CHENNAI · October 4, 2024

ridayReview THEMOMHINDU

With love from Paris

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The shakti of every woman

everal decades ago, as a young boy, when I was asked to sing a kriti for Lakshmi pooja, I sheepishly declared that a school prayer was all I knew, only to be reminded by my teacher that the famous geetham 'Varaveena' is on Mahalakshmi. This led me on a path of imbibing the nuances of the lyrics. Students of Carnatic music usually learn a song even before grappling with the concepts of Bhakti and Shakti. The quest still continues, especially when I sing kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar on Devi, ranging from the simple tunes of the nottu swaras like 'Shyamale Meenakshi' and 'Kamalasana' to the exceptional 'Kamalamba Navavarnam'. The last is more esoteric with tantrik, geometric and religious details of the Sri Chakram and its nine enclosures. The beauty of the lyrics of the Navavarnam comes through in the 11 ragas they are set in. Equally beautiful are the works of Syama Sastri, especially his 'Ratna Thrayam'. I experience a sense of surrender when singing it. Ragas Bhairavi, Thodi and Yadukulakamboji help convey the magnificence of Kanchi Kamakshi as described in the lyrics. Swati Tirunal and Papanasam Sivan have also shared with us their musical and spiritual fervour. Muthiah Bhagvatar's creation in raga Niroshta is unique - it omits the only two swaras 'ma' and 'pa' where the lips touch. All this for a kriti on Vagdevi, no less!

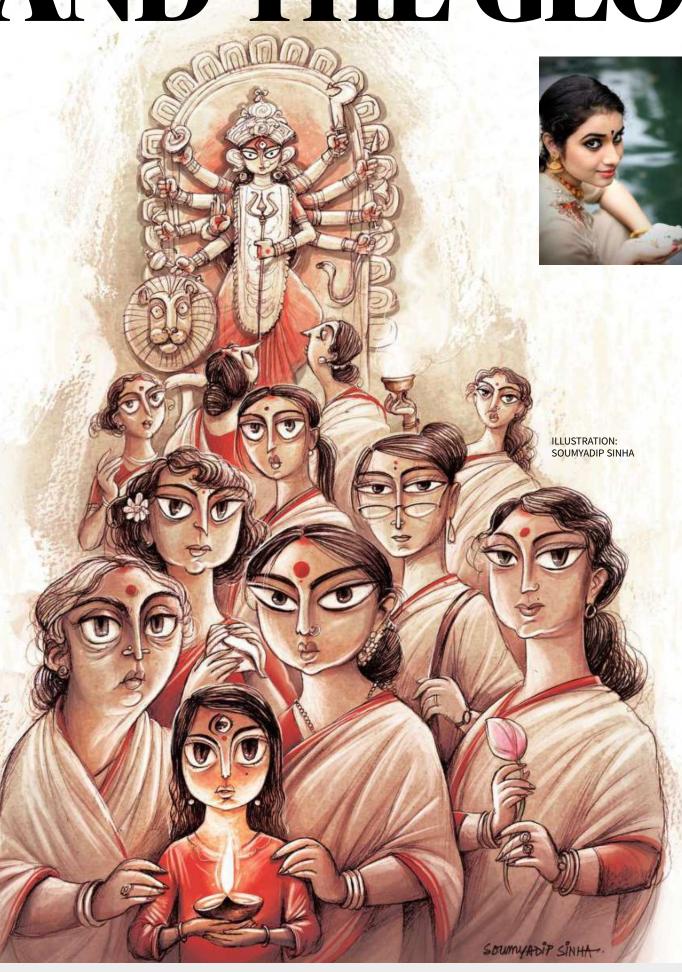
When I embarked on a collaborative music iourney with Anil Srinivasan in 2006. I felt Kali and Durga manifest in different ways while rendering the timeless 'Chinnanjiru pen pole along with 'Bhavani dayani', both in the raga Sindhubhairavi. Particularly noteworthy is the manner in which Anil interpreted and visualised Durga as a little girl playing hopscotch on the banks of Sivaganga in Chidambaram. Subramanya Bharati's 'Nenjukku neethi', 'Kani nilam' and Thondru nigazhndha are powerful paeans to Shakti and Bharata Mata. Speaking of bhakti towards our nation, it was not until I sang for Just Us Repertory's play, Rural Phantasy, that I discovered the joy of learning the full version of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Vande Mataram as a Ragamalika, which eventually found its way into my concert repertoire. The contours of Carnatic music are vast enough to include contemporary themes as well. A thillana where the lyrics not only extol Shakti to grant power to humankind but also humankind to respect every woman as Shakti is a personal favourite. Music as a veritable force of Nature can spur us to appreciate new concepts, including worship of Shakti. By the time you read this article, I would probably be singing in celebration of Devi this Navaratri, starting with 'Varaveena'!

> - SIKKIL GURUCHARAN Carnatic vocalist

VD THE GLORY

Five artistes share how they discovered themselves through

the Shakti of art and the need to recognise one's inner strength



Not a distant goddess

s a dancer who has embodied the divine feminine through compositions on Devi, my understanding of Shakti has evolved beyond viewing her as a distant goddess. Initially, I encountered Shakti in familiar forms – Radha for Krishna, Parvati for Shiva, Saraswati for Brahma, and Lakshmi for Vishnu. However, as I delved deeper into her essence, especially in my production 'Harini', Shakti transformed into more than just a deity. She became the nurturing mother, the guiding guru, and the force that prepares devotees for divine grace. The realisation that even Vishnu and Shiva await their Shakti's consent before bestowing blessings reshaped my perception of her role.

Shakti is not a mere consort; she is the force that drives creation, sustenance, and transformation. Sivagamasundari does not just observe Nataraja's dance, she facilitates it. In this sense, Shakti transcends the traditional idea of being a complement to the masculine. She is the power behind all movement and change. However, there is often a disconnect between how we revere Shakti in rituals and acknowledgement of her presence in everyday life. Too often, we celebrate her in festivals yet overlook her presence within ourselves and others.

As a dancer, I feel that art helps bridge this gap, making Shakti not just a symbol but a lived reality. I've seen Shakti in my mother, who held our family together, in my grandmother's quiet strength, and now within myself as I balance motherhood and dance.

The Sanskrit word śak, meaning 'to be able', perfectly encapsulates Shakti's essence. She enables, bears, and endures – not just in cosmic terms but in every being. At this stage of my journey, what strikes me most is how Shakti transcends gender, religion, and myth. It is the hope within all of us, waiting to be awakened, fuelling our dreams and actions. Shakti is the pulse that keeps the universe in motion and the force that drives us to dance, dream, and create. It is both the cause of my dance and the dance itself. When we recognise and honour Shakti within ourselves, true magic begins.

> - MEERA SREENARAYANAN Bharatanatyam dancer

The force of Nature



s an artiste, particularly a female artiste, I believe that creativity is a form of Shakti. The energy that empowers you to imagine and manifest on stage, in whichever form you want, is again a beautiful, abstract power of that divine Shakti that artistes are blessed with.

As a folk artiste, I have got the opportunity to understand the deeper

significance of worshipping the goddess. In folk traditions, she is seen as someone protecting the land (Bhudevi), the family (Kuldevi) and against illness (Sheetala Devi). And Nature plays a significant role in this worship.

The songs that I perform go beyond describing Devi's attributes. They tell you how to conquer the demons in your life. We usually do not realise how empowering music can be. We do not always have to look at the Devi in the temple or the prayer room – strong women (shakti) are all around you.

> - MALINI AWASTHI Folk and thumri artiste

Look within

Bengali by birth, I grew up watching Devi being worshipped as the embodiment of Shakti. As a child, the powerful divine energy during Durga puja captivated me - the resonant voice of Birendra Krishna Bhadra reciting the 'Chandipath', soothing tunes of Agomoni (arrival of the goddess), foot-tapping beats of the dhak and the infectious energy of the *dhunuchi naach*. Each time I

associated her with a formidable feminine force – a warrior, a woman of immense strength destined to conquer the world. Raised in an open-minded family, I felt empowered and believed I had everything I needed, which inspired me to pursue my passion for dance.

encountered the idol of Durga, I

When I began to perform on stage, I felt physically invincible and thought that was the essence of Shakti. But the journey hasn't been easy. The challenges, the fears, the uncertainity...you feel emotionally drained. It was then that I truly discovered what Shakti means to me. It isn't merely an external force; it's the power that resides within. It transcends tools and weapons; it's about cultivating inner

confidence and confronting one's own fears and demons.

Now, I understand Shakti as a pure flow – a dynamic, creative energy, a life force that propels you from within. As a performer, I have come to appreciate my true position. I no longer wish to dance merely for the sake of movement; I yearn for that divine force to guide my movements. In

this sense, it's not just me dancing – there's a greater energy inspiring my creativity and expression. I have a dream project centered around Shakti, and I hope to bring it to life very

> - SANJUKTA SINHA Kathak dancer

Self-expression



ight from my training years, I was made to understand the importance of knowing the meaning of the lyrics to convey the emotions in them. However, it was during the recording of

my album Devi Ragamala that I experienced the deeper impact of lyrics. The amazing verses were penned by Saurabh Savoor and set in different ragas. While singing them, I began to think about my own negative and positive energies. I seemed to discover my true self through the words. Even today when I sing them at concerts, they make me think and introspect. Gradually I realised, Shakti is the everyday existence of a woman.

> - SAWANI SHENDE Hindustani Vocalist





Renuka Suryanaryanan

arnatic music has a rich collection of kritis composed by different vaggeyakaras, particularly the Trinity. Muthuswami Dikshitar's kritis are known for their intricate phrases, melodic appeal and lyrical beauty. As Dikshitar was proficient in playing the veena, one can also see its influence in his compositions. Many of his kritis are set in a leisurely veena-playing style with quicksilver madhyamakala passages to capture the essence of the ragas.

To celebrate the composer's 250th birth anniversary, a year-long event titled 'Dikshitar 250' has been organised by Veenavadhini Sampradaya Sangit Trust. The Trust, founded by Veena artiste Jayasri Jeyaraaj and Jeyaraaj, recently presented concerts by Veena Venkatramani and Neyveli Santhanagopalan at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore.

Stringing melodies

The evening began with vainika Veena Venkatramani's recital spanning 90 minutes. The highlight was her presentation of kritis such as 'Kadambari priyayai' (Mohanam) and 'Sadasraye abhayambike' (Chamaram). She shared that the raga, which is otherwise called Shanmukhapriya, gets the name Chamaram in the Dikshitar school. Dikshitar had followed the Asampurna Melakarta system

The enduring

melody

'Dikshitar 250' celebrated the lyrical beauty of the composer's works



in naming the Melakarta ragas.
Veena embellished each kriti
with well-nuanced raga alapanas
and kalpanaswaras. The tanam
section, following the Chamaram
alapana, stood out. Choice of
kritis and good kalapramanam

are her assets. Interestingly, the

tani avartanam by Tirucherai

Kaushik (mridangam) and K.R.

Sivarama Krishna (kanjira) was rich in complexity.

Bonding with rasikas Senior vocalist Neyveli Santhanagopalan's concert showed his ability to engage with the audience. He began with the Gowla raga composition

'Tyagaraja palayasumam'.

Muralidharan (violin) and Mannargudi Easwaran (mridangam) elevated the presentation. Santhanagopalan got into an introspective mood in the ensuing Bilahari raga alapana as he traversed through its many layers. He presented the kriti 'Eka dantam bhajeham' with kalpanaswaras. He did not indulge in too many korvais in this segment. But in the main kriti 'Sri rajagopala bala' (Saveri), towards the second half of the recital, he came up with a few intricate korvais. An elaborate and creative niraval-swara segment followed the kriti.

Accompanists Nagai

Earlier, Santhanagopalan presented a Varali raga alapana with its aesthetics intact. The kriti chosen was 'Seshachala nayakam'. His 'Manasa guruguha rupam bhajare' (Anandabhairavi) had melodic appeal.

Violinist Nagai Muralidharan's repartees during the alapana and swara segements were enjoyable. Senior mridangist Mannargudi

Easwaran displayed his percussive skill during the tani avaratanam.

Highpoints of Harikamboji

Bharat Sundar travelled to the raga's core to unravel its layers



essays Bharat
Sundar with L.
Ramakrishnan
(violin), Vijay
Natesan
(mridangam) and
Sai Subramaniam
(morsing). PHOTO
COURTESY: KEDARAM

H. Ramakrishnan

edaram recently organised a concert in memory of N.V. Subramaniam (NVS), who founded Saraswathi, a performance-oriented organisation, and the Saraswati Vaggeyakara Trust, which focussed on the deeper aspects of music. NVS was more than just a concert organiser. He had learnt to play the violin, and had perfected the art to the extent that he even accompanied senior artistes such as Maharajapuram Santhanam and T.R. Subramaniam. NVS tried to find time to pursue his passion for music despite holding a senior position in the Southern Railways.

In his concert at the Ragasudha auditorium, Bharat Sundar impressed with his voice and presentation. For instance, his Harikamboji elucidation, with engaging gamakas and lucid phrase, had a lingering effect. Senior violinist L. Ramakrishnan played the phrases with equal zeal.

Bharat Sundar chose 'Enta rani tanakenta' in an appropriate nadai in the raga. The saint says, "Lord, whatever happens, I will never move away from you." The niraval and kalpanaswaras were aptly rendered at the charanam 'Seshudu sivuniki bhushudu lakshmana'. If the extensive niraval was studded with aesthetic phrases, the impromptu swara clusters displayed the vocalist's imagination.

On the mridangam, Vijay Natesan, disciple of T.V. Gopalakrishnan, played a sprightly thani punctuated with many sparkling passages. On the morsing, Sai Subramaniam, disciple of A.S. Krishnan, was able to produce the desired tonality with his subdued playing.

Poignant rendition

Earlier, Bharat Sundar sang a well-nuanced Dhanyasi. Dhanyasi is a raga that lets the rasika experience multiple rasas. Papanasam Sivan's 'Balakrishan paadamalar panivorkku' (Rupakam), which came next, conveyed the bhakti and karuna rasa.

The vocalist began his concert appropriately with Kedaram. He chose Dikshitar's 'Ananda natana prakasam' (Misra Chapu), a Panchabhuta kriti on Nataraja in Chidambaram. It has an in-built jathi-swara with a sollukattu in line. 'Neekela dayaradu' (Khanda Chapu) in Sarasangi by Ramaswami Sivan had niraval at 'Nerataka bhuvi mida' in the charanam segment, and an elaborate swaraprastara.

At this point, Bharat Sundar recalled how once T.R. Subramaniam stopped him while singing this niraval to point out a mistake in the enunciation of the lyric.

He next sang Tyagaraja's 'Shara shara samaraika' (Kuntalavarali) with a chittaswaram, set by the legendary M. Balamuralikrishna.

'Udayadri Pai' was part of the popular Lalitha Sangeetham (light music) programme broadcast by AIR Vijayawada in the 1980s. The lyrics were by Rachakonda Lakshmee Narasimhan, and it was tuned by Malladi Suribabu in Ragamalika. The song pays obeisance to the Sun. Bharat Sundar presented this song, giving it a special touch with impressive modulation.

'Charana kamalaalayathai', a Tiruppugazh in Subha Pantuvarali, and a thillana in Khamas were the concluding pieces.

Driven by passion A
class in progress; and
a solo and group
performances PHOTOS
COURTESY: THOMAS VO
VAN TAO







The call of Mohiniyattam

Thomas Vo Van Tao, a male Mohiniyattam exponent, shares what drew him to the dance form

Kunal Ray

homas Vo Van Tao is a rare male Mohiniyattam exponent. After learning Bharatanatyam for 10 years, he veered to Mohiniyattam where he found his calling. His aesthetics was further shaped under the tutelage of Neena Prasad. Thomas performs extensively and teaches Mohiniyattam in Paris, France. Excerpts from a conversation.

Question: What drew you to Indian classical dance? **Answer:** I was around eight when I happened to watch a documentary on South India on TV at the end of which there was a short excerpt of a couple dancing together. It left me fascinated. A few years later, by chance, I met my first teacher, who taught me Bharatanatyam for more than 10 years. Mohiniyattam came much later in my life when I travelled to Kerala and decided to give it a try.

Q: Mohiniyattam is labelled as the dance of the enchantress and also exclusively performed by women. Why did you veer towards this dance style and do you ever feel constrained by your gender?

your gender?

A: I stopped Bharatanatyam and veered towards
Mohiniyattam for the feeling of plenitude I experience every time I dance it. The slow or medium pace of Mohiniyattam and its movement vocabulary made me feel that I was finally

student and dancer, I was expected to dance a certain way and I was only taught certain type of compositions that would supposedly highlight my masculinity. Without really knowing it, I was in the quest for a dance that responded more to what I am and that would allow space for what we label as femininity. I wouldn't say that my gender was ever a constraint. On the contrary, Mohiniyattam gave me ample

dancing . As a Bharatanatyam

space to explore and fully embrace my gender in its complexity.

Q: Is language ever an obstacle?
A: I don't think anybody
would ask a Bengali or
Gujarati Bharatanatyam
dancer this question. We all
fall back on translations or
have friends help us translate
and understand certain
lyrics. Moreover, a native
Tamil speaker might not be
able to fully understand a
Sangam era text or a Malayali

Manipravalam text. Now to answer your question more practically, yes it does make a difference to know the language of the composition as it brings more spontaneity in abhinaya, but again, not all dancers in India perform compositions in a language that they have mastered.

a heavily Sanskritised

Q: You also trained in research. Did research influence your practice?

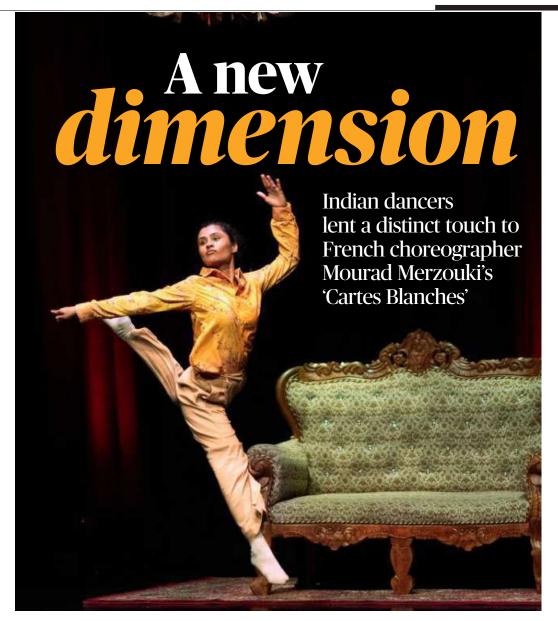
A: Yes, I wrote my Masters' thesis on the contemporary history of Bharatanatyam. This research did impact my practice and I think it has been to some extent crucial in my decision to stop practicing this art form. I was conflicted between what I was reading about the history of Bharatanatyam and what was taught to me in dance class. The bhakti-loaded repertoire that was taught to me and its supposed antiquity and sacredness did not match with what I was reading about the tradition. I have not done formal research on Mohiniyattam but I do read everything I can about it. Unfortunately, only a few academic works have been dedicated to this art form and especially to its history as all the pre-Kalamandalam era practitioners and witnesses of their art are no longer alive.

Q: Living and working in France is different from India. Is that a challenge for a performing artiste?

A: There is a long tradition if I may call it so, of non-Indian practitioners of Indian dance in France. Simkie, the first French lady who learnt Indian dances, did so as early as the 1930s in the midst of the Revival Period when a

whole new narrative was made around Indian dance traditions. So, Indian dances are not completely alien to many here, but it is sometimes what paradoxically makes it even more difficult for me to set a context for my practice. Reconciling both my experience in India as a student and as a dancer and people's perception of Indian dances can indeed be at times challenging. The audience often comes to see or experience what they consider exotic or ancient, with a lot of preconceived notions based on what they have read on the so-called revival. Making sure that the context in which the art form my students learn or the audience sees on stage evolves and thrives is not something that one can do in the span of a class or in a five-minute conversation after a performance. It is an ongoing work which comprises spreading awareness about the art form through performances but also making people understand that things are not so vastly different and exotic.

> Q: Do you feel the need to make Mohiniyattam contemporary to your time and context? **A:** Mohiniyattam or Indian dance for that matter is not bound by time and space. It is an art that is made and practiced by people of today and no matter how ancient it is or not, Mohiniyattam is still moving forward and keeps on creating and recreating itself through different bodies. So, yes Mohiniyattam is contemporary and I would even say that it's probably ahead of its time. It asks us to slow down and observe.



Dance beyond **borders** From production, which was staged in Bengaluru PHOTOS

> COURTESY: PRAKRITI

FOUNDATION

Charumathi Supraja

artes Blanches means 'complete freedom' or 'a blank card." While blankness gives reign to choice, factors like the card's size and texture, inevitably shape it. This play of freedom with restriction seemed to define 'Cartes Blanches', recreated with Indian dancers by French choreographer Mourad Merzouki, in collaboration with Prakriti Foundation and The French Institute in India. Performed at Prestige Srihari Khoday Centre for Performing Arts, Bengaluru, 'Cartes Blanches' simultaneously relayed distance and intimacy. The proscenium stage set apart the impossibly nimble dancers from an audience not necessarily made up of dancers, while the highly skilled dancers played out intimate (and complex) movement conversations conducted against the backdrop of a grandly furnished living room. Sharply designed lights determined the audience's perception of the powerful storytelling taken on by

time and space. | It seemed like the invitation to experience freedom was also extended to the audience who could make their own meaning of the narratives panning out on stage. These narratives could have spoken of young cousins meeting after long, a reunion of classmates or even a family's post-dinner

dancers negotiating unique

relationships with rhythm,

conversation. The interaction between diverse dance styles layered the performance – astounding in energy and told in an endearing voice.

Co-produced by the

French Institute, India and Prakriti Foundation, Campagnie Kafig's 'Cartes Blanches' was presented by six Indian dancers chosen last year through multi-city auditions, when internationally renowned choreographer Mourad Merzouki was touring the country with another work – Pixel. First premiered in 2016, 'Cartes Blanches', in this Indian version, wove in local dance and martial art forms. These parts, surprisingly, did not jar, possibly because the audience was already prepared for the assortment of flavours brought by dancers, who, clearly, were not from one training mould.

Blend of styles

Merzouki, recently in the news for exclusive choreographies created for the Olympic Games in Paris, spoke about the process of recreating 'Cartes Blanches' in India. Having been a circus

performer well before his dance journey began, Merzouki is known for bringing together acrobatics and dance. He sees movement as "a language to create." Believing that "a body in movement does not separate acrobatics and dance."

Merzouki is inspired by the

questions that come up

process. "It's never easy,

encounters I have with

different artistes and

techniques lead me to

reinvent myself, so each

show has its own story, its

own dynamic," he says. He

finds "the social dimension

of hip hop dance" crucial

creative process. Armand

Amar's musical score for

'Cartes Blanches', "draws

on sounds and cultures

from all over the world,"

he points out. "We both

collaboration has enabled

us to question each other

Shahan Kavarana, Snigdha

Prabhakar, Sam Padelkar,

while also merging our

worlds," says Mourad. Dancers Deep Das,

Divieta Sahajwala and

Chetan Kumar Yeragera

explorations of freedom

within the pre-existing

framework of an almost

production created in a

context. They all felt the

preparation was barely

enough to scratch the

surface of the piece, while

appreciating the careful

guidance of Mourad and

his team members, Remi

Autechaud and Sabri Colin.

They expressed how they

felt supported in the many

challenges they had to take on, physically, emotionally

growth pathways the piece

opened for each of them.

and mentally, while

traversing the personal

very different cultural

two-week period of

decade-old dance

brought 'Cartes Blanches' alive with their honest

enjoy working with

fields, and our

designers from other

and lets it guide his

during the creative

but each time, the

Mourad sees his work as an attempt to blend an array of energies and styles, irrespective of the dancers' origins. "I want to work on a form of alchemy, so that each creation is unique," he says. He believes that recasting a production with "other bodies, other energies, gives a whole new approach to the piece and makes it more mature and powerful." He is excited about how the latest version of 'Cartes Blanches' is informed by flavours brought in by Indian dancers and their diverse training backgrounds.

The new piece complements the original hip-hop or contemporary dance" structure of 'Cartes Blanches', he says. A choreographer who thrives on "challenges and crossing disciplines,"



Narendra Kusnur

and impersonators have a following of their own. Their success lies in their ability to keep the memory and flavour of the original alive. So it is with Rehmat-e-Nusrat, a group Uttarakhand, which specialises Fateh Ali Khan's songs.

At their first public show, a sold-out one at Royal Opera House in Mumbai last month, the group showed its natural flair for sufiana kalams. The first song went on for 25 minutes, yet the audience remained attentive. Many were familiar with the Sufi composition 'Allah hoo', popularised by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. They enjoyed the way it was presented by Rehmat-e-Nusrat - soaring vocals, energetic chorus, melodic harmonium and powerful tabla accompaniment

hours, Sarvjeet and his team Rohit Saxena, Shubham Mathpal, Anubhav Singh and Deepak Kumar on backing break, with a majority of the 'Allah Hoo' was followed by the well-known 'Ae ri sakhi ', 'Bhala hua mori ghagri phooti'. When the group rendered the devotional 'Sanson ki mala', it was greeted with rapturous applause. 'Yeh jo halka halka suroor hai' lasted 30 minutes but the fervour never diminished. Rehmat-e-Nusrat concluded with Khusro's

Amarrass Records, the group and Bengaluru, besides the Jaipur Literature Festival and Ziro Festival of Music in Arunachal Pradesh.

sings Kumaoni folk melodies under the name HimaliMou. Sarvieet hails from Almora,

north of Nainital in Uttarakhand, and was exposed to a lot of Kumaoni and Nepali music. His father was a government teacher who played the harmonium as a hobby. The youngster began singing early, and won many school competitions. The turning point came when he heard a recording of Nusrat's 'Sannu ek pal chain na aawe'. He recalls, "I must have been 14 or 15 then, and my first impulse was to watch Nusrat ji perform live. It came as a shock when I found

Sarvjeet spent a few years learning on his own the gawwalis by Nusrat and the Wadali Brothers. He says he realised the importance of and diction, and also with the right emotion," he adds.



ometimes, tribute bands hailing from the Kumaon hills in in Pakistani legend Ustad Nusrat

and rhythmic handclaps.

Though the duration was two (Sanjay Kumar on the tabla, and vocals and claps) performed for three-and-a-half hours without a audience staying on till the end. written by the great mystic Amir Khusro, and the Nirguni bhajan timeless 'Chaap tilak'.

Signed up by Delhi-based has performed regularly in Delhi

Interestingly, the same group

out he passed away in 1997."

Learning on his own

imbibing the nuances of poetry familarising himself with ragas. "You need to know the meaning of the words, and express them

His father wanted him to



Transcendental notes Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan; and (below) Sarvieet's group performing at Royal Opera House in Mumbai рнотоs: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



The sufi bond

Rehmat-e-Nusrat performs sufiana kalams popularised by the Pakistani legend Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

become an aeronautical engineer, but at 16, the young singer decided to leave home and teach music and art in Pantnagar. Later, he travelled around to meet singer Pooran Chand Wadali and Manganiyar artiste Fakira Khan. He formed Rehmat-e-Nusrat in 2014, choosing talented and passionate youngsters, but it took them six years to be recognised.

When Ashutosh Sharma of Amarrass Records met Sarvjeet, he thought the group would only do folk music. He was surprised their main focus was

qawwali.

In contrast to the sheer energy of Rehmat-e-Nusrat, the music of HimaliMou is more restrained. It features Kumaoni hill songs known as jhoda (songs for working classes), niyoli (songs of separation) and chapeli (tunes for dancing). The harmonium and wooden flutes provide the melodic accompaniment, and the dholak and hudka hand drums provide the rhythm, along with handclaps.

Whether it is qawwali or folk music, Sarvjeet believes in maintaining purity of tradition.



Sangam poetry through **Mohiniyattam**



The Rasika Ranjani Sabha Foundation and R R Sabha Arts Academy hosted the seventh Tamil Isai Saaral programme titled 'Paar Maghizh Paavanna Kalanjiyam'. A thematic dance recital 'Paavaiyar potrum paamaalai', based on Sangam literature, was presented. It featured the Mohiniyattam performance of L. Nivedita Sri, a student of Gopika Varma. Nivedita began her performance

with a Mallari to depict the entry of 'Aadal vallan' to the stage. In her next piece on Avvaiyar, Nivedita captured her journey to Tirukayilayam. She next chose to depict Karaikal Ammaiyar. In the song 'Iravaada inba anbu vendi' the poet says that she must forever be at Shiva's feet when he dances. Nivedita's training and practice came through in 'Varanam aayiram', which describes the various stages leading to the marriage of Andal; 'Maasaru ponne', the phrase used by Kovalan to describe the beauty of Kannagi, a tana varnam, and a Thevaram verse, where Appar becomes a nayika to establish the concept of total surrender. The programme ended with the song 'Thennadudaya sivane potri' and the chanting of Thiruchitrambalam.

Nattuvangam was by A.B. Mohanapriya Diwakar, music composition was by Kalakkad R.M. Seethalakshmi, Jayashree Aditya (vocal); Madurai D. Kishore (violin); and S. Govindarajan (mridangam).







Anuj Kumar

n the 1970s when Hindi cinema was coming out of the chocolate box, there emerged an unconventional face that shunned the bouffant and the pout to carve a woman who refused to be a satellite to a hero. Shabana was fortunate to take the plunge when a 'New Wave' was taking shape and found a bunch of path-breaking filmmakers such as Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen, Goutam Ghose, Basu Chatterjee and Mahesh Bhatt, who tempered her talent to create an alchemy of ideas on screen. Over the years, her films might have failed but Shabana always shone bright.

Born to the illustrious actor Shaukat and poet Kaifi Azmi, Shabana's conscience took root in a household where progressive poetry and proletariat politics wafted in the air. If the verses of Faiz and Ali Sardar Jafri distilled into her young mind from the baithaks organised in the drawing room of Kaifi's Janki Kutir in Juhu, the robust realism of drama unfolding next door at the iconic Prithvi Theatre was hard to resist.

Strong presence

The liberal atmosphere instilled in her the belief that the role of arts is not just to entertain. Having imbibed the spirit of a communist household from a very young age, it was not difficult for her to understand

the value of collaboration, which essentially every abiding work of cinema demands. Right from her first appearance on screen in *Ankur*, where the young, urbane Shabana immersed herself into the role of the Dakhini-speaking maid, who is seduced into an illicit relationship by her master, she empathetically embraced characters from the margins.

Over the last five decades, Shabana has shown an amazing ability to make the mundane dramatic and the dramatic believable. She allows life to fuel her characters and preserves the residue left after her performances to inform the larger purpose of her existence where art and activism mingle without prejudice. "Art has the right to provoke as well," she told this journalist once. Unequivocal against injustice and bigotry of all kinds, she became the voice of slum dwellers. She condemned protests against Pakistani ghazal singer Ghulam Ali's performance in Mumbai and was among the first ones to criticise the fatwa issued against A.R. Rahman for

Not a switch on, switch off kind of actor, she values training and rehearsals over instinct. It is hard to find a false note in her portrayal of a Carnatic singer in *Morning* Raga, a performance that won her praise from Sitar maestro Pt. Ravi Shankar. Few remember that she sang ghazals for her character in

scoring music in an Iranian film

on Prophet Muhammad.

Muzaffar Ali's Anjuman and rendered Rabindra Sangeet in Aparna Sen's Sonata. Shabana also has this knack

for humanising the insecure woman squirming at the thought of sharing someone she holds dear. She expressed different shades of this fear of disintegrating facade in Shatranj Ke Khiladi, Masoom, Pestonjee, Muhafiz and Makdee with a touch of hysteria. She loves to carry home the peculiarities of her characters to deliberate on their human condition, to put them in a social context, and returns to deliver performances that have aged gracefully like her.

Here are five films that define her charisma.

Arth (1982) Mahesh Bhatt's Arth is to Shabana what Mother India is to Nargis. From a wife whose face turns pale at the thought of her husband leaving her for another woman to becoming a self-sufficient woman, Shabana etches Pooja with remarkable empathy and strength. Interestingly, it was one of those scenes where Bhatt didn't allow Shabana to prepare and her instinctive response to the stimulus still induces awe.

The film provided her with an opportunity to lip sync to her father's lyrics – "Tum Itna Kyon Muskara Rahe Ho, Kya Gham Hai Jisko Chhupa Rahe Ho – became an anthem for the aching souls.

Having grown up in a communist household where everyday existence was hand to



mouth but gender equality was a given, mapping Pooja's journey enriched Shabana's understanding of Indian women. "My mother used to work when my poet father was not earning much. It was when I did Arth and played a character who says no to her philandering husband even after he says sorry that I realised how big a step it is," she told this journalist in a previous interview.

The distributors felt the ending wouldn't work because it was too much for an Indian man to say sorry and still not be accepted by his wife. The film did good business but soon Shabana started getting letters from women feeling stifled in their married life. "The last thing I wanted was to become an agony aunt but the film has proved to be cathartic for middle-class women who are yet to distinguish between a character and a real person. Mandi (1983)

From Ankur and Nishant to Susman and Hari Bhari, Shabana has been a constant in Shyam Benegal's universe. Mandi is, perhaps, their most formidable work together. Playing Rukmini Bai, the madam of a brothel, she is both the hunter and the hunted in the sharp satire on the position of sex workers in society. Shabana put on weight for the role, made chewing paan a habit, and visited red light areas to create a mercurial character that turns cunning, comic, and curt to survive in



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filth. We have had several versions of Rukmini Bai but she stands tall in the market.

Paar (1984)

With Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana formed one of the most iconic on-screen pairs in the Indian film industry. From Sparsh and Masoom to Pestonjee and Libaas, the two have created many magic moments on screen. But their dedication to bringing alive the plight of landless Dalit labourers in Goutam Ghose's Paar remains unrivalled. The 12-minute sequence where Naurangia and Rama transport a herd of pigs across a swelling river is etched in the memory of cinephiles. Their exhaustion and exhilaration give goosebumps. "It was an emotionally and physically demanding scene but Shabana and Naseer were tremendous", says Goutam Ghose.

Khandahar (1984) The Mrinal Sen film is a great example of how Shabana lets the silences of her characters converse with the audience. Perhaps that's why she is a great choice to decode literary works that don't lend themselves easily to cinematic interpretation.In Khandahar, based on Premendra Mitra's Bengali short story, Shabana's Jamini personifies the ruins of relationships. Bound by duty and love for her ailing mother, alive to see the suitor of her daughter return, Jamini finds hope when a city-bred photographer enters her life but his gaze also turns out to be exploitative. Echoing the crumbling facade of the building, Shabana unravels Iamini's mental architecture.

Godmother (1999) Throughout her astor career in parallel cinema, Shabana kept looking for a lane that would connect her craft with the reach of popular cinema. Early in her career, she worked with Manmohan Desai but in his universe, she was far from a driving force. She impressed cynics with the moving portrayal of a selfless mother in the Bollywood melodrama Avtaar (1983) but it was Vinay Shukla's Godmother that challenged her to create the ruthless Rambhi, a character that has the backstory of an art house film but gradually moulds into the avenger of a mainstream entertainer. It didn't fully fit into her worldview but Shabana delivered a stunning portrayal that won her the fifth National Award for Best Actress.

\equiv CALENDAR \equiv

Theatre festival

Brahma Gana Sabha, in association with Narada Gana Sabha, Kartik Fine Arts and Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha, will conduct a three-day drama festival at Narada Gana Sabha from October 4 to 6. Time: 6.45 p.m. The festival features three historical plays staged by different theatre groups. Details: October 4: Poovai Daya's SRMG Creations' Karaikal Ammaiyar. October 5: RS Manohar's NxG's Malikafoor. October 6: Tamizharasan Theatres' 'Sri Narasimhar. Tickets at the hall or on mdnd.in. For details call 9444444767.

Veena recital

Mrunaalini Srinath, disciple of Chinna Veenai Rangarajan, will present her veena recital at the following places. Today, 6 p.m.: Srinivasa Perumal Temple, Royapettah; tomorrow, 6 p.m.: Mundagakanni Amman Temple, Mylapore; and October 6, 6 p.m.: Anjaneyar Temple, Luz, Mylapore.

Vocal concert

TKR Music Trust presents Anirudh Subramanian's vocal concert today, 6 p.m. at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall, The Music Academy. Anirudh will present compositions by Thiruvalampozhil K. Ram Kumar. VSP Gayatri Sivani (violin) and B. Ganapathyraman (mridangam) are the accompanists.

Music for a cause

The Christian Missions Charitable Trust (CMCT) is hosting a musical evening Love-in-Action-2024', in aid of health care and youth development, at Museum Theatre on October 6, 6,30 p.m. It features VoyzMale, Rolling Tones, and The Octet Cantabile. A special feature 'Grace in Motion: A symphony of faith and dance', is by the students of Women's Christian College.



An ode to Shiva

NCPA has organised a thematic Bharatanatyam performance by senior dancer Geeta Chandran on October 6, 5 p.m. at Jamshed Bhabha Theatre, Titled 'Pravahati', the performance marks Geeta Chandran's 50-year journey in dance.

Voice and string

Madhuradhwani presents the following programmes at Arkay Convention Center, Mylapore. Details: Today, 6.15 p.m.: Delhi P. Sunder Rajan. Oct. 5, 6.15 p.m.: Madurai T.N. Seshagopalan. Oct. 9, 6.15 p.m.: Jayalakshmi Sekhar (veena). Oct. 10. 6.15 p.m.: Visveshwar Nagarajan (flute).



Navaratri contest

Looking forward to

putting together an elaborate golu? Take part in the 'Kolu Kondattam' contest of The Hindu Downtown, which looks out for unique arrangements. Extra points for entries that include a pack of ITC Mangaldeep and Aroma Ghee in their arrangement. There is also a

special award will be given for entries that portray the theme 'life in a day in Chennai'

The Hindu Made of Chennai Kolu Kondattam is presented by Gopuram, co presented by Mangaldeep, Associate Partner: Aroma Ghee, Rajamanicka Mudaliyar Company, Education partner: Saraswathi Vidyalaya, Food partner: Madras Coffee House, Gift partners: Aachi, Medimix, Amman Sareez, Thiruvanmiyur Cotton House, Naga, A1 Chips, PS

Tamarind, Repute, Hanbao, Maestro Electric Cooker, RAS Chekku Oil

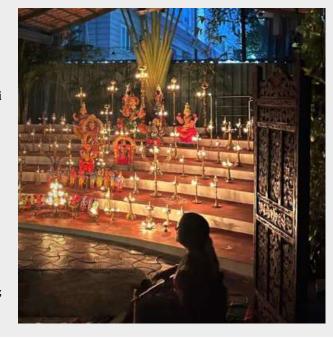
The last date to enter the contest is October 7. Upload your kolu photos on newsth.live/THKC2024CH or scan the QR code



Nine days of music

avaratri has immense cultural significance with different styles of music performed across the country. Organisers and artistes come up with unique events during these nine days. A look at what Chennai has to offer.

SunaadaLahari is back with its annual Suprabhata Sangeetha Seva at its Alwarpet venue. Solo and duet vocal concerts, open to rasikas, will take place at 5.30 a.m. Musicians will perform in the glow of earthern lamps. Artistes to perform include: Today: Mambalam Sisters; Oct. 5: Vivek Sadasivam; Oct. 6: Aishwarya Shankar; Oct. 7: Nisha Rajagopalan; Oct. 8: G. Ravikiran; Oct. 9: Sumathi Krishnan; Oct. 10: K. Gayatri; Oct. 11: Ashwath



Narayanan. The concert series concludes with the veena recital by Vasanthi Ramesh and Rajshri Ramakrishna on October 12, 5.30

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha has organised vocal and instrumental concerts (4.30 p.m. and 6.30 p.m.) as part of the nine-day festival. Today's concerts will be by Ramya Kiranmayi (4.30 p.m.) and Rithvik Raja (6.30 p.m.). Musicians to be featured on other days are: October 5: Padmashree Srinivasan followed by Sriranjani Santhanagopalan. Oct. 6: Deepika and Nandhika and Charulatha Mani. Oct. 7: N.S. Kamakshi and Chaitra Sairam. Oct. 8: Shruthi S. Bhat followed by Vijay Gopal (flute). Oct. 9: A. Shyam Prakash and Suryaprakash. Oct. 10: Malladi Sivanand Yasasvi and Srirangam Venkatanagarajan. Oct. 11: U. Jaya Vigneshwar (Mandolin) followed

by Prasanna Venkataraman. The series concludes with Vishruthi Girish's vocal concerts at 4.30 p.m. and K. Kumarswamy's Saxophone at 6.30 p.m. on October 12. The series is being held at P. Obul Reddy Hall, T. Nagar.

• Chennai Fine Arts presents a concert series(October 3-12). Today: C.K. Pavandeep. Oct. 5: Roopa Mulukutla Shastry. Oct. 6: Pathangi Brothers. Oct. 7: Sreeranjane Kaushik. Oct. 8: Adyar Amarabharathi Sathsangam will present Kamashi Pravaham, featuring the compositions of Lakshmi Viswanathan. Oct. 9: Shruthi Bhat. Oct. 10: Bangalore M. Nishanth. Oct. 11: Subhashree Ramachandran. Sashank Mallya's veena performance will be held on October 12 will bring the event to a close. All the concerts will be streamed live on cfacfa Facebook page at 11.30 a.m. daily.

Thematic performances



Lil Trails, in collaboration with Aalaap presents Lil Navaratri, a two-day celebration of the goddess through stories, music and dance on October 5 and 6 at Sastry Nagar, Chennai. The festival begins with Trayii (oct. 5, 11 a.m.), a choreographed production, conceived and presented by storyteller Janaki Sabesh, and Carnatic musician Madhuvanthi Badri.

'The Dancing Goddess' is the theme for the performance on October 6. It features performances by the students of Sheela Unnikrishnan, Renjith - Vijna, and Sushmitha Suresh. Each performance will be offered as an invocation to Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati, the three manifestations of Shakti,

A thematic presentation 'The Little Goddess' will be showcased at 5 p.m. Tickets are available at liltrails.com/lilnavaratri/