

# friday Review

THE HINDU

**Celebrating saint-poets**

Bolava Vitthal concert showcased the lyrical beauty of abhangs p2

**True colours of Thodi**

Bhavadhaarini Anantaraman conveyed the nuances of the raga p2

**EXPLORING KATHAK'S BOND WITH CINEMA**

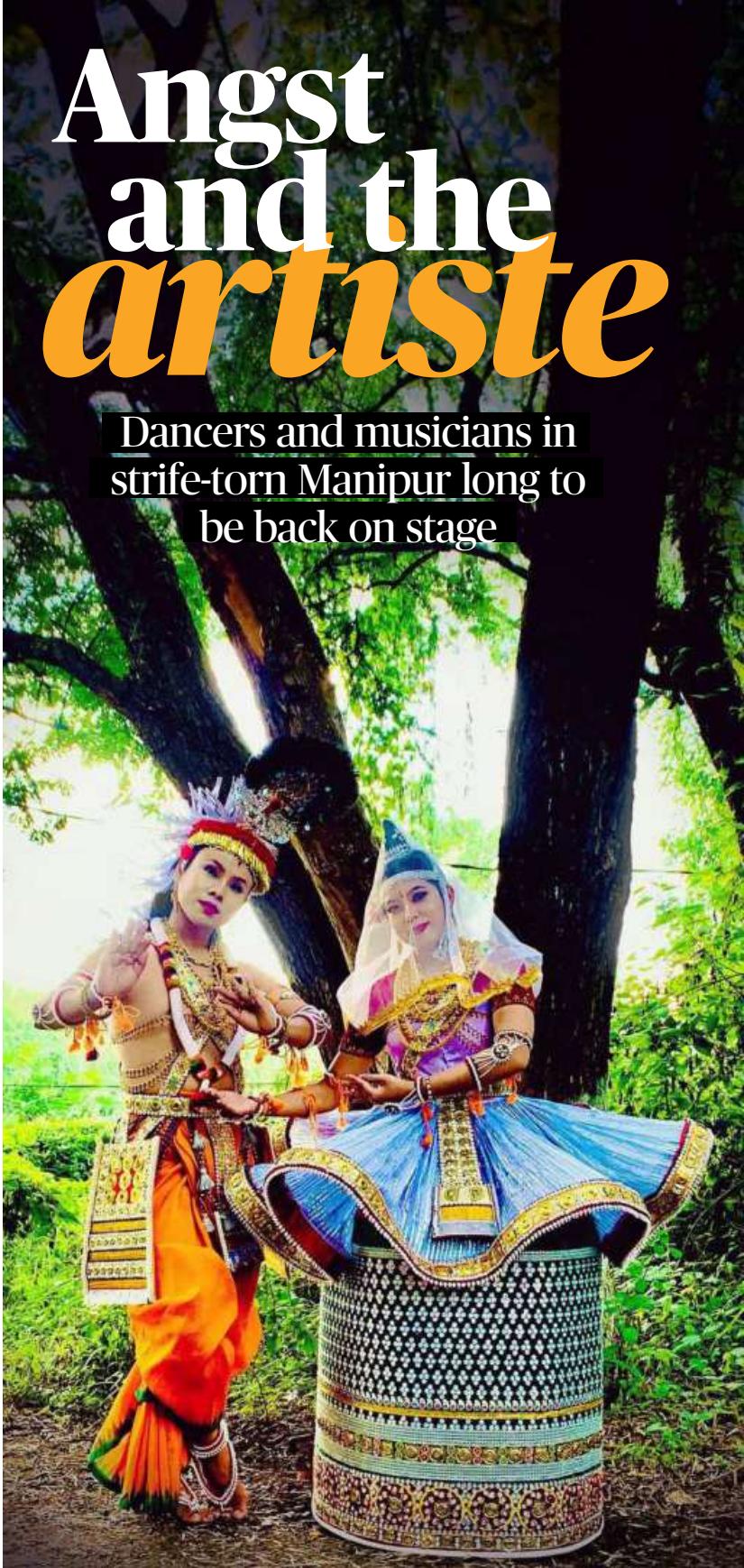
Siddhi Goel's research shows how the dance form influenced filmmaking p4

**On a hopeful note** (Clockwise from right) Bidyananda with Vanna Waheng; Akhu Chingangbam; a Pung Cholam artiste; Surjit Nongmeikapam with his students. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Sudipto Mullick**

**T**ravelling for pleasure or work is one thing, but travelling just to access the Internet is unheard of. Filmmaker Longjam Meena Devi had scheduled the post-production of her documentary *Andro Dreams* (2023), on the sexagenarian Laibi Devi, who helms an all-girls soccer team in a remote Manipuri village, a week before the submission-deadline for the International Film Festival of Kerala. Within four days of the breakout of the conflict in Manipur, even private Wi-Fi was snuffed. Initially, Meena, the first woman filmmaker from Manipur to receive a National Award, tried to make do with DIPR's (Directorate of Information and Public Relations) facilities but the waning net-speed was not conducive to heavy uploads. Though Meena somehow managed, many others, including artistes, have suffered immensely due to lack of connectivity.

At Manipuri Nartanalaya, dancer-scholar Yumlembam



## Angst and the artiste

Dancers and musicians in strife-torn Manipur long to be back on stage

**Chennai-bound**

Sinam Basu Singh and his wife Monika are delighted to travel to Chennai to perform at the Smriti Festival on August 3 at Kalakshetra. The young Manipuri dancer couple sees it as a sign of hope. "We want tourists back in our culturally-rich state. Manipur is home to more than 200 temples and several art forms. This is only our second performance since the violence broke out last May. I have decided to talk about the importance of peace and harmony before every performance," says Sinam.

Bidyananda Singh, a resident of Keishamthong in Imphal, rues that he couldn't participate in a Kolkata youth dance festival only because he couldn't receive any mail. Later, when the organisers called

Bidyananda, he couldn't travel because of the exorbitant air fare.

"I had to forego at least five shows. But the one I missed the most was the 2023 Sangai Kumhei festival, organised each year from November 21 to 30 by the Manipur Tourism Department," says Bidyananda, who is an assistant professor at Manipur International University.

Acclaimed contemporary choreographer-dancer Surjit Nongmeikapam (Bonbon) had to shelve the staging of his pet project 'Soul Strings', which aims to knit together all Manipuri communities. After shows at Churachandpur and Phayeng, close to Kuki valley, the next one had been planned at Haipi, a Thadou-Kuki village," says Surjit speaking from his Imphal-based Nachomi Arts Foundation's studio.

Though there is no blanket embargo, the locals are in no mood for recreation. Bidyananda, who was in the organising committee of the Viksit Bharat series presented by his teacher Thounaojam Haridas's institute Guru Sanaton Apunba Hari Sankirtan Neimashang on February 21 this year, said, "I cannot even explain how it felt when doing the event. We had deliberately booked a small-auditorium near the institute since we wanted fewer people to attend. We also avoided a commercial sound system and professional videographers. Nowadays, we do only daytime shows because it becomes risky after dark."

**Fear factor**

Rumours of organisers and artistes being attacked that initially emerged from Keishamthong have instilled fear in people's minds. The abduction of Akhu Chingangbam, singer-lyricist and founder of alternate folk-rock group Imphal Talkies, from his Khurai residence and release were widely reported.

Despite grave risks, practitioners are braving it out for sustenance. Without

performances, learning and rehearsal have become redundant. "I used to previously conduct classes for students of Manipur University (central) and Manipur University Of Culture (state) in my courtyard but since the place is visible from the street, I decided to shift indoors for the safety of the students and my family," says Bidyananda.

In contrast, Surjit, in keeping with his desire to "build a movement culture" is rethinking his approach to the art during these trying times. "I am planning to conduct lessons in the open so that people can either observe or join. The purpose is to soothe minds and souls."

Bidyananda is lucky to have a job; though his last month's salary has still not been paid. Some of his colleagues have taken up sundry jobs. Income for Surjit, who shuns grants, comes chiefly from renting out his mini-truck while his recently inaugurated multi-disciplinary Yumpham Arts Space has been converted into a makeshift boarding school for students of the burnt-down Moreh school, where his uncle was the teacher.

Then, there are the Shumaang Leela (Meitei courtyard theatre) artistes, who have also borne the brunt of the violence. This traditional theatre is popular for its 'Nupi Shabu' – male actors performing female roles.

With no platform to perform, these artistes have turned to construction work or are driving taxis and autorickshaws for a living. A few like Sagolsem Sana are trying to earn through online performances. "We also been making appeals for donations."

Sana, an award-winning actor, who lives in Paonabazar in Imphal, used to do 100 shows a month, almost three to fours shows a day, earning around Rs 1,200 per show. "The stage is my world and I cannot survive without it," says Sana, with anguish in her voice.

**N.C. Srinivasaraghavan**

**T**he unpredictability is what makes a T.M. Krishna concert special and his recent performance at the Asian College of Journalism's M. S. Subbulakshmi auditorium did not disappoint the audience in this respect.

Till today, Krishna is the only Carnatic musician who has the ability to elicit contrasting opinions from two music lovers who may even identify as his die-hard fans. His experiments with the format and manodharma could annoy one, while the other could squeal with joy at the attempt. Such is Krishna's spontaneity that even a padam, quite often sung by him, sounds different each time one hears it.

**Tagore's poem**

The auditorium, which is acoustically designed for performances without any form of electrical amplification, enabled the audience to hear even the micro sangatis that Krishna generously improvised in the pallavi of 'Yaarukagilum', a sringara padam, symbolic of rebellion. His demonstration of about half a dozen ways to end the phrase 'Pennem' exhilarated the listeners.

One of Arun Prakash's significant contributions to the arrangement is no doubt his no-fuss arudis; here it rounded up the anupallavi and carefully connected it to the charanam. The charanam ended with the phrase 'Kasugusena' at the upper gandham. A round of

## Triumph of the voice

Every little nuance was clearly heard at T.M. Krishna's mikeless concert



swaras was rendered by Krishna at this point with a set of whirlwind phrases that touched the lower and upper gandhams. Just when one thought this was not enough of a deviation, Krishna next chose to explore the mandra sthayi with a round of swaras at 'Enna' in the pallavi. One must say this was an astute choice to use the setting effectively as the auditorium facilitated even the lowest mandra

sthayi phrases to be heard clearly. One of the pieces that Krishna chose to present was 'Shubh sukh chain', a Hindustani translation of Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Bharoto Bhagyo Bidhata' whose first stanza is used as the national anthem. Rewritten by Subhas Chandra Bose with the help of writer Mumtaz Hussain and Colonel Abid Hasan Safrani, the song is a reimagining of the national

anthem and makes significant departures from the original text and melody.

Krishna mentioned that he chose this piece as certain verses in it echoed his thoughts on nationalism.

Possibility is what Krishna has shown the Carnatic music world from the beginning. Take for instance his dissection of the Surutti nishadam. Without going into many of its standard phrases, he chose to exhibit how much the madhyama to upper nishadam section can be exploited to get the best out of the raga. Next, he added the shadjam to pancham layer, later moving on to approaching the nishadam from the upper rishabham.

H.N. Bhaskar set out on a similar expedition to unearth the potential of 'Ni' in Surutti when Krishna interjected to infuse the kakali nishadam into the alapana to make it into a soulful Desh. Ultimately, however, the kaishi nishadam reigned supreme and wrestled itself back to become Brindavan Saranga. Muthuswami Dikshitar's 'Soundararajam' was rendered at a breezy pace leading up to the thani.

**The bird song**

Arun Prakash provided a seamless stream of soft strokes throughout the composition and his thani was a direct extension of this sophisticated approach. Some would even be bold enough to ask if what they heard was a 'Soundararajam' in the middle of that incessant mridangam flow – such was Arun's melodic presence that evening.

Eminent poet Perumal Murugan's poems on birds are filled with beautiful imageries and employ tasteful alliterations. His fascination with the Indian Roller

known as 'panangaada' in Tamil resulted in him going through the works of M. Krishnan, a world-renowned ornithologist. Tuned and presented by Krishnan in Khamas, the composition uses some characteristic phrases involving the kakali nishadam to highlight the unique features of the bird in the lines 'neela nira rakaiyai serkka viruthu sellumbodhu' and 'porambaa padakkendru paayum'. They talk about the bright blue markings on its wings, which are prominent in flight, and its tendency to display aerobatic twists and turns.

Asking Bhaskar to take up an alapana, Krishna observed as the violinist played a clear Mayamalavagowla alapana. During his turn, Krishna tactfully removed the daivatam to turn it into Jagannohini topping up the segment with superfast one-avartana swaras for 'Sobilli Saptaswara'.

Many in the audience were happy to hear him sing 'Bhare Panduranga' and felt that it was apt post Ashadi Ekadashi. When rendering 'Koluvamaregada' in Thodi, Krishna's niraval at 'Tambura jekoni' was punctuated by meaningful pauses where the harmonic drone of the two tamburas on stage accentuated the mood of the sahitya.

Krishna is a musician who has shown us how to unshackle art from orthodoxy. The only pledge we all must take is to allow diverse forms of artistic expression to co-exist in harmony, without one overpowering the other.

Vaishali K.S.

**B**olava Vitthal', an evening of abhangs (songs sung in praise of Vitthal of Pandharpur) was organised by Pancham Nishad on the occasion of Ashadi Ekadashi at Chowdaiah Memorial Hall in Bengaluru recently. It showcased the inexhaustible wealth of poetry of saints and mystics such as Gyaneshwar, Tukaram, Eknath, Namdev and Chokha Mela.

The 14th edition of the festival featured two renowned Hindustani vocalists – Devaki Pandit and Jayateerth Mevundi. Both the vocalists gave a fine start to the festival with a lyrical enunciation of 'Madhura Bhakti' through the familiar *gajar* – 'Jai jai ramakrishna hari' in the evening raag Yaman, embellishing the incantatory chant with creative improvisations.

Nikhil Phatak on the tabla, Sukhad Munde on the pakhawaj, Shadj Godkhindi on the bansuri, Vyasmurthy Katti on the samvadini and Suryakant Munde on the manjira enhanced the appeal.

During her solo rendition, Devaki Pandit paid glowing tributes to her two gurus Pt. Jitendra Abhishek and Kishori Amonkar by choosing to render the abhangs they had popularised. She commenced with saint Eknath's 'Ya pandariche sukh pahat dola' in raag Yaman. It describes the feeling experienced by the devotee when he beholds Vitthal in Pandharpur. Devaki's voice traversed through the higher octaves of Yaman in this abhang set to Deepchandi taal of 14 beats. Nikhil Phatak and Sukhad Munde were at their ebullient best.

**Rich musical tapestry**  
Devaki's prowess on raagdari sangeet was discernible in her rendition of the abhang 'Amha nakale jnana' composed by the Mahar saint of the 14th century, Chokha Mela. In her delineation, Devaki effortlessly touched upon raag Desh, Tilak Kamod, Brundavani Sarang and Miyan ki Malhar, weaving a rich musical tapestry for this abhang, sung often by Pt. Jitendra Abhishek. Improvisations of Shadj Godkhindi on the bansuri



Lyrical ode  
(Left)  
Jayateerth  
Mevundi.  
(Below) Devaki  
Pandit. PHOTOS  
COURTESY:  
PANCHAM NISHAD

# Songs of the minstrels

Saint-poets enriched Marathi literature with abhangs that are making a big presence on the concert stage



stood out.

Devaki surprised the audience by taking up a Purandaradasa composition 'Murutiyane nilliso madhava', which was one of the signature pieces of Pt. Bhimsen Joshi. Vyasmurthy Katti's samvadini accompaniment in raag Kaafi had an alluring expressivity. In her singing of another Chokha

Mela abhang 'Abir gulal udhalita rang natha ghari naache majhya sakha Panduranga', where the sant has a vision of his deity Vitthal dancing and laments about his inability to enter the temple as he is from a lower caste. Devaki's exploration of the emotions of bhakti and exultation through raags

Deshkar and Bhoop made it a sublime experience for the listeners.

Devaki's next took up the rare abhang by Muktabai, the younger sister of Sant Jnaneswar, 'Mahavarai daya kara taati ugada Jnaneswara'. She essayed raag Lalit Pancham interspersed with raag Marwa.

## Music for a cause



Aim for Seva presents 'Hey Govind: An Ode to Krishna', a fundraiser by Jayateerth Mevundi (vocal) and Pravin Godkhindi (flute). They will be accompanied by Narendra L. Nayak on the harmonium, Yashwant Vaishnav on the tabla, Sukhad Manik Munde on the pakhawaj and

Suryakant Gopal Surve on the side rhythm.

The evening features a selection of abhangs and bhajans.

The event is organised in support of Swami Dayananda Krupa Home, and will be held on July 27, 6.30 p.m. at The Music Academy. Tickets on mdnd.in or call 95000 60153.

Devaki concluded with the popular 'Bolava Vitthala, Pahawa Vitthala, Karava Vitthala, Jeeva Bhava' set to raag Marwa thaat ka vibhas.

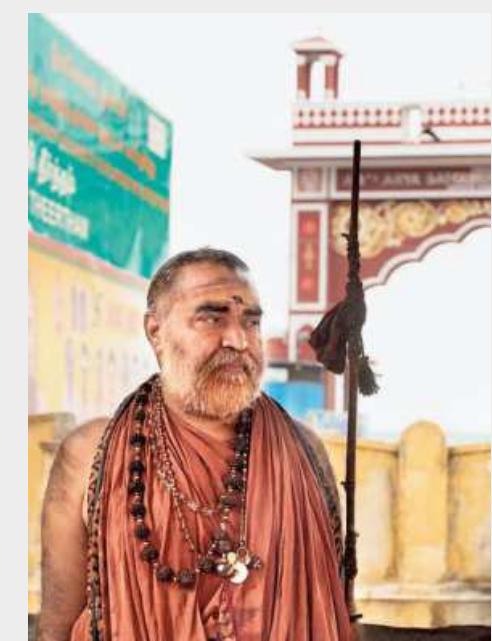
Jayateerth Mevundi began with the Sant Namdev abhang 'Pandaricha vaasa chandrabbage snan' in raag Abhogi Kanada, recreating its grand rendition by Pt Bhimsen Joshi. Aditya Oak on the samvadini enhanced the lyrical appeal of the composition. Acquiescing graciously to audience *farmayish*, Jayateerth sang the Kannada composition 'Vittala pidi enna kaiyya, Vittala Pandhariraya'.

## Popular song

With his evocative delineation of raags Bhimpalasi and Dhani, Jayateerth mesmerised the audience with complex gamaks. His rendition of 'Hari vittala aparampara, akar, makaar, kariti ha vichar' with flashes of Pahadi was a spirited presentation. This was followed by the immensely popular 'Tatikodi nibhakaya jagannatha vittalayya vittalayya', a tongue twister rendered flawlessly with finesse, in hues of Shuddh Kalyan.

The *piece de resistance* was Purandaradasa's 'Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma'. Jayateerth began with a alap in raag Shree and plunged into the expanse of Marwa Thaat Ka Vibhas raag and the famous composition on Lakshmi, the consort of Vitthal. He was ably supported by a vocal chorus and a tani avartan by Nikhil and Sukhad with the audience joining to sing 'Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma'.

# Continuing an age-old tradition



**S**ri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi visited Sri Ramanathaswami Devasthanam at Rameshwaram on July 17, 2024 to perform Gangabhishekam Shodashopachara puja to Sri Parvatavardhini Ambal Sametha Sri Ramanathaswami with the holy waters of Ganga brought from the yatra to Prayagraj and Varanasi in June 2023, signalling completion of the age-old custom of Kashi-Rameswaram yatra. Sri Chandrashekarendra Saraswathi, the 68th pontiff of Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam and Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, the 69th pontiff of the Peetam had performed the Kashi-Rameswaram yatra by foot from 1921-1943 and 1963-1977.

Sri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi fulfilled the age-old tradition of Pratishta of Saikata Parameshwara Linga carried from Dhanushkodi, Rameshwaram into the Ganga at Dashashwamedha Ghat on June 29, 2023. After nearly 28 months since visiting Dhanushkodi, the holy Sikata was immersed in Ganga river as per the practice and Ganga jalam was again taken. The Sikata was taken out at Dhanushkodi on the auspicious Ratha Saptami followed by Bhishtashtami on February 19, 2021 during the Acharya's Rameswaram yatra.

The 70th Shankaracharya commended our country's heritage while recollecting yatrads of Purvacharyas and appealed to follow the tenets of Dharma for a peaceful and harmonious life.

Earlier in the day, the Acharya performed the Chandramouleeshwara puja at Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam Sankara Matam at Agniteertham in Rameshwaram. Ekadashi Rudram and havan were performed with Gangajal at the Saraswathi Sannidhi.

## Spirit of Youth festival

The Music Academy conducts this year's Spirit of Youth Festival of Music and Dance from August 1 to 10 at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. The ten-day festival will feature music concerts at 6 p.m. followed by Bharatanatyam performances at 7.30 p.m. Schedule: August 1: S. Swarathmika (vocal) followed by Swathi Jaisankar (Bharatanatyam). August 2: Malladi Sivanand Yasavini and Kavya Ganesh. August 3: Samanvitha G. Sasidaran followed by M. Divya Laxmi's dance performance. August 4: Vinayak Vaidyanathan (veena) and Apeksha N. Kamath. August 5: Supriya Raja followed by P. Sundaresan. August 6: P. Vikram and K. Shahana. August 7: Nanditha Kannan followed by C.S. Anand's dance recital. August 8: Vishwas Hari (mandolin) and E.B. Sreelakshmi. August 9: Dhanush Anantharaman and Akhilesh Vadari. The line up concludes (August 10) with B. Atchayaharini's vocal concert at 6 p.m. followed by P.N. Sowmya Laxmi's Bharatanatyam performance.

# Show of promise

Rishabh Kaushik exuded confidence in raga essays but needs to further hone his skills



## P. Srihari

**W**hat stood out in Rishabh Kaushik's Nadhasangam concert for Narada Gana Sabha, held at its Mini Hall recently, was his diligence. There was a good mix of ragas and composers and Rishabh showcased his talent adequately. He was accompanied by Indhalur Shyam Raghav on the violin and Vishnuvardhana K on the mridangam.

The young vocalist began with the lively Kadhanakuthulam varnam 'Saranagata vatsale' by Calcutta Krishnamurthy. He then proceeded to present Tyagaraja's 'Narada gana

*lola*' in Atana, set to Rupakam. While the rendition was generally neat, the swarathanas were sometimes off the mark.

After a crisp raga alapana of Vachaspathi, Rishabh presented Papanasam Sivan's 'Paratphara parameswara'. He would do well to keep in mind that splitting the compound word charanaaravinda (charana and aravinda) into charana and ravinda (in the anupallavi line 'Sundara charanaaravinda ananda') would rob of both the linguistic beauty and the meaning. While it may not always be possible to break compound words perfectly while singing, owing to the demands of musical aesthetics, the first

While the concert underlined Rishabh's promise, it also highlighted areas needing attention, such as dictional fidelity, gamaka felicity, modulation and emotional engagement with the compositions. With more guidance, hard work and exposure, he can aspire to establish himself in the field.

sangati at least needs to be rendered properly for the sake of expressing cognisance. And, it is 'Subrahmanyam thandhaiye', and not 'Subrahmanyam thandhaiye' in conclusion of the charanam. Rishabh then negotiated the niraval and swara sequence phase at 'Ari ayanum kaanaa' with sufficient assurance.

Oothukadu Venkata Kavi's poignant Ritigowla song 'Enna punniyam seidaeno' in Misra Chapu was followed by the main kriti 'Kaliyuguntageda' by Tyagaraja. After a satisfactory exploration of Kiravani, Rishabh presented the song competently, with niraval and swaraprastara at 'Bhagavata agresarulaku'. He capped off the recital with a moving thillana in Misra Sivaranjani composed by Maharajapuram Santhanam.

**Vibrant thani**  
Shyam Raghav's bow work was tidy throughout. His raga essays, both Vachaspathi and Kiravani, were evocative. Vishnuvardhana's percussion support was deft, and his thani for the two-kalai Adi tala was vibrant.

While the concert underlined Rishabh's promise, it also highlighted areas needing attention, such as dictional fidelity, gamaka felicity, modulation and emotional engagement with the compositions. With more guidance, hard work and exposure, he can aspire to establish himself in the field.

# Aesthetically built

Bhavadhaarini's singing captured the spirit of the kritis

## H. Ramakrishnan

**B**havadhaarini Anantaraman's recital for Madhuradhwani made one feel she utilised her talents to give full expression to the lyrics as visualised by the vaggeyakara. This was particularly evident in her elaboration of Thodi, a Sarvaswara gamaka varika rakti raga. Thodi Sitaramayya of the 19th century is said to have sung this raga for eight days.

Bhavadhaarini did full justice to the alapana traversing across octaves with ease. Her imaginative rendering, which captured the spirit of the tradition and the kriti were proof enough of her training under the legendary D.K. Pattammal.

The kriti that she took up was 'Kamalambe' (Rupakam), Dikshitar's Navaravana Dhanya Keerthanam, in the eighth (sambhodana prathama) vibhakti on the goddess at Tiruvarur. Exhaustive niraval and swaraprastaras were at the charanam, 'Sakala loka nayike sangeetha rasike'. The concluding swara korvai was built up aesthetically.

Bhavadhaarini opened her concert with the timeless Sri Raga varnam, 'Saami ninne kori' by Karur Devudu Iyer. It was followed by Tyagaraja's Asaveri composition 'Maapala velasi ika', a favourite of the DKP school. She next chose Dikshitar's 'Visalakshim visvesi', which has a radiant built-in jathiswaram. Bhavadhaarini preceded the kriti with a beautiful alapana of raga Kasiramakriya. She rendered a

niraval and swaraprastara at 'Kasiraajin kapalini'. The shloka in Nadanamakriya 'Kamsena prerita kapi poorthana' led to the rendering of Narayana Tirtha's Tarangam, 'Mangalani thanoathu'.

Though not as exhaustive as Thodi, Bhavadhaarini's Suddha Dhanyasi alapana was a well-planned attempt. She rendered it as a prelude to Dikshitar's 'Sri parthasarathina' with a lively chittaswaram. She also rendered apt swaraprastara to the kriti.

Harikesanallur Muthaiah Bhagavat's contribution to Carnatic music is immense. He was a prolific composer of several musical forms including Tana Varnams, Pada Varnams, Daru Varnams, Ragamalikas and several group kritis. And Bhavadhaarini chose one from his group kritis for this concert – 'Mantrini mathanga thanaye' (from 'Chamundamba ashtottara satha nama kritis') in raga Hemavathi.

**High on bhakti**  
'Saanandam kamalamanooharina' is a beautiful Ragamalika consisting of Kamalamanoohari, Hamsadhwani, Revagupti and Tarangini composed by Swati Tirunal on Padmanabha. It has

chittaswaras for the ragas. Bhavadhaarini's rendering of this kriti was deeply devotional.

After a shloka on Kachi Ekamban, she rendered the popular Revati kriti by Thanjavur Sankara Iyer, 'Mahadeva siva sambho' yet another favourite of the DKP school. Harikesanallur Muthaiah Bhagavat's Kapi piece 'Kallio hari charanamoktiye' followed at a fast pace.

Bhavadhaarini's repertoire also included the Oothukkadu kriti 'Naadamurali gana vilola' in Hami Kalyani with jathis and swaras. It commences with Adi tala tisra nadai but the charanam is in chatusra nadai. She concluded her concert with the 29th Tiruppavai in Madhyamavati, 'Sitram sirukale'.

Bhavadhaarini was accompanied by violinist Neela Jayakumar, a disciple of maestro M. Chandrasekaran, who played evocative alapanas in Thodi, Kasiramakriya and Suddha Dhanyasi. Her responses to swaraprastaras deserve special mention.

V.R. Jayakumar, disciple of mridangam exponent Thanjavur Ramadas, enriched the concert with soft strokes. His thani following the Thodi kriti in Rupakam was a delight.





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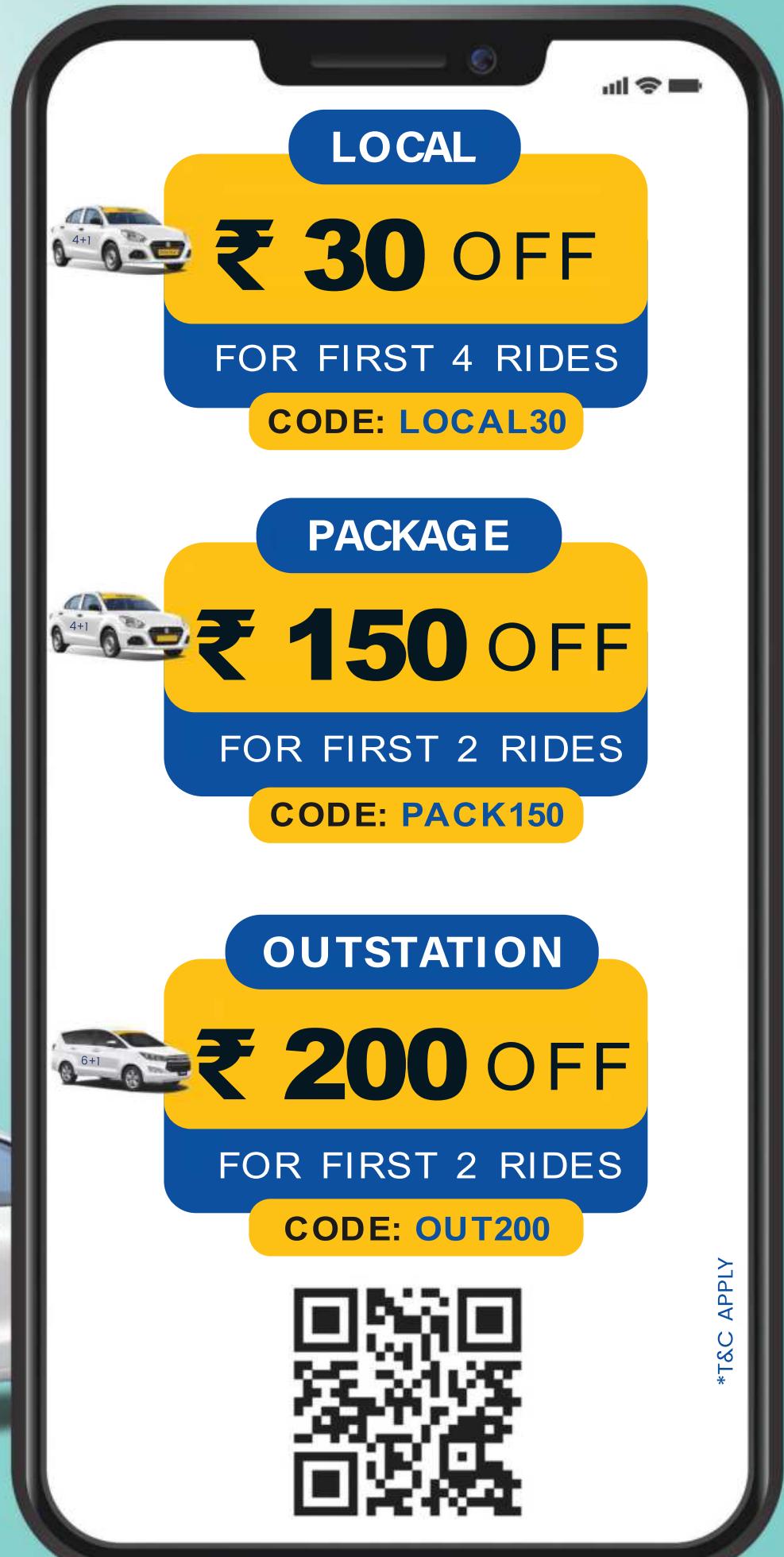
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**The best of both worlds** (From left) Madhubala in *Mughal-e-Azam*; Gopi Krishna with actor Sandhya in *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje*; and Siddhi Goel. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES



## Dedicated to Pt. Birju Maharaj

Kathak Darpan Institute presents Smriti Festival in memory of Pt Birju Maharaj from August 1 to 4 at Kalakshetra Foundation.

Vyjayanthimala Bali is the chief guest. Padma Subrahmanyam will receive the award instituted in the name of the legendary dancer. This will be followed by 'Kuchelopakhyanam', a Kathakali performance, by Sadanam Balakrishnan. On August 2 Saswati Sen will perform at 5.50 p.m., Priyadarshini Govind (Bharatanatyam; 6.30 p.m.) and Uma Dogra (Kathak; 7.20 p.m.). Day 3: Tejaswini Sathe and group (Kathak; 5.50 p.m.), Siman Basu Singh (Manipuri; 6.30 p.m.) and Braga Bessell (Bharatanatyam; 7.20 p.m.). The festival closes with Indu and Nidheesh (Bharatanatyam; 5.50 p.m.), Sunanda Nair (Mohiniyattam; 6.30 p.m.) and Neha Banerjee and Kalashram group (Kathak; 7.20 p.m.).



## Theatre Shraddha's next

Theatre Shraddha is all set to stage its latest production *Kongai Thee, Ee Pad* on July 27 and 28, 6.30 p.m., at Alliance Francaise, Nungambakkam. Tickets available on insider.in.

# A whirl of glamour

Dancer-teacher Siddhi Goel's research project looks at Kathak's bond with cinema

Shailaja Tripathi

**R**emember the number of times you have watched the iconic song 'Chalte chalte' from the Hindi film *Pakeezah*. Apart from the dreamy eyes of Meena Kumari, you would have noticed the two dancers in the background, dressed in pearly white Anarkalis, cutting a picture of grace and poise. The song is unimaginable without the two dancers, yet they remain unsung. Kathak dancer Siddhi Goel took it upon herself to find the identities of the two. She looked through IMDB data, spoke to actors of the time and watched the credits of several films from the period. Her research didn't yield confirmed answers but indicated that the two could be Leela and Sujata.

Siddhi's biggest source of information was Anjana Mumtaz, a disciple of Pt. Gauri Shanker, who choreographed the song. Anjana was on the sets of *Pakeezah*, especially during the shooting of the song.

Siddhi embarked on a research journey (supported by an arts research grant from India Foundation for the Arts) to trace the presence of Kathak in Hindi cinema over a period of 100 years. "It's a work in progress. People can support my research by sharing information ([https://www.instagram.com/allthings\\_kathak/](https://www.instagram.com/allthings_kathak/))."

### Focus on choreographers

"I have focussed not just on the dance songs in films but also on choreographers such as B. Sohanlal, B. Hirral and Gopi Kishan. They were exponents in Kathak. Even some of the

well-known actors of the time including Jeevankala, Rani, Padma Khanna, Jayshree T and Bela Bose had learnt the dance form. Then there were dance assistants and background dancers, who were basically classical dancers. My research extended up to the arrival of Madhuri Dixit and includes creations of Sanjay Leela Bhansali. I have also explored the contemporary trends in Kathak as far as cinema is concerned," says the Delhi-based artiste.

### Creating a dance piece

Choreographies such as 'Piya tose naina lage re' from *Guide* (1965), 'Hothon pe aisi baat from *Jewel Thief* (1967), 'Thade rahiyo o banke yaar' and 'Chalte Chalte' from *Pakeezah* (1972) by Sohanlal, Hirral, Pt. Lacchu Maharaj and Gauri Shanker respectively impacted the aesthetics of dance in films. Siddhi's research focussed on the process of creating a dance piece and how song and dance took the movie's narrative forward.

Siddhi wanted to understand the reason behind why these artistes made a shift from classical to cinema. Was it because patronage for the art was on the decline? Kathak's repertoire was also largely impacted by the tawaifs, whose lives inspired many films of the time. Songs such as 'Lagat karajwa main chot', 'Thade rahiyo o banke yaar' and 'Mohe panghat pe nandlal' are proof of dadra, thumri and kajri finding a place in kathak.

According to Siddhi, who holds a Masters in Arts and Aesthetics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, the close interaction between classical legends and artistes of the film world resulted in classics such as *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Pakeezah*. These movies are still



considered works of art. "I was keen to highlight how dancers were an integral part in the making of these films. For instance, in 'Teere nazara dekhenge' from *Pakeezah*, choreographed by Pt. Gauri Shanker, the entire dance sequence supports storytelling. So my study was not just about its aesthetics but also about a method of choreography that enhanced the emotional impact of the story."

Siddhi has tried to go beyond the big three magnum opuses: *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan*. "One of my favourite mujra songs is 'Ye raat phir na aayegi' from *Mahal* (1949), choreographed by Pt. Lacchu Maharaj. The dance sequence stands out for its impeccable choreography and the way it has been shot."

*Heeramandi*'s success is a testimony to Kathak's continuing bond with celluloid. In its journey from royal courts and celluloid to the proscenium, Kathak has been deeply impacted by changing historical, social and cultural milieus.

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## CALENDAR



### Rhythm workshop

The Music Academy, has organised a percussion workshop 'Playing between the line' - An approach to Kanjira accompaniment for students and rasikas on July 27, 10 a.m. - 12.15 p.m., at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Kanjira artiste V. Anirudh Athreya conducts the session. For registration and other details contact 2811 2231 or 2811 5162. The programme is organised under the endowment, instituted by Dr S.A.K Durga, in memory of her father S.A. Venkataraman.

### Bhajan competition

Sri Radha kalyana Mahotsava Seva Committee, Nanganallur, will conduct a bhajan competition for those in the age group of 20 and below, on August 11. Schools and bhajan mandals can participate. Entries must be mailed to vittalapandurang05@gmail.com. For details call 98415 43054 or 99624 50746.



### Vocal concert

Musiri Chamber presents the vocal concert by Bharat Sundar on July 28, 4.01 p.m. He will be accompanied by Sayee Rakshit on the violin and N.C. Bharadwaj on the mridangam. Venue: 48/2, (Old no: 28/2,), Musiri Subramiam Road, Mylapore.

### Workshop for dancers and actors

Basement 21 is organising a workshop 'Interplay' by inter-disciplinary artiste Andrea Hackl on August 3 and 4 (10 a.m. to 2 p.m.) at Goethe-Institut. The workshop is open to dancers and actors. To register send a mail to mail.basement21@gmail.com by July 31.

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