

friday Review

THE HINDU

Landmark celebration for QFR

Subhasree Thanikachalam on the making of the popular music show p2

Kapila Venu's novel attempt

The dancer presented Madurai Veeran's story in Nangiarkoothu style p3

MANGAI IS BACK WITH ANOTHER PLAY ON WAR

'Stree Parvam' looks at battles from the perspective of women p4



Legend and legacy Sheik Chinna Moulana with Ustad Bismillah Khan; photographed after receiving an honorary doctorate from Andhra University in 1985; grandsons S. Kasim and S. Babu. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES & M. MOORTHY



Notes of nostalgia

On Sheik Chinna Moulana's birth centenary, his grandsons Kasim and Babu talk about how he took the humble nagaswaram to the world stage

ILLUSTRATION:
SOUMYADIP SINHA

Nahla Nainar
Hyderabad where Sheik Chinna Moulana was honoured for receiving the Sangita Kalanidhi in 1998. "Later that evening he said, 'you presented the Sankarabharanam raga properly, because I saw the audience listening to it in rapt attention'. It was not effusive praise, but this was his way of complimenting us," says Kasim.

Family treasure
Originally from Karavadi in Andhra Pradesh, the family has been playing the nagaswaram for over three centuries. "Our grandfather belonged to the Chilakaluripet (a town in Guntur district) school of music," says Kasim. "Among his gurus were his own father, Sheik Kasim Sahib, and later, Sheik Adam Sahib."

As he emerged as a noted performer, Sheik Chinna

Moulana decided to explore the Thanjavur bani, which allows for greater variations in presenting ragas. "From an early age, *thattha* was influenced by the recordings of T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai. He migrated to Tamil Nadu to get trained in the Thanjavur style under Rajam-Duraikanru Brothers of Nachiarkovil," says Kasim.

Sheik Chinna Moulana's career took off in the early 1960s, and Kasim believes the exposure to the Thanjavur bani helped immensely. The maestro decided to make the temple town of Srirangam his home. Kasim, who accompanied his grandfather to Tamil Nadu early on, got his music education at home from the age of three.

Babu joined the in-house gurukul in his teenage years. "Our proximity to our guru was an added advantage," says Babu. "I would spend all my waking hours with *thattha*, trying to distil the essence of his musical experience into my performance."

"From 1982, after I graduated from college, until his last concert in 1999 at the Music Academy I was performing with him," recalls Kasim. "Our grandfather never had a retirement phase, he just kept performing or teaching."

Purity of form
Often referred to as the 'Bismillah Khan of the South', Sheik Chinna Moulana shared a deep relationship with the shehnai maestro. "We have a video recording of the two exchanging ideas on the playing techniques of the nagaswaram and shehnai. The duo did just three jugalbandis, and kept away from fusion. Their most notable jugalbandi

over 250 hours of Chinna Moulana's recitals. "We have also started a YouTube channel through which we will periodically release video recordings of our grandfather's concerts," says Kasim.

Story of the instrument
For the centenary, the nagaswaram instrument used by Sheik Chinna Moulana will be put on public display.

Not many know that the instrument, which made the maestro popular across the globe, was purchased from a destitute artiste. "According to my father, a nagaswaram artiste who had fallen on hard times, had got off the train at Karavadi, and was advised by the station master to visit Sheik Chinna Moulana. He came home and showed *thattha* his nagaswaram. He said that he had to sell it in order to make ends meet. Moved by his plight, *thattha* bought it for Rs. 20, and told him to stay back for dinner. This nagaswaram, possibly already used for a few years, was to become our grandfather's preferred instrument for over four decades, shaping his career and style of playing. Till date, we have not been able to trace the artiste who sold it to him," says Kasim, as his brother brings out the nagaswaram.

Kasim and Babu are the special nagaswaram artistes of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, and like their grandfather, share a unique stature in Hindu sacred music. The success of Muslims such as Sheik Chinna Moulana in the Hindu cultural sphere is perhaps the greatest example of India's syncretism. "*Thattha* often used to say 'music is my religion,'" says Kasim.

Among their recent efforts to document the maestro's work, is the creation of a digital audio archive of

Two-day event

Sheik Chinna Moulana's birth centenary celebration will be held on April 6 (6 p.m.) and 7 at Courtyard By Marriott in Tiruchi. M. Venkaiah Naidu, former Vice President of India, will inaugurate and preside. K.N. Nehru, Minister for Municipal Administration, Government of Tamil Nadu, will be the guest of honour.

A documentary on the maestro will be screened on the inaugural day followed by the presentation of Lifetime Achievement award to thavil vidwan Uduvalaipettai M. Angusamy. Senior nagaswaram artiste Palani M. Sakthivel and thavil artiste Thirukkattupalli T.R. Ramadas will also be honoured. Young nagaswaram artiste B. Selvam and M. Muthukumar (thavil) will be given the best upcoming artiste awards. At 7.30 p.m., Abhishek Raghuram will present a concert. On April 7 (4.15 p.m.), nagaswaram recital by Adyar Brothers and at 6.30 p.m. by DSD Selvarathinam, S. Shanmugasundaram and S. Sethuraman

ADVERTISEMENT Get Ready to Laugh Your Hearts Out With The Defective Detectives

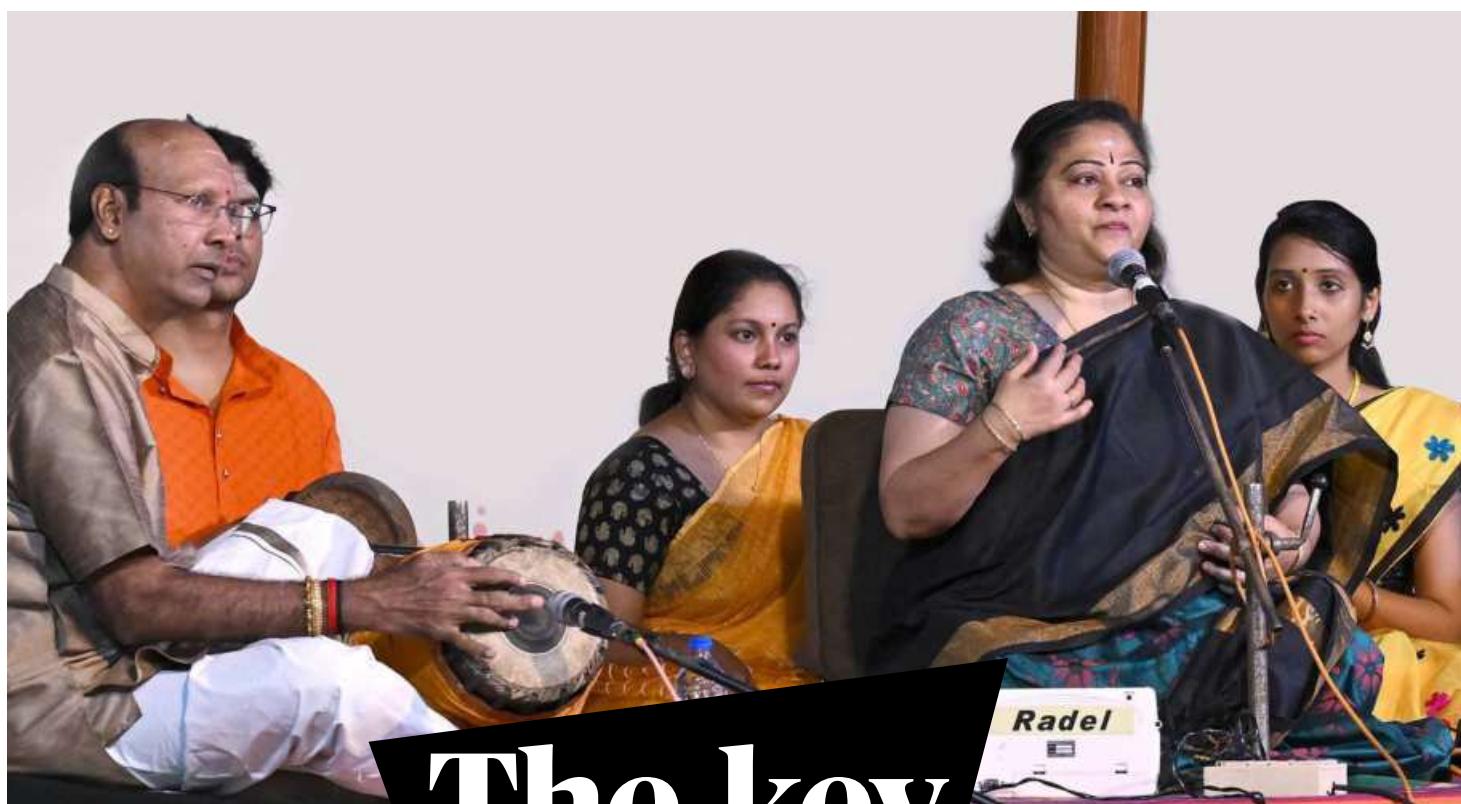


The internationally acclaimed film, 'The Defective Detectives', is an adaptation of Paritosh Painter's play, 'See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil', which he both wrote and directed. The story follows three lead characters – Shree, Aditya, and Manav – who, despite their physical challenges, strive to overcome obstacles and pursue greater aspirations.

turning their world upside down in the process. Now, the makers are all set to bring the same excitement and thrill with The Defective Detectives, which is currently running in theaters in English. Speaking about releasing the film in English, director and writer Paritosh Painter expressed, 'We truly believe that entertainment has no barriers. One can watch and enjoy content in every language, especially after Covid. Our film, The Defective Detective, offers a unique take on life and comedy.'

Having received huge accolades for my original play, we decided to turn it into a film to reach out to more audiences. He further added, "With the film already making waves at international film festivals, I am super positive that audiences across India will also enjoy watching this entertaining tale." The movie has been penned and directed by Paritosh Painter & produced by Rajeev Kumar Saha under Saha & Sons Studios and Ideas the Entertainment Co presentation is currently running in theaters near you."





The key takeaways

There is always enough to imbibe from Sowmya's well-structured concerts

G. Swaminathan

Call it her commitment to the values of classical music or her musical wisdom, for ardent listeners there is always enough takeaways at Sowmya's concerts. Her recent performance at Hamsadhwan, dedicated to its founder R. Ramachandran's centenary, was no exception.

Sowmya's choice of kritis and the style of presentation were the highpoints. Her elegant and elaborate essay of Hemavati brought into focus the various hues of the melodious raga. 'Sri Kantimati', the popular Dikshitar composition, followed. The swara section at 'Suddha

'tamrabarni' revolving around the dhaivata-centered swaras created an impeccable imagery of the raga with senior violinist Embar Kannan contributing significantly to it.

Reign of melody
Sowmya began her recital with 'Hechariga ra ra' (Tyagaraja) in Yadhukulakomboji and moved on to the melodic notes of Abhogi. Her phrases traversed across octaves and conveyed the inherent charm of Abhogi. 'Sabapathikku veru deivam' by Gopalakrishna Bharati was her selection here. Sowmya framed her swaras in a way that they ended with 'sa-ma' dovetailing 'sa-ma-namaguma' as swarakshara. Hence, the

swara segment mostly hovered around madhyamam.

A well-defined Devagandhari essay, replete with bhava-laden phrases, prefaced



Rich raga contours Sowmya with Neyveli Narayanan (mridangam) and Anirudh Athreya (kanjira). (Below) Embar Kannan accompanied on the violin.
PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

'Koluvaiyunnade' by Tyagaraja. Another unique kriti was 'Garudagamana' in Nagaswaravali by Patnam Subramania Iyer. Papanasam Sivan's 'Singaravelavan vandaan' in Anandabhairavi soothed the soul. 'Sriramabrahma mahima' in raga Begada by Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavatam came as a filler before Sowmya ventured into the Hemavati treatise.

Enjoyable responses
Embar Kannan's responses on the violin were enjoyable as were his raga expositions, particularly of Abhogi and Hemavati.

In present-day concerts percussionists are given enough time to exhibit their skill. Veteran Neyveli Narayanan on the mridangam and Anirudh Athreya on the kanjira, during both their individual and combined play showcased their best. The recital concluded with 'Sodanai sumakkum velai' in Kapi by Sivan and 'Ninnaye gathi endru' by Mahakavi Bharati.



Rewind Subhasree Thanikachalam and team take listeners down melody lane in their QFR series.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the younger generation. Apart from authentic recreation of songs, she also shares interesting trivia about them.

Asked about the difference between QFR and her other shows, she says, "This show has turned the spotlight on me."

Subhasree is happy that the QFR family is expanding with more musicians eager to be a part of it. "With each episode we add new facets. I have a strong team to back me. I owe it to the passion and commitment of Venkat, Syam Benjamin, Selva and Shivakumar. We identify singers from across the globe, send them tracks to learn the songs, and then comes the orchestral arrangement. Finally, it is edited for presentation. It's not as easy as it sounds," says Subhasree.

The series is crowdfunded. And according to Subhasree, the best takeaway is seeing the audience relive the past through songs. "I am overwhelmed by their response. This is what has kept us going."

To commemorate four years of QFR's journey on the digital platform, a four-hour live programme with over 40 musicians, will be held today at Narada Gana Sabha (6 p.m.). Tickets at bookmyshow.com

Four years and counting

Subhasree Thanikachalam, the woman behind QFR, on what made her launch the music show

V.V. Ramani

It began rather quietly on March 23, 2020 when lockdown was announced. The pandemic kept people confined to their homes and most of them didn't know how to keep themselves occupied and entertained. That is when the idea to go on a nostalgic musical trip occurred to Subhasree Thanikachalam. She launched QFR (Quarantine From Reality), a series that wove together timeless songs of legendary

composers.

From a 21-day series on the digital platform it has now become a popular show staged across the globe. Completing more than 625 episodes, the QFR team is celebrating four years of its journey.

Digital foray

Subhasree, who has in the past produced and directed several well-known TV shows such as Sapthaswarangal, Ragamalika, Margazhi Mahotsavam, Carnatic Idol, and Hariyum Namum, launched this series to introduce retro songs to



On a rare temple trail

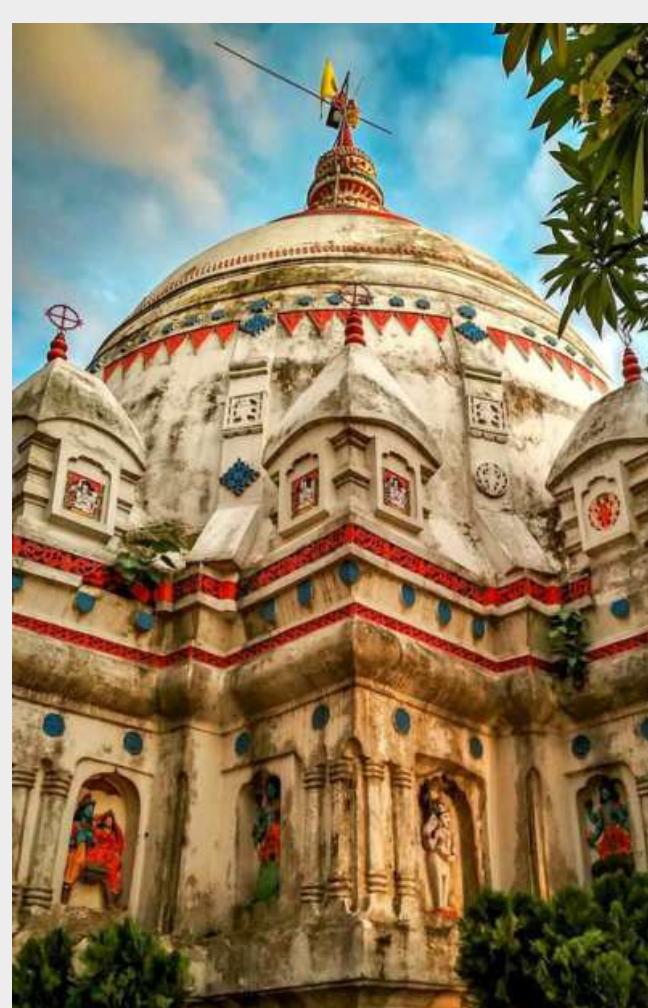
A shrine for the deity of fever and a sculpture of Yama! A recent seminar threw light on them all

provenance, in the Chicago museum, Jvaradeva wears a tiger skin garment, the tail of the tiger being visible. He wears snakes as ornaments.

One deity, different forms
In the Kodavasal temple, Jvarahareshwara's front left leg is raised in a dancing pose. In Thirutturaipoondi taluk, we find a Jvarahareshwara image holding trisula, gada (mace) and ankusa (elephant's goad). In Taramangalam, Salem district, there is a three-headed, three-armed, three-legged image of

Jvarahareshwara. His raised left leg is placed on a stylised lotus. The Jvarahareshwara icon in Bhavani has three heads, three hands, three legs and nine eyes. But it has no mouth.

In Eastern India, Jvaradeva was worshipped along with Sitala (goddess of small pox) and Ghentu (god of skin disease), a practice that continues in Hoogly, Howrah, Medinipur, 24 Parganas and Kolkata. Sometimes devotees offer small votive images of Jvaradeva called chhalans, but there is no independent temple for Jvara in Bengal.



Exquisite (Left) Jvarahareshwara temple in Kanchipuram; and Vishnu Janardhana temple, in Sukreswar, Guwahati (below).
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Jvaradeva is propitiated in Bengal with fruits, rice, sweets and sacrificial goats.

In one Buddhist depiction, we find the Buddhist goddess of fever – Parnasabari flanked by Hayagriva on the left and Sitala on the right. Hayagriva here is believed to be Jvaradeva. Contemporary unfired clay images of Jvaradeva in West Bengal, are seen sporting three complexions – blue, black and grey.

In one, he is shown wearing warrior shoes. From the iconographic viewpoint, images of Jvaradeva reflect both continuity and change.

The god of death
Paramita Das, History professor, Gauhati University, spoke on dharma (Yama). Yama is the son of Viswavasu. Yami is his sister.

Yama is a judge for the dead, besides being the god of death. Iconography of Yama, as given in the Puranas, says that a Yama icon is dark like a rain-bearing cloud. Yama should have four hands and he should hold a pasa (rope) and a club. He was elevated to one of the dikpalas (guardian deities of the directions). Yama became the guardian of the Southern direction. Chitragupta is the one who maintains records.

A Yama sculpture is seen in the Hayagriva Madhava temple in Hajo, Kamrup district, Assam. Here, he is seated on a buffalo, with legs folded on the back of the buffalo. His two hands hold a club. In the Aswaklanta

temple sculpture, Yama is depicted seated astride a buffalo, resting one hand on his mount and the other holding a club.

Yama is portrayed as a drikpala in the Vishnu Janardhana temple, in Sukreswar, Guwahati. Hajo has another sculpture, in which the head is missing.

Manasa Devi (the serpent goddess) and Yama are worshipped together in Assam. Manasa's story is recorded in *Manasa Mangala Kavya*, which is a local purana, not one of the 18 mahapuranas. In the Assamese version of *Manasakavya*, there are frequent references to Dharmathakur.

Sometimes symbolic representations of Yama are worshipped. On a mound in Assam, we find a kalasa, a symbolic representation of Yama. In a shrine in Bengal, we see a number of terracotta horses, flanking a vertical stone, which is worshipped as Dharmathakur.

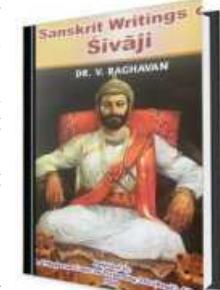
As part of ritual worship, a shaman dances, holding a sword in his hand. At Sualkuchi in Assam, blood of a pigeon is consumed by the shaman during the worship of Manasa Devi. During worship of Dharma or Yama, people take temporary sanyas. When they are possessed by Yama, or Manasa, they perform the duties of a priest and are called sanyasis during that period. They then revert to the status of householders.

From April 15 to May 15, or sometimes for an extended period up to June 15th, Dharma is worshipped.

A study of local songs of Western Assam and late medieval neo-Vaishnavite literature shows Yama being worshipped as a tortoise.

Annual lecture series

Dr. V. Raghavan Centre For Performing Arts in association with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan presents its annual lecture series, 'Sahiti Saurabha', today (6.30 p.m.) at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. Prof Shrinivasa Varakchedi, eminent Sanskrit scholar and Vice-Chancellor, Central Sanskrit University, Delhi, will preside and speak on 'Excellence of poet Bhavabhuti as seen in his play *Uttara Ramacaritam*'. On the occasion, three of Raghavan's publications - *King Bhoja*, *Sanskrit Writing on Sivaji*, and reprint of his magnum opus *Bhoja's Srangara Prakasa* (third revised and enlarged edition) - will be released by the Vice-Chancellor. The Samksita Ranga, an allied organisation of Dr. Raghavan Centre, will present an excerpt from Poet Kalidasa's Sanskrit play *Sakuntalam* to mark the 45th remembrance day of Dr. Raghavan.



Join the mehfil

Aalaap presents 'Songs, Sung Dance', an evening of poetry, music and dance, helmed by singer Vandana Srinivasan of the Madras Mehfil. The event will be held at Spaces on April 6 (8 p.m.).

The evening will comprise eclectic music from across genres including classical, semi-classical, film, ghazal, sufi and folk. The event also includes a segment featuring four classical dancers - Laasya Narasimhachari, Priya Murle, Uma Sathyanarayanan and Vijnna Vasudevan - who will respond to the songs through abhinaya. Vandana is trained in both Carnatic and Hindustani music. She has sung in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada films. Madras Mehfil has performed at several venues around the world.



Six-day theatre fest

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has organised a six-day theatre festival from April 8 to 13 at its main auditorium, Mylapore. To be staged at 6.30 p.m. daily, the festival (non-ticketed) will feature four Tamil plays, one bilingual (Tamil and English) and a Dramathon comprising six short plays (Tamil), each spanning 15 minutes. The festival will not only bring together different theatre groups but also offer an opportunity to new talents in the field.

Schedule:

April 8: *Vandichodai* by Koothu Pattarai.
April 9: Six short plays by different troupes will be staged under the banner 'Dramathon'.

April 10: *One Degree Second* by Alchemy Theatres.
April 11: *Tiruchiyyi Meeta Sundarapandian* by Theatre Karpanai Kudhirai.

April 12: *Nam Arumai Pudhumaiipithan* by Theatre Ko.

April 13: *Black Out* by Theatre Karan.
The festival will not only bring together different theatre groups but also offer an opportunity to new talents in the field.



Musical celebration

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha in association with Rajalakshmi Institutions celebrates Sri Ramanavami from April 9 to 20 at its Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Mahaswami Auditorium, T. Nagar. Vocal concerts by well-known musicians, upanyasam and award function will form part of the festival. The curtains will go up with R.P. Shravan's vocal concert on April 9, 6.30 p.m. Artistes to perform on the next two days are: April 10: Rithvik Raja, April 11: Sriranjani Santhanagopalan. A discourse on Srimad Ramayana by Nagai Mukundan will take place daily from April 12 to 20, 6.30 p.m. The 'Pravachana Sudha Vani' title will be conferred upon Mukundan at the award function on April 17 at 6.15 p.m.

Thangam Meganathan, chairperson, Rajalakshmi Institutions, who will be chief guest, will present the birudhu. The award has been instituted in memory of her father P.A. Ramakrishnan.

Kutcheri time

Hamsadhwani will feature Ramakrishnan Murthy today, 6.15 p.m. at Youth Hostel, Adyar. He will be accompanied by Vittal Rangan on the violin, Delhi Sairam on the mridangam and S. Krishna on the ghatam. The concert is organised as part of the sabha's 34th annual music festival.



Vocal and namasankirtanam

Madhuradhwani will feature the following programmes at Arkay Convention Center. Schedule: Harikrishnan Moozhikulam's vocal concert as part of Singe Mike 'Concert series (April 6, 6.15 p.m.); Udayalur Kalyanaraman's namasankirtanam (April 7, 6.30 p.m.) and Girijashankar Sundaresan's vocal concert (April 10, 6.15 p.m.)

Dramatic Kapila's histrionics and the nuances of Nangiarkoothu came to the fore in the performance
PHOTOS COURTESY: KAPILA VENU



Novel attempt

Kapila Venu presented Madurai Veeran's story in Nangiarkoothu style

G.S. Paul

Koodiyattam cannot alienate itself from Tamil or Tamizhagam, though it is a Sanskrit theatre tradition popular in Kerala. It is believed that while Chakyars, the traditional performers of this art form, belong to Tamil Nadu, stories from the State have never been used in Koodiyattam.

Viewed against this backdrop, Kapila Venu's latest choreography in

Nangiarkoothu (an off-shoot of Koodiyattam performed only by women) - 'Madurai Veeran Kathai' - is a pathbreaker. The one-and-a-half-hour performance was presented by Kapila at the recently revived Kottichetham auditorium of Natamakairali in Irinjalakkuda.

A warrior turned family deity Madurai Veeran (warrior of Madurai) is a folk deity popular in Southern Tamil Nadu. The prefix to his name is because of his association with

Madurai. He is venerated as the protector of the people of the city. There are also many folk songs, ballads and plays that describe his bravery.

Veeran was born into a royal family but was abandoned. Subsequently, he was adopted by a couple from the Arunthathiyar community. Growing up among them, he eventually became a guard in the court of Bommanna Nayakan. His fame brought him to Madurai, where King Thirumalai Nayakar sought his assistance to protect the city from bandits.

During his stay in Madurai, Veeran

Kapila Venu's recent performance lent a unique touch to the conventional Nangiarkoothu repertoire. It's heartening to see dancers push the boundaries of their art for a wider reach



Sounds of the past

Amrit Yatra, an unusual ensemble, brought together ancient instruments

Meena Banerjee

The 10th Ritachanda Festival, held recently in Kolkata, provided the audience an opportunity to witness Amrit Yatra under the direction of Kalamandalam Piyal Bhattacharya, a Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee.

Piyal, who trained in Kathakali at Kerala Kalamandalam, is a renowned Natyasastra research-scholar. He has been working to recreate the dance practices of the Natyasastra and the music of that period.

The Amrit Yatra, a unique presentation, was an ensemble displaying antediluvian instruments. It was a fascinating journey through the corridors of time.

Talking about his study of ancient Indian instruments, Piyal said, "The essence of rasa-nishpatti, the attainment of aesthetic experience, in our music is facilitated through the intricate melodies produced by the one-string tube zither, also known as Ghosha Veena. Albeit non-existent now, its presence is immortalised in the Bengal sculptures of Saraswati, riding a mesha (male sheep), and symbolising its significance as the origin of all string instruments. Later, another Ekantari (one string) veena was invented. It was known as Alapini or Alavu. I found that it is played by Lalu Shankar Mahali belonging to a tribe in Jharkhand. He calls it Tuhila. Chhannul Singh of Orissa also plays it and refers to it by a different name. I sent my student Sayak Mitra to learn its playing technique from them."

Sayak led the ensemble. Apart from his melodious singing, he also played different kinds of veena. He shared that Lalu Shankar Mahali



Vintage fare (Top) Sayak Mitra leading the ensemble. (Above) Kalamandalam Piyal Bhattacharya. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tunes the tuhila to natural sounds while Chhannul plays each swar with gamaks.

At the show, Sayak also introduced Shubhendu, who played Mattakokila veena, a beautiful 21-string Indian harp. The foundational jaati-s (specific combination of notes) were played on this. Though not found in India now, it is the national instrument of Myanmar. "Piyal da took Shubhendu to U Win Maung, an expert in the instrument and who trained both of them," said Sayak.

Legend behind Sapta-Kalpalgeeti He continued, "We began to sing the Sapta-Kalpalgeeti, the seven divine hymns based on a specific note to the accompaniment of Ekatantri, Mattakokila and Kacchapi veenas, flute and percussion instruments such as Dardur, Pakhawaj, cymbals of different sizes and temple bells."

According to the Puranas, one day the seven Kapalas of Shiva's Kapala-mala began singing the Shiva-stuti in seven swaras. These hymns were practiced by the Kaapaaliks for their saadhana until the 15th century C.E., offering a glimpse into the spiritual practices of Uddiyani Pradesh, presumably a part of present-day Kazakhstan.

To shorten the length of the

presentation, Piyal selected Kalpalgeetis specifically based on Sa, Ma, Pa, Dha and Ni swaras, each based on Maagadhi Geetis to enhance its depth and complexities. After these hymns came Asarita Vardhaman Geeti, a structural and musically dramatic tool that can be applied to the presentation of Purvaranga of any natya adhering to Bharata's principles. Then there was Panika Giti introducing the concept of Dhruva within the structure of the lyrics of the songs.

According to Piyal, Jaidev's *Dashavatar* from *Gita Govind* stands as a testament to the artistic brilliance of this era. "Through intricate compositions like the gat

(combination of swars and rhythm), bandish (lyrics based on a specific ragam that allows innovation within a fixed structure) and taarparan (inventive string instrumentalists matching the bol-bans of percussion instruments), the improvisational brilliance of Indian classical music reached new heights."

The members of Chidakash Kalalay, founded by Piyal, tried their best to display this with short vocal and instrumental pieces in raags Chadrakauns and Vasant.

This engaging showed how the invaders' music tradition blended seamlessly with Indian artistic ethos to shape Hindustani classical music.





Mahabharata before moving to the war in Ukraine. The text for this segment was crafted by Yana Salakhova, a practitioner of Theatre of the Oppressed in Ukraine. This portion poignantly explores the experiences of motherhood amidst conflict. Salakhova's words give voice to the complex emotions and dilemmas faced by mothers. "She called it the opening up of the space for the wounds to explode," says Mangai recalling her interaction with Yana.

The play begins with images from Sri Lanka by feminist activist Sarala Emmanuelle. Mangai juxtaposes these visuals with paintings by the renowned artist Trotsky Marudhu.

The theme of war runs deep in Mangai's body of work – *Stree Parvam* is not her first play around war.

But what truly resonates is the inclusion of poetry towards the end of the play. Along with the verses of Sri Lankan Tamil poets Nuhiman and Puduvai Rathnadurai, the play features the profoundly moving poem 'If I must die, let it be a tale,' penned by Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer, who tragically lost his life in an Israeli airstrike last year.

Says Mangai, "There is an element of story in every poem – the stories must survive. It is our way of clinging to hope, even in the face of profound despair."

The play will be staged at Asian College of Journalism on April 6 and 7.

War and women

Mangai's new play *Stree Parvam* shows how conflicts destroy hopes and dreams of families

drift into sleep at midnight, entering the realm between dreams and hope, they soon wake up to – a land of flowers and smiles, with the gentle flight of birds against the backdrop of a soft Arabic song. This tranquil vision is soon shattered by the realities of war – as the play transitions to the everyday massacre in Gaza.

"But this horror was not wrought by natural forces," the chorus reminds Gandhari, unconvincing by her assertions that she had issued sufficient warnings. Instead, they recount the indiscriminate killings that stained the battlefield: Aravan, Abhimanyu, Drona, Karna, and the infamous midnight massacre by Ashwathama.

In the play, when people

– finally confess and acknowledge their guilt and grief, a ray of possibility illuminates their path. The chorus then performs the customary rituals, wishing for peace and harmony to prevail.

The play concludes with a haunting poem by Vallalar:



Stree Parvam is an attempt to look at war through a gendered lens

MANGAI

*Karunai ila atchi kadugi ozhiga
Arul nayandha nanmarkkar alga
Nallor ninaitha nalam peruga
Ninaindu ellorum vazhga isaindu*

(May the unkind rule come to an end. May the compassionate ones rule. May the good ones have their dreams fulfilled. May everyone think good and live in harmony.)

Mangai describes the play as a "small gesture of solidarity with the people living in countries that are/have been under siege." The play begins with Gandhari and Kunti holding hands and finally embracing each other. For Mangai, this represents a form of feminist affective solidarity that recognises deep-seated guilt and endeavours to forgive. "It may not be easy, but worth trying."

In her work, Mangai employs various elements to dehumanise war. A central symbol is the omnipresent white cloth, representing "life,

earth, and the universe that we hold dear and are duty-bound to protect for the next generation," says Mangai. The music in the play transitions from the fervent beats of Koothu to a soft Arabic lullaby, and finally to a high-energy rap. Concurrently, a screen displays images of war from around the world, showcasing both the devastation and the resistance against it, emphasising the human cost, which has been reduced to mere numbers.

For the transition from the state of sleep to the realm of dreams, Mangai incorporated a three-minute film by Tara Hakim, a Palestinian artist residing in Jordan. Mangai says she specifically requested Tara's film to be integrated at this pivotal moment. Upon viewing rehearsal footage, Tara selected a song to accompany her film, ensuring that the shift from the Mahabharata narrative to the dream sequence was not only conveyed visually but also through evocative music.

The play revisits the

Kavitha Muralidharan

Perhaps the most difficult question that we are forever left to grapple with," begins veteran theatre artiste A. Mangai, thoughtfully pausing before continuing, "is how to end a war." Mangai made this comment just before a preview of her new production, *Stree Parvam*, being presented in collaboration with the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in memory of educationist Mina Swaminathan, who was passionate about theatre. The term 'stree parvam' is from the Mahabharata, the 11th of the 18 books on the epic, stree parva is about the grief of women over war and its losses.

Watching the rehearsal of Mangai's 65-minute production, a gripping and haunting portrayal, it became nearly impossible not to envision war as an large, chilling blanket spanning epochs and tightening around the neck of humanity. From the ancient battlefields of the

Veena recital

Musiri Chamber has organised Ramana Balachandran's veena recital to mark Musiri Day, on April 7. He will be accompanied by Anantha Krishnan on the mridangam. The concert will take place at 48/2, Musiri Subramaniam Road, Mylapore. Time: 4.01 p.m.



Debut

Kashvi Thangaraj, disciple of Yulaume Thangaraj and R. Thangaraj, will present her maiden Bharatanatyam performance on April 7, 6.30 p.m. at TEACH Auditorium, Taramani.

JUMBOT CIRCUS

YMCA GROUNDS, OMR, KOTTIVAKKAM, CHENNAI



SATHYAM | ESCAPE | INOX | DEVI | WOODLANDS | PVR - AMPA MALL | PALAZZO | S2 PERAMBUR | TNAGAR AGS KASI TALKIES | INOX LUX | PVR GRAND - VELACHERY | PVR GALADA - PALAVARAM | PVR - VR MALL - ANNA NAGAR REDHILLS PVR | ECR - PVR | AIRPORT - PVR AERO HUB | INOX NATIONAL | INOX MARINA | ECR - MAYAJAAL MAMANDUR - C3 CINEMAS | OMR - CINEPOLIS | EVP CINEMAS | AMBATHUR - RAKI & MURUGAN | VILLIVAKAM - AGS OMR AGS | MADURAVAYAL - AGS | KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI | KOLATHUR - GANGA | CITLAPAKKAM - VARDHARAJA PADI - LAXMI BALA | CHENGALEPET - SRK | ANAKAPUTHUR - VELCO PATTU | MADURANTHANGAM - ALANKAR

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PVR INOX

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ONE LIFE | U English

THE FAMILY STAR | UA Tamil/Telugu

Double Tucker | U Tamil

GODZILLA VS KONG: THE NEW EMPIRE | UA English/Tamil

SHOWCASE

5TH - 9TH APR'24 CELEBRATING JAYA BACHCHAN WITH A SPECIAL RE-RELEASE OF HER ICONIC MOVIE **SILSILA**

CREW | UA Hindi

GODZILLA VS KONG: THE NEW EMPIRE | UA English/Tamil

The GOATLIFE | A BLESSLY FILM

MULTI LANGUAGE SHOW

NEXT CHANGE

GADE MIYAN GADE MIYAN

MAIDAAN

RELEASING ON 10TH APR

SCAN THIS QR TO WATCH TRAILERS & BOOK TICKETS