

# friday Review

THE HINDU

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# Folk and Freedom

How Munnetram, a koothu performance, proved to be a social leveller

**A. Mangai**

**K**. Velur village, Arcot taluk, Ranipet district, recently busted with youthful energy, kindred spirits and pride. The stage near the Uthiragiri Amman temple in the village, with two statues dedicated to Kalavai Ponnusami and Tamil scholar Prof. M. Varadarasan, speaks of the village's long-term involvement in their heritage of Koothu and Tamil.

The village hosted the *Munnetram* (Progress) project of

Kattaikkuttu training programme in three villages in the surrounding area, sharing the shortened versions of their new koothu along with Carnatic music (Ashwath and team), Bharatanatyam (Sangeeta Isvaran and Mookambikai trained girls of Katradi Centre in Kalavai village) and multiple folk forms (Nanbarkal team from Chennai). The overnight event began at 9 p.m. and lasted till 6.30 a.m. The project was led by Thilagavathi Palani.

Overnight Koothu performances are not new in Northern Tamil Nadu. But the presence of a young audience through the night, the

performances of urban and rural groups, the mix of classical and folk forms and the inclusive caste and gender dynamics were certainly refreshing.

Though we think that breaking the fault lines of the urban-rural divide in the performing arts in Tamil Nadu is a recent phenomenon, it actually has its own unique history.

When culture in India is becoming homogenised, the home-grown artistes' growing desire to critically engage with their art forms is heartening. This engagement has been crucial in bringing about a

change in the contemporary context – of being rooted yet accessible.

Village leader Nandakumar was happy that a Carnatic music concert was staged for the first time there. While the mangalavadyam (nagaswaram and thavil, three of each) featured a female artiste, the North Chennai-based Nanbarkal group led by Deepan included school and college students and employed people. They performed Parai, Silambam, Karagam, Poikkaalkuthirai and Mayillattam.

Deepan shared how these art forms were livelihood options and skills to entertain and create awareness for members of the group.

The three Koothu performances – Pudheri Pillaiavakkam (trained by A. Kandeepan), Veliya Nallur (taught by Arimuthu aka Babu) and K. Velur led by Thilagavathi herself – at the night-long event also highlighted the effort to erase the socio-cultural divide. The stories performed were Vilvalaippu / Draupathi's Marriage, Saindhavan Garva Bangam and Karna Moksham. Mythology was employed to establish a connect with the audience. The purpose was to make them think through familiar stories.

At the culmination of a three-month long training, the first Koothu group had a total of 24 artistes in the age group of seven to 18. Kandeepan mentions how almost 50 of them came for the audition. The second group had a mix of professional artistes and students. *Karna Moksham* was



**Breaking new ground** (From far left) Thilagavathi Palani; and from *Munnetram*. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

performed by a mixed gender group, predominantly by Dalit youth.

While most of the trainers and musicians in all the three villages studied together at P. Rajagopal's Kattaikkuttu Gurukulam, many of the younger artistes have been working with Thilagavathi at Shri Krishna Kattaikkuttu Kuzhu. "I am passionate about training young enthusiasts. We need them to take this movement forward. It's a rewarding experience because they come with their own set of new ideas and approaches", says Thilagavathi. She had been dreaming of this project for three years. Educationist Prema Rangachari of Bhuvana Foundation helped crystallise it.

Way back in the 1980s, the Madras Craft Foundation initiated the introduction of folk forms in Chennai schools. Scholar and writer V.R. Devika worked on it for almost a decade. In 1990, Rajagopal and his wife Hanne de Bruin started the residential koothu training gurukulam

at Punjarasanthalangal. They admitted boys and girls from different caste groups. In fact, Thilagavathi is one of the first graduates of the gurukulam. However, the sustenance of the school is becoming increasingly difficult with no State recognition or funding.

Thilagavathi, who broke new ground as a woman koothu artiste, has been reaching out to women and encouraging them to use the art form to better their lives. In this journey, she is often joined by trained Bharatanatyam dancer Sangeeta Isvaran, whose NGO Katradi works on bringing about social and cultural interventions through the arts.

For art can change how communities are perceived. In that sense, *Munnetram* was more than a performative event, it removed the barriers to progress.

*The writer is a theatre director and translator.*

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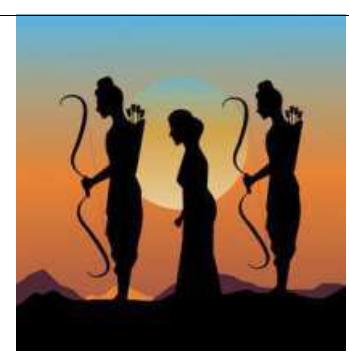


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## CELEBRATORY NOTES

No Indian festival or religious and dance event is complete without music performances. So here's the line-up for Ram Navami.



**Chennai Fine Arts** has organised Dasarathy Sangeetotsavam from April 7 to 10. The following concerts will take place at Krishna Mandiram, Tiruvanmiyur. April 7, 5.30 p.m.: students of Madhurya Music School and 6.30 p.m.: Ragasudha Balasubramanian (vocal). March 8, 5.30 p.m.: Students of Karpagam Sangeetha Vidyalaya and 6.30 p.m.: Lavanya V (vocal). March 9, 5.30 p.m.: Students of Gana Surabhi Music Academy and 6.30 p.m.: Adithya

Mohan (vocal). March 10, 5.30 p.m.: Students of Sowparnika Sangeetha Vidyalayam and 6.30 p.m.: Nagai Selva Muthu (vocal).

**Bharatiya Vidyabhawan**,

Mylapore presents a thematic group production 'Parishvanga Pattabhishekam' by Anita Guha's Bharathanjali on April 6 (6.30 p.m.) at its main auditorium. The programme is open to all.

**ISKCON**, Anna Nagar, has organised special programmes on April 6 at Kola Perumal Chetty Vaishnav Senior Secondary School, Arumbakkam. It will feature bhajan, a skit on Rama, a talk by Bhanu Swami Maharaj, and discourse on Rama.

**Srirama Bhajanai Mandiram**, Kettavarampalayam, celebrates the 119th year mahotsavam from April 6 to 15. The line-up includes Veda parayanam, Akhanda bhajan, Divyaprabandham and Sita kalyanam. The festival concludes with Anjaneya utsavam.

ராமருக்கு உதவிய அணில் போல... ஊர் குடி தேர் மீழப்பது போல...  
மன்னர்கள் வழியில் ஆலயத் திருப்பணி செய்வோம்... வாருங்கள் பக்தர்களே...  
மதுரை அழகர்கோவில் அருகே பொய்கைக்கரைப்படியில் தொடங்கப்பற்றிருக்கும்  
**ஸ்ரீ மஹா பெரியவா ஆலயத் திருப்பணியில்  
பங்கேற்க அன்பு வேண்டுகோள்**

பூசலார் நாயனார்... சிவபெருமானுக்கு ஒரு ஆலயம் கட்ட வேண்டும் என நினைத்து, தன்னிடம் அதற்கான வசதி தில்லாத போது மனதிலேயே ஆலயம் கட்டுவது போல நினைத்துக் கொண்டார், எப்படி? இன்று வானம் தோண்டுகிறோம். அஸ்திவாரம் போடுகிறோம். கட்டிடம் எழும்புகிறது. கோபுரம் கட்டுகிறோம் என ஒரு கோயிலை கட்ட எத்தனை நாட்களாகுமோ அத்தனை நாட்களும் மனதாலேயே கோயில் கட்டினார்.

சிவனின் திருவிலையாடலாக... அதே சமயத்தில் சோழ மன்னர் ஒருவரும் சிவனுக்கு கோவில் கட்ட, பூசலார் நாயனார் கட்டிய மனக்கோயிலில் எழுந்தருளிய சிவபெருமான் மன்னர் மூலமாக அவரது பக்தியை உலகுறியச் செய்தார். பூசலார் நாயனாரின் திருத்தில் எழுந்த கோயில் என்பதால், சௌன்னை அருகே திருநீற்றுவுரில் “இருதயால்ஸ்வரர்” என்ற பெயரில் இன்றும் திருக்கிறது இக்கோயில்.

### பாக்கியத்தை தவறவிடலாமோ?

சொந்தமாக நமக்கென ஒரு வீடு கட்டுவதே குதிரைக் கொம்பு! எனும் போது கிறைவனுக்கு கோயில் கட்டுவது அவ்வளவு எளிய விஷயமா? ஒரு கோயிலுக்கான திருப்பணியில் நாம் பங்கெடுக்கும் வாய்ப்பு வருகையில் நாம் அதை தவற விட்டு விடலாமா? எவ்வளவு மயிரிய பாக்கியம் அது!

**குந்தனைக்கடல் காஞ்சி மகா பெரியவர் ஸ்ரீ செக்ரேந்தீர் சுர்வநி ஸ்வாமிகள் அருளால் இதோ அந்த வாய்ப்பு உங்களைத் தேடி வந்திருக்கிறது.**

புண்ணிய திருத்தலமான 'திருமாலிருஞ்சோலை' எனப்படும் மதுரை கள்ளமூகர் கோயில் மலை அழவாரத்தில், காஞ்சி ஸ்ரீ மகா பெரியவருக்குத் திருக்கோயிலை அமைக்க மூக்கிறது 'மதுரை அனுவத்தின் அனுகிரஹம்'.

கள்ளமூகர் திருக்கோயிலின் தீர்த்தக்குளம் அமைந்திருக்கும் பொய்கைக்கரைப்படியில், இயற்கை எழில் கூழ் பொலிவுற அமையவிருக்கிறது. இந்தக் கோயில். இதற்கான பூர்வாங்க பணிகள் கடந்த 6-3-2025 அன்று தொடங்கப்பற்றுது.

மதுரை, S.S.காலனி, எண்.13, பொன்மேளி நாராயனன் ரோட்டல் 'ஸ்ரீ காஞ்சி மகா பெரியவா கிருஹம்' என்னும் கோயிலை நிர்வகித்து நடத்தி வரும் 'அனுவத்தின் அனுகிரஹம்' நிறுவனர் நெல்லலை பாலு அவர்களின் சீரிய முயற்சியால் அமையவிருக்கிறது இந்தக்கோயில். அடுத்த ஓராண்டுக்குள் இந்தக் கோயில் கட்டுமானம் பூர்த்தி பெற்று ஸ்ரீ காஞ்சி மகா பெரியவா சுந்திரசேகரேந்தீர் சுர்வநி ஸ்வாமிகளின் அருள் ஆசியோடு கும்பாபிஷேகம் செய்யப்பட இருக்கிறது.

அவரது அருளாசியைப் பெற்ற பக்தர்கள் "ராமருக்கு உதவிய அணில் போல", ஊர் குடி தேர் மீழப்பது போல" இந்தப் புனிதத் திருப்பணியில் பங்கு பெறும் அரிய வாய்ப்பினைப் பயன்படுத்திக் கொள்ள அன்போடு அழைக்கிறோம்.

**எப்படி உதவலாம்?** இத்திருப்பணிக்கு பண்மாக மட்டுமேயில் கட்டுத் தளவாட சாமான்கள், இதர பொருட்களாகவும் வாங்கிக் கொடுக்கலாம். கோயில் அமையவிருக்கிற பீப், கட்டுமானத்தைச் சேர்த்து சதுர அடி ஒன்றுக்கு ரூ.3,500 ஒதுகும்.

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கோயில் அமைவதற்கான செலவுகள் பல லட்சங்களைத் தொடுவதால் ரூ.1.லட்சம் மற்றும் அதற்கு மேல் நால்காடையாகப் பங்களிப்பு செய்யும் கொடையாளர்களின் பெயர்கள் கோயில் கல்வெட்மலும் பொறுக்கப்பட இருக்கிறது.

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மதுரை அழகர் கொவில் அருகே பொய்கைக்கரைப்படியில் அமைய இருக்கும் ஸ்ரீ மஹாபெரியவா கோவில் கட்டுமான பணி தொடக்க விழாவில் மதுரை ராமகிருஷ்ணமடம் தலைவர் சுவாமி நித்ய தீபானந்தா குத்து விளக்கேற்றி தொடங்கி வைத்தார். அருகில் இடமிருந்து ஜெயபாரத் ஹோம்ஸ் நிர்வாக இயக்குனர் ஜெயக்குமார், தமிழ்நாடு சட்டமன்ற எதிர்க்கட்சி துணைத் தலைவர் ஆர்.பி. உதயகுமார், அனுவத்தின் அனுகிரகம் நிறுவனர் நெல்லலை பாலு, வழக்கறிஞர் புதூர் ராமகிருஷ்ணன், நந்தினி ரியல் எஸ்டேட் அதிபர் எம்.ஆர்.பிரபு, ஆடிட்டர் சேது மாதவா ஆகியோர் உள்ளனர்.

## மதுரையின் அடசயப் பாத்திரம் டிரஸ்ட் நீங்களும் உதவலாமோ...

Regd. No. 4-50/2021

கிழவாதுவர்களுக்கு உணவு வழங்குவது முதாதையர்களுக்கு நீதி கொடுந்து புண்ணியை கிடைக்கும்.

மதுரையில் வீதியோரத்தில் உணவுக்காக தவித்துக் கொண்டு கிருக்கிறவர்களுக்கு "மதுரையின் அடசயப் பாத்திரம்" என்ற அமைப்பை தொடங்கி கடந்த 1400 நாட்களுக்கு மேலாக தினந்தோறும் 300 பேருக்கு உணவு வழங்கி வருகிறோம். தங்களது திருமண நாள், பிறந்த நாள், குழந்தைகளின் பிறந்த நாள், முதாதையர்களின் நினைவு நாள் போன்ற நாட்கள், பிற நாட்களிலும் இந்த புனிதப் பணிக்கு உதவிட அன்புடன் வேண்டுகிறோம். வாழும் பயிரை கண்டபோதுதான்மை வாழுனோன் - வள்ளலார்

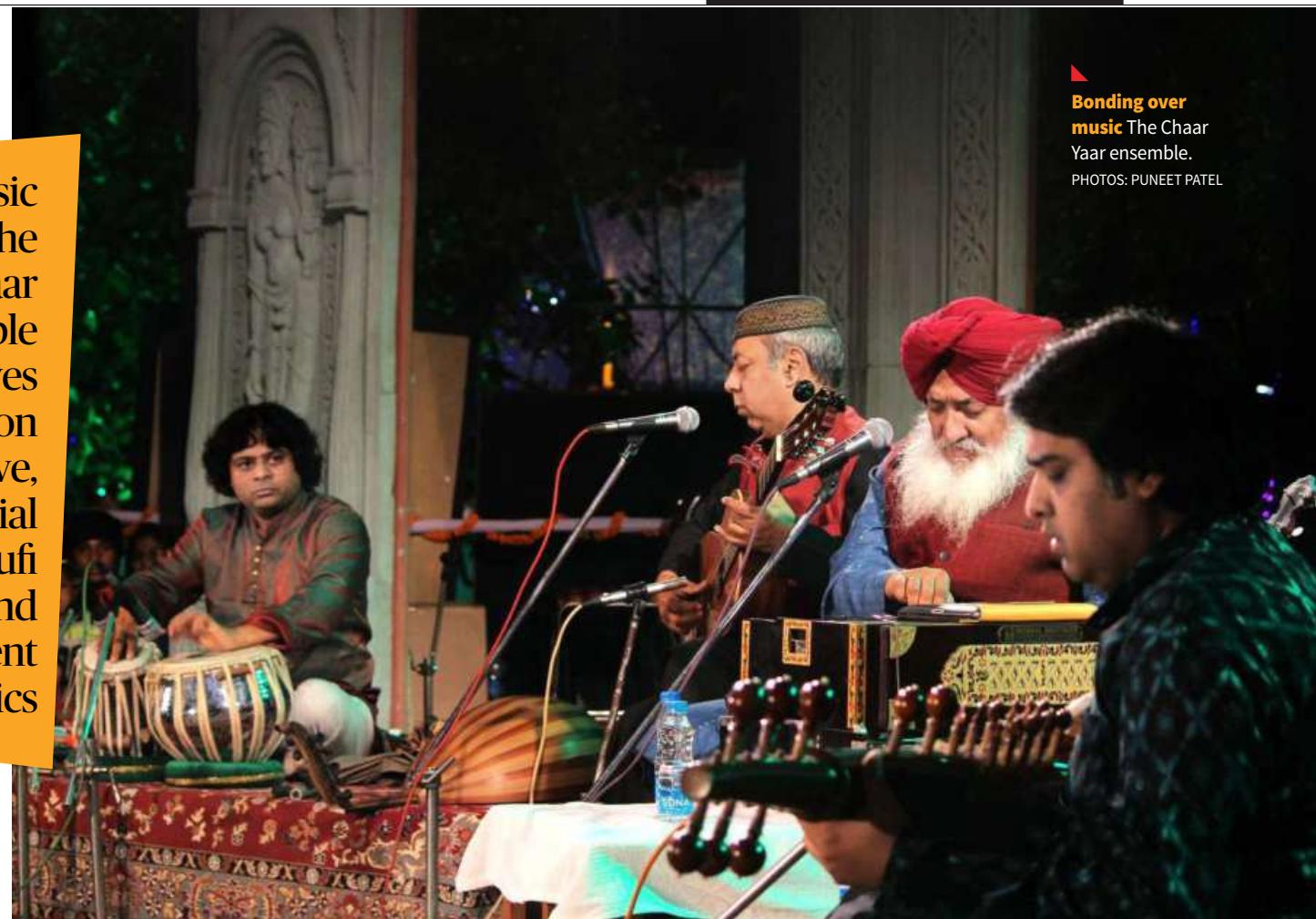
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The music of the Chaar Yaar ensemble derives inspiration from love, social justice, Sufi poetry and turbulent politics



Bonding over music The Chaar Yaar ensemble.

PHOTOS: PUNEET PATEL

Charumathi Supraja

The music of the Chaar Yaar ensemble demonstrates how difference need not be a big deal. It's not just the religious identities of the band members that often finds mention. Nor that they sing medleys blending Kabir with the Beatles, or Bertolt Brecht with Bulleh Shah. The four musicians casually dip into multiple musical genres, creating a melange of songs that are as pleasing as thought-provoking.

The songs the ensemble presented at the Sacred Spirit Festival in Jodhpur, were born in diverse socio-political and cultural contexts. They conveyed merriment and mysticism. Images of bliss or "the dance of the intoxicated"; of clay jumping on the potter's wheel; of a world in which "there's nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too" filled the air when Madan Gopal Singh, Deepak Castelino, Pritam Ghosal and Amjad Khan performed at Chokhelao Bagh (once a fruit orchard on the sprawling premises of the Mehrangarh Fort). Their set-list merged literature, poetry, philosophy, music and theatre, with no trace of heaviness.

Chaar Yaar's genesis begins

## Four friends and their music



in friendship, deep engagement with social justice values, Sufi poetry and turbulent politics. Madan Gopal and the late Safdar Hashmi (founder of street-theatre group Jana Natya Manch) met through Safdar's brother Sohail Hashmi. Both teachers of

English Literature, Safdar and Madan Gopal watched politically charged plays and faced the hard times of Emergency together. Later, it was Safdar Hashmi who ordered Madan Gopal to come over and listen to cassettes that Sohail had brought from Pakistan.

Madan Gopal was so moved by the voices of Tufail Niazmi and Allan Fakir that he had to take many breaks while listening to them. "They shaped my musical journey. Tufail more so, because of the language affinity," says Madan Gopal. As he listened to the music, Safdar Hashmi plied him with cups of tea and cooked him a meal. "Safdar saw that I was emotionally distraught. He packed the cassettes and handed them to me," recalls Madan Gopal. They were played on loop in Madan Gopal's household for months thereafter, his family sharing the passion for both music and immersive listening.

"I started singing Heer Ranjha because I heard Tufail Niazmi and that was only because of Safdar Hashmi," says Madan Gopal. Later, "the universe conspired" to get him to sing with Tufail Niaz, Allan Fakir and Iranian Sufi singer Shahram Nazeri (whose voice he had fallen in love with). Before that came his foray into street-theatre as a sutradhar for Safdar Hashmi's plays during the rise of militancy in Punjab. He later sang for theatre, art films and at social gatherings in Delhi households (with his painter-friend Manjit Bawa, accompanying him on a hand drum or dholak). At one such gathering, Madan Gopal met

Deepak Castelino, a guitarist and jazz musician.

The musical collaboration that began three decades ago led to the formation of Chaar Yaar, with Pritam Ghosal joining them on the sarod after a decade, and Amjad Khan joining them on the tabla after another. Deepak says they "experimented with different sounds, trying the flute and sarangi before narrowing down on these four". He adds that they mostly play their own compositions and translations by Madan Gopal. He recalls offering workshops to children in rural Orissa and Kashmir in the early years.

As a band, their music is associated with not just entertainment but also protest marches and peace-building initiatives. Each of them holds an independent musical practice besides their work with the band.

Pritam Ghosal shares that conversations and a sound friendship play a crucial role in their music-making. "We do not practise as much as we converse. When you're not over-thinking, your mind is free and what happens is spontaneous," says Pritam. Amjad Khan, whose tabla rendition holds their music together, says he feels very close to the ethos of the band, though he was the last to join them.

## Art diplomacy



The ASEAN-India artists' camp in Shillong will explore the Ramayana as the connecting link

Creative Phad artist Prakash Joshi.

the camp – Samindranath Majumdar, Tanmoy Samanta and Yogendra Tripathi. Each artist will create one work of art, representing different styles while still carrying the essence of their own culture and history.

Cheriyal scroll painting artist Vinay Kumar feels the camp offers him an opportunity to showcase his understanding of the epic. For Thai professor Panich Phupratana, this is his maiden visit to India. His work focusses on Hanuman as a powerful and intelligent warrior serving Rama. "My work will show that Thai beliefs and religion share the same origins as those in India," he shared.

Growing up in Malaysia, Moahaha Kumara Velu was exposed to the Ramayana through Wayang Kulit, a traditional shadow puppet theatre, and other local performances. "I'm especially drawn to the story of Sita. Her strength, quiet resilience and grace resonate deeply with me. While this will be my first work inspired by the Ramayana, I see it as a meaningful opportunity to explore its emotional and cultural layers through my own lens," she said.

The artworks created during the camp will first be unveiled in New Delhi in a two-day showcase before making their way to Malaysia, the ASEAN Chair for 2025, for a week-long exhibition.

"Art is a powerful bridge. Creative collaborations strengthen ties, making cultural exchange a quiet yet powerful form of diplomacy," said Moahaha Kumara Velu.

Neha Kirpal

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and India share common cultural and civilisational linkages that go back a very long time. A lot of similarities can be found in their literature, architecture and religious texts as well as folk practices. The Ramayana is an epic that has been a connecting factor among Southeast Asian countries.

It is with this in mind that the third edition of the ASEAN-India Artists' Camp returns for a 10-day residency in Shillong from March 29 to April 7. The theme of the festival is 'Echoes of Ramayana: Artistic Journeys across ASEAN and India'. It brings together 21 well-known and up-and-coming visual artists from 10 ASEAN member states, including Singapore, Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Myanmar and Cambodia, one artist from Timor Leste as an observer country, and 10 artists from India. They will showcase their interpretation of the Ramayana through paintings.

Organised by the Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with SEHER, the camp marks 10 years of India's Act East Policy, using art as a medium for cultural dialogue. "The Ramayana is not just a religious epic, but a cultural one as well. We want to know the echoes and the resonance that the text has in the ASEAN region," said Sanjeev Bhargava, founder-director of SEHER.

During the camp, the artists will talk about various forms of painting guided by mentors of

## CULTURE BRIEFS



### Revisiting margam

Natyarangam has organised a Poorna Margam recital by senior dancer and guru Revathi Ramachandran on March 29, 6 p.m., at its auditorium.

### Grand finale

Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha's 60-day-long annual dance festival concludes on March 31. On the occasion, the sabha honours Revathi Ramachandran with the 'Naty Kalasarathy' title. Veteran dancer-scholar Padma Subrahmanyam will be the chief guest. This will be followed by Noopuralaya's 'Swami Desika Vaibhavam' (4.30 p.m.) and Sheela Unnikrishnan's 'Srinivasa Kalyanam' (7 p.m.). Venue: Narada Gana Sabha.

### Seminar on archaeology

C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Institute of Indological Research, Chennai, and Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, have jointly organised a seminar 'The Importance of Archaeology in Decoding Indian History' and the release of the book *Art in the Indus Civilization*, to be held today and tomorrow at the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Alwarpet. B.R. Mami, Vice-Chancellor, Indian Institute of Heritage, Noida, and Director General, National Museum, New Delhi, will inaugurate and release the book today at 10 a.m. T. Satyamurthy, former director of Archaeology, Kerala, will deliver the keynote address. There will also be an exhibition titled 'Archaeological Excavations in Tamil Nadu'.

Manjari Sinha

In recent times, there has been a surge in young talent, but not all of them make it to the performance stage despite rigorous training. It is here that initiatives such as Raza Foundation's 'Aarambh' and IIC's (India International Centre) 'Double Bill' play a pivotal role.

While the 2025 edition of 'Aarambh', held at the Amaltas Theatre of India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, featured vocalist Rujuta Lad, 'Double Bill' showcased Hindustani vocalist Dhanashri Ghaisas and Aditya Shanker and troupe (instrumental fusion music).

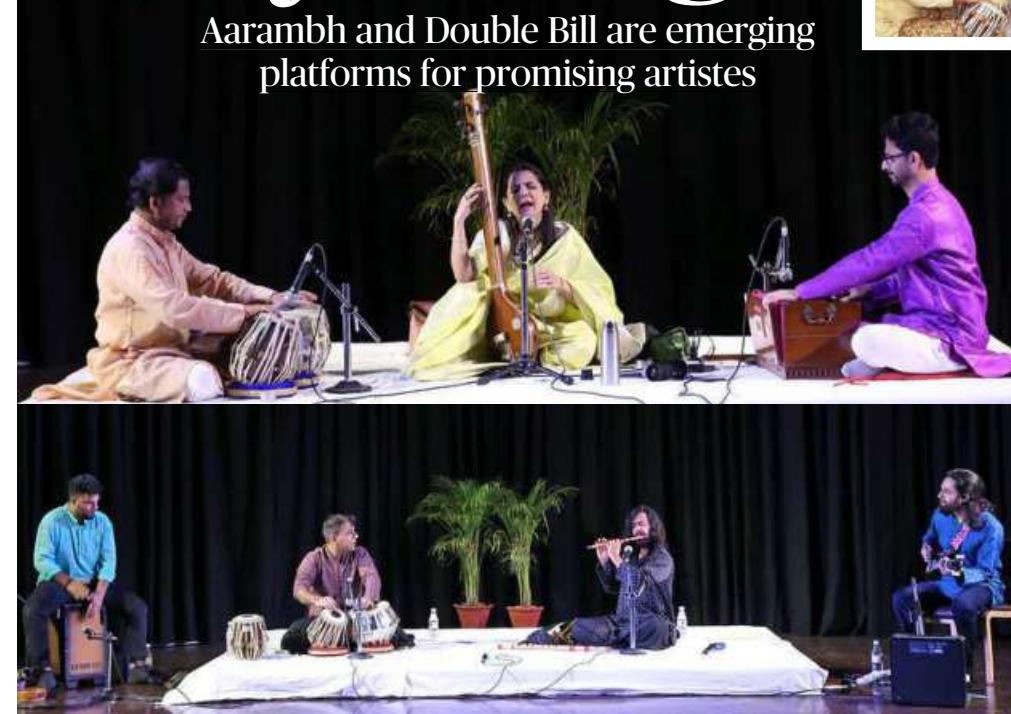
Rujuta initially trained under Dhondhu Tai Kulkarni, and further refined her skills under Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, an exponent of the Jaipur Atrauli gharana.

Accompanied on the harmonium by Vinay Mishra and on the tabla by Saptak Sharma, Rujuta opened her concert with raag Nand. The traditional bada khayal 'Dhundhu bare sainyan...' was rendered in vilambit Teentaal as per the convention of her gharana. She delineated the piece in a leisurely manner, going through systematic alap, bol alap, barhat and varied taan patterns, before progressing through the chhota khayal 'Aa ja re balaava', composed by Kishori Amonkar in a medium tempo of Teentaal.

She next chose to render 'Nayaki kanhada', a staple of the Jaipur Atrauli gharana.

## A stage for the young

Aarambh and Double Bill are emerging platforms for promising artistes



The famous bandish 'Mero piya rasiya' was dealt with aplomb in Madhya-Vilambit Rupak taal. The other bandish 'Nikli albeli rangili naar', composed by Ashwini Bhide, was adorned with quicksilver taans to suit the bandish. Rujuta also wanted to sing a Hori but concluded with a Bhairavi bhajan due to paucity of time. Dhanashri, who performed at the Double Bill series, also trained under Ashwini Bhide

Deshpande. Showing her grasp over the characteristic features of her guru's gharana, Dhanashri opened with raag Yaman, but the use of the Shuddha Madhyam sometimes made it sound like Yaman-Kalyan. After an alluring alap, Dhanashri presented a traditional bada khayal 'Mo mann lagan lag'i' set in Vilambit (slow) Teentaal. She elaborated the raag gradually, focussing on its melodic points. The



Showcase of talent (From above) Rujuta Lad accompanied by Vinay Mishra (harmonium) and Saptak Sharma (tabla); Dhanashri Ghaisas, with Kshiti Singh (harmonium) and Vinod Lele (tabla); and the fusion music ensemble led by Aditya Shanker. PHOTOS COURTESY: IIC

Bindadin Maharaj. The harmonium accompaniment by Kshiti Singh (harmonium) and Vinod Lele's concluding laggi (tabla) enhanced the appeal of her concert.

The performance by the fusion ensemble with Aditya (tabla), Kartikeya Vashishth (flute), Neeraj Kumar (percussion) and Shailendra Wakhlu (guitar) was structured like a journey. Aditya's guru Ustad Raufuddin Sabri was present in the audience.

The concert, which began with Shiv-Vandana 'Om Namah Shivaaya', in raag Malkauns moved to an Egyptian folk tune that sounded like Bhairav, and a pop-influenced piece, before concluding with a thumri 'Ka karun sajni, aaye na balam' in Bhairav. But the ensemble couldn't keep up the momentum because of the disparate repertoire.

A new biography *Soumitra Chatterjee and His World* by Sanghamitra Chakraborty reveals the man behind the iconic actor

Rachel Dwyer

**T**wo Indians of the 20th Century to have found among the greatest global recognition in the arts are Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray. And, closely tied to their life and work was Soumitra Chatterjee (1935-2020). Together, they played important roles in the flourishing of a culture that was simultaneously very Bengali yet universal. It was different from other parts of India – this was a world where Russian literature and German music mixed with Sanskrit and Bengali poetry.

Rabindranath, a friend of Satyajit's grandfather, Upendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury, was a guru to Satyajit, who, in turn, was Soumitra's mentor. The Indian government commissioned Satyajit to make a documentary on Rabindranath for the latter's birth centenary (1961). He also made films based on

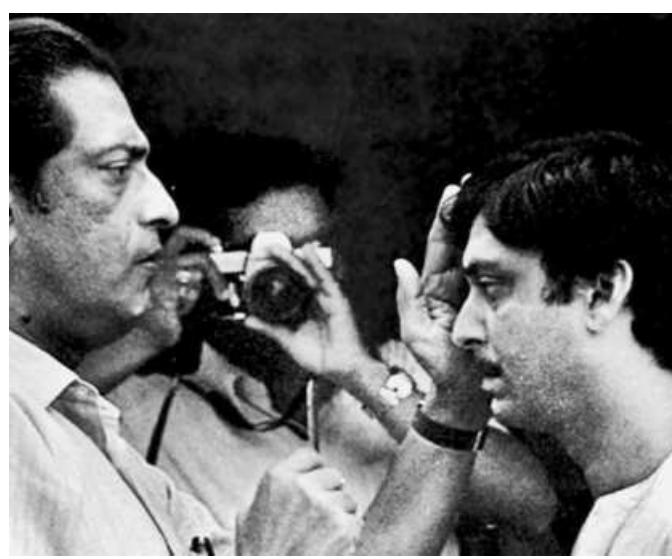


## Soumitra up close

Rabindranath's works, including *Teen Kanya*, 1961, *Charulata* (1964) and *Ghare Baire* (1984). In these films, Soumitra played a hero who seemed to be Rabindranath himself as much as one of his literary heroes, an ideal of the Bengali man.

Soumitra acted in 14 of Satyajit Ray's films. He worked with other major directors, including Tapan Sinha and Mrinal Sen. He never worked with Ritwik Ghatak, whom he disliked.

Soumitra had an elegance about him, in his refined looks and his great personal style. Like many legendary



cinema actors, he was also trained in theatre, and worked closely with his directors to perfect his 'less is more' acting. His command of Bengali and its dialects and registers contributed immensely to his performances.

In these films, Soumitra often played an educated, cultural *bhadralok* figure, contemporary or historical, usually romantic, sometimes maudlin. It is easy to conflate the actor with the roles, and many continue to see him as Apu, after his first film with Satyajit, *Apur Sansar* (1959).

Sometimes, Soumitra played a more ambivalent character, notably as a seducer of unhappy wives – be it the innocent Amal of *Charulata* or the exploitative Sandip of *Ghare Baire*. He was convincing even as Narsingh in *Abhijan*, the inspiration for Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. Soumitra was also loved for his

hero, Uttam's melodramas often show him as a sensitive middle-class Bengali man negotiating complex roles and wider social questions in his search for love and stability.

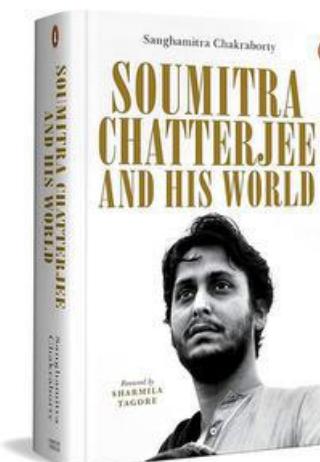
Although Uttam Kumar was senior, the two actors were on good terms, and even acted together in Tapan Sinha's *Jhinder Bondi* (1961), a version of 'The prisoner of Zenda', where Soumitra took on a negative role against Uttam's advice.

Soumitra's offscreen life was well known although it seems uneventful for one of India's most famous and admired actors, being centred on family, friends, work and some political activities.

Author Sanghamitra Chakraborty has done a fine job of writing an engaging and fluent book. She draws on a wide range of published works, Soumitra's own writings, and a wide range of interviews. The book is structured around his work rather than presented chronologically, so his serious films, missable films and his theatre work with his other great mentor Sisir Kumar Baduri are dealt with, before looking at his poetry, his art, and his work as the editor of a literary magazine.

There are no salacious revelations, only discrete mentions of close friendships with other women but it is mostly an analysis of his work set against a rather sad story of a man who felt dissatisfied with himself and sometimes with life.

Although the book is huge, I enjoyed every page. Sometimes there are long digressions such as into the life of Satyajit Ray. It is difficult to write a book for local audiences (Bengalis who read English) as well as for a global readership. The publishers should have got better photographs or added an index so this can also function as a reference work.



non-romantic *Feluda*, the Indian Sherlock Holmes, as Feluda himself acknowledges in the stories.

Although Amitabh Bachchan or Shah Rukh Khan may be among the better known Indian actors globally, Soumitra is known to all who watch world or arthouse cinema. He was by far the most handsome among his highly talented contemporaries, which included greats such as Chabi Biswas, Robi Ghosh and Utpal Dutta. Soumitra acted with many of the smart and stylish actresses of his generation, including Madhabi Mukherjee, Supriya Choudhury, Aparna Sen and Sharmila Tagore, as well as Waheeda Rehman.

Many comparisons are made between Soumitra and Uttam Kumar. The suave Uttam Kumar was the brightest star in popular Bengali cinema, always a star, the Mahanayak. Soumitra, on the other hand, was an actor and an ordinary man going about Calcutta. Unlike Soumitra's introspective *bhadralok/Rabindranathian*

## CALENDAR



### For music aspirants

Shakthi Sangita Sabha's third edition of Carnatic Music Talent Search is back. Students between the age group of eight and 24 can enrol. A three-month programme, it is spread over four phases of performances (three online and one on-stage). Participants can register for any of the following categories: Carnatic Music (Vocal and instrumental); Semi-Classical vocal (non-film); Percussion; Tirumurai rendition (Thevar and Thiruvagam) and Classical music-based film songs. Last date is March 31.

Link to access the Google form: <https://forms.gle/cZUK94Yas2C552he>. For more details contact 94455 25823.

### Veena solo

Madhuradhwani features Parupalli Sujana's veena concert today, 6.15 p.m., at Arkay Convention Center, Mylapore. B. Sivaraman (mridangam), N. Rajaraman (ghatam) will accompany her.

### Special line-up

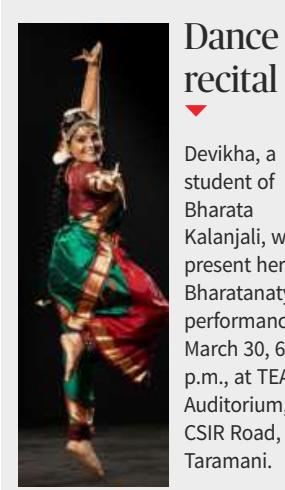
Hamsadhwan will feature the following programmes at Youth Hostel, Adyar. March 29, 6.15 p.m.: 'A musical pilgrimage to Devi kshetras' featuring compositions by Syama Sastri and Muthuswami Dikshitar, to be presented by senior violinist R.K. Shirramkumar, with Amritha Murali, Bharati Ramasubban (vocal), Madan Mohan (violin) and Manoj Siva (mridangam). March 30, 6.15 p.m.: 'Ugadi' special vocal concert by Akkarai Sisters.

### Dance recital

Devika, a student of Bharata Kalanjali, will present her solo Bharatanatyam performance on March 30, 6 p.m., at TEACH Auditorium, CSIR Road, Taramani.

### Thematic concert

Bengaluru-based vocalist Chitra Srikrishna will present a special concert 'Puthiya Thodakkam,' on April 3, 6 p.m., at Rasika Ranjani Sabha. It will feature classical and folk songs in different languages.



### The palace turns into a stage

It is heartening to see monuments across the country being turned into stages for cultural events. The aim is to showcase both our rich heritage and musical treasures. From March 28 to 30, the halls of Ran Baas, The Palace, nestled within the historic Qila Mubarak in Patiala, will echo with the tunes of a musical past. Sur Mahal The Patiala Baithaks, a residential programme, will be launched to trace the Patiala gharana tradition of Hindustani music.

The three-day festival will feature a formidable line-up of musicians who will narrate through classical, folk, devotional and sufi music the making of one of the oldest gharanas and how its early practitioners created a legacy that shaped a classical style. The festival, a revival of the gharana's glorious past, features concerts by Ajay Chakrabarty, Principal Sukhwant Singh, Fazal Qureshi, Ustad Jawaad, Jayateerth Mevundi, Jasbir Jassi, Ajay Prasanna, Kartik Raman, Pooja Gaitonde and Jazim Sharma.

AGS T NAGAR | PVR SATHYAM | PVR PERAMBUR | PVR PALAZZO | PVR AMPA | PVR ESCAPE | AGS MADURAVOYAL | AGS VILLIVAKKAM | AGS OMR | MAYAAJAL | PVR AEROHUB | PVR HERITAGE RSL | PVR GRAND MALL | MARINA MALL VR MALL | PVR SKLS GALAXY MALL | KASI TALKIES | CINEPOLIS BSR | LATTA | SAKTHI | ROHINI | EVP VARATHARAJA | INOX LUXE PHENIX | S.R.K | GK CINEMAS | MURUGAN (PALIPATTU) | VIJAY PARK AMBATTUR RAKKI | AMBATTUR MURUGAN | UTHUKOTTAI KUMARI

AGS PICTURES | AGS TALKIES | INOX LIUX | PVR GRAND - VELACHERY | PVR GALADA - PALAVARAM | PVR ICON VR MALL | REDHILLS PVR ECR - PVR INOX NATIONAL | INOX MARINA | S2 THYAGARAJA | MAYA JAAL | ECR - VIJAY PARK | MAMANDUR - C3 CINEPOLIS | EVP CINEMAS | AMBATUR - RAKI & MURUGAN | VILLIVAKKAM - AGS OMR AGS | MADURAVOYAL - AGS KOTAMPETU - ROHINI | PORUR - GK | THAMBARAM - VIDHYA & MR & NATIONAL | CHORMPET - VETRI | KOLATHUR - GANGA PADI - SIVA SAKTHI & LAKSHMI BALA RADHA | GREEN | REDHILLS - RADHA MOVIE PARK | THIRUVALLUR - RAKI & ROJA & THULASI

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