'Sentamizh thenmozhiyaal' in *Malaiyitta Mangai*. The film was shot in just 39 days. It was released in Paragon theatre, and ran for 91 days.

When Kannadasan's friends suggested that he should keep it going for another nine days to reach the prestigious 100-day mark, he refused, and said that a film should run on its own steam, and should not be pushed towards pre-set goals. The film helped TRM bounce back and regain prosperity. He never forgot Kannadasan's timely help. "When I visited TRM's house in Thenkarai, I found two portraits – one of his, and one of my father," says Gandhi.

Wide range of songs

There was variety in TRM's songs. "He sang a gana song – 'Irundhaa nawabssa' in the 1959 film *Abhalai Anjugam*. Once when Meyyappa Chettiar was leaving after attending T.K.S. Kalaivanan's wedding reception, TRM began to sing 'Kodi kodi inbam tharavey' from the 1960 film *Aada vanda deivam*, and Chettiar who was about to get into his car, came back to listen to the song," says Prabha.

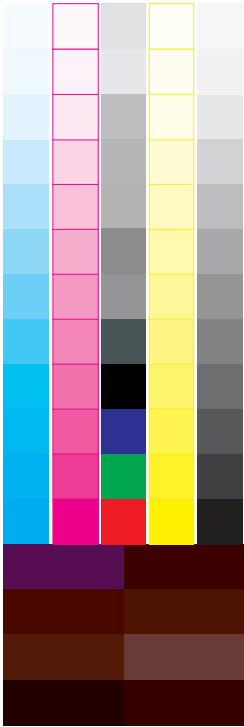
TRM was a good host, and had many friends in the industry and across the political spectrum. Both MGR and Karunanidhi visited him in Thenkarai. When *Pattikada Pattanama* was shot in Sholavandan, Sivaji and Jayalalithaa stayed in his house, and many scenes

were shot in his fields. His help is acknowledged in the opening credits.

Perhaps he could have continued in films, if he had agreed to be a playback singer. But he was willing to sing only if he was acting the role. TRM went back to his village, where he continued to sing in concerts and plays. "Before leaving for a concert, he would call out to his brother Lakshmanan, who lived three houses away. If Lakshmanan was able to hear him, then thatha concluded his voice was fine," says Prabha.

TRM died at the age of 53. "My cousin Rajesh (Sukumar's son) has organised a two-day celebration in Thenkarai, for grandfather's centenary, which is on June 16," says Prabha.

TRM's life had swung between extremes – Vedic background to Dravidian ideology, village life to the dazzle of cinema, and then back again to rural tranquility. But through all this, one thing remained with him – music.



Notes from the archives



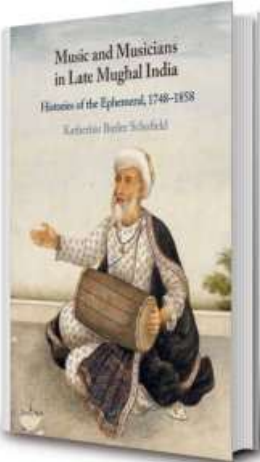
Mian Himmat Khan, the last musician in the direct line of the Khandari beenkars in Bahadur Shah Zafar court. PHOTO COURTESY: KATHERINE SCHOFIELD

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Khushhal Khan did step out of the carpet as he drew the emperor's attention to his wonderful rendition of raag Todi. Seeing the emperor totally enamoured by the music, Khushhal signalled to an official to get him to sign a petition, which Shah Jahan unwittingly did, but later realised he had been tricked. He then banished the singer from his court.

Apart from such fascinating anecdotes, the book also offers a wealth of information. Apparently there were four communities that participated in musical gatherings (majlis) – kalavants, who performed dhrupad and played the 'bin' (rudra veena) and rabab, qawwals, instrumental accompanists of qawwals and courtesans.

An interesting listing of all great musicians, from pre-Tansen period to 1800, throws light on some unsung names such as Nayak Baiju (who pre-dated



Jahandar Shah was strangled to death by his courtier, Sadarang left the court and re-appeared during the reign of emperor Muhammed Shah. Because of his wonderful khayal compositions, he is erroneously credited for creating khayal, which has been popular in the royal courts since the 1660s.

The book is not confined to music in the Mughal court. In 1788, at the Awadh court of Asaf ud Daula, Katherine writes about the musical interactions between Kashmiri courtesan Khanum Jan and Sophia Elizabeth Plowden, wife of an East India Company official. These were later compiled as "Hindustani Aairs", popularly performed till as late as the 1850s.

Moving to Hyderabad, Katherine writes about Khushhal Khan Anup's *Rag Ragini Roz o Shab*, written around 1833, and currently housed in the Salar Jung museum. The listing of raags can "tell various stories - it could easily fill a book in its own right."

Immense research

Katherine highlights how the sources of music writing can contradict -- Colonel Skinner's notes on 'kalavants' are totally divergent to other sources, making cross-checking a must. Her book is a result of immense research and took over five years to complete. "I used mostly Persian, and to a lesser extent Urdu, Brajbhasha and Hindi texts."

The most poignant chapter is on the visually impaired 'Keeper of the flame' Mian Himmat Khan, belonging to Sadarang's lineage. He died early in the reign of Bahadur Shah Zafar (1837-58). He attempted to preserve his knowledge for posterity through the treatise *Asl al-Usul*. As he had no sons, he took his daughter's son, Mir Nasir Ahmed, as his last 'bin' disciple. Mir Nasir Ahmed had to flee from Delhi after 1858, and lived under the patronage of the Kapurthala Prince Bikrama Singh (wrongly mentioned as Bikramjit Singh in the original Urdu texts).

Katherine concludes, "so many stories remain untold in this book. It is because I do not have the many lifetimes I would need to tell them all."

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