

friday Review

THE HINDU

Revisiting Kalidasa's play

Presenting *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* for a contemporary audience p2

The life and times of Bharati

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ANUPAM SHOBHAKAR STRIKES A NEW TUNE

The musician gears up to launch his next album, *Liquid Reality* p4



Musical summit

The third edition of the Mahindra Percussion Festival, held in association with *The Hindu*, features a formidable line-up of artistes

Narendra Kusunur

It's almost 10 weeks since the passing of Ustad Zakir Hussain and tribute festivals continue to be organised around the world. Musicians, particularly percussionists, cannot stop talking about how he touched their lives, shaped their music and impacted their thoughts.

The 2025 edition of the Mahindra Percussion Festival (MPF), to be held in Bengaluru on March 1 and 2, will be dedicated to the tabla wizard. The festival is also a celebration of Indian rhythm, which has now found a global resonance. With the untiring efforts of innovative musicians such as Ustad Zakir Hussain, Indian instrumentalists have pushed boundaries like never before. His pioneering East-West band Shakti, which he launched along with the inimitable jazz guitarist John McLaughlin set the tone and trend of collaborative music. If sitar maestro Pt. Ravi Shankar was the first Indian musician to win a Grammy, the Ustad consolidated our music's presence at the international award show with several wins.

The line-up at the Mahindra Percussion Festival is reflective of the Ustad's rhythm legacy. Besides featuring top names from the Indian percussion world, MPF will put out some specially curated concepts.

On the opening day, Carnatic vocalist Aruna Sairam will lead the Thrillana Project, which will focus on the rhythmic nature of the composition form, thillana. The following evening, drummer Ranjit Barot and theatre director Roysten

Abel will present BeatRoute, a musical production that seamlessly blends Indian folk rhythms with modern electronic music, highlighted by Ranjit's drumming.

The event is presented by the Mahindra Group in association with *The Hindu*. It will be held at the Prestige Srihari Khoday Centre For Performing Arts, which hosted it last year too. The other performers this year are sitar exponent Ravi Chary and his project Crossing, the Trilok Gurtu Project, and Chennai percussion duo SNAX, consisting of drummer Ramkumar Kanakarajan aka Kanaxx and mridangam player Sumesh Narayanan.

Each act will provide something different. For instance, Ravi Chary Crossing will feature popular tracks such as 'Yogi' from its self-titled 2012 album, besides tunes from the latest album *Dhvanika*. The ensemble also comprises drummer Gino Banks, tabla player Satyajit Talwalkar, bassist Sheldon D'Silva and keyboardist Sangeet Haldirup. Gino and Satyajit will play special solos and rhythmic encounters.

According to Ravi Chary, the name of his project was suggested by Zakir Hussain. "For this show, we have created a special composition, which is a heartfelt tribute to the immense influence he had on us, and his contribution to our music," he adds. Ravi is also delighted to perform on the same day as Trilok, who he had accompanied on his first fusion show at Mumbai's Rang Bhavan in 1997. "I have drawn huge inspiration from Trilok ji, having played with him at international festivals," he says.

Interestingly, Aruna Sairam is the only vocalist who will lead a segment at the show. "The thillana is a very joyously rhythmic form, which is composed mostly for Bharatanatyam but also sung to great appreciation in music concerts. So I thought it would be the most apt to delineate at a



LINE-UP

March 1: Thrillana Project; Ravi Chary Crossing; Trilok Gurtu Project

March 2: SNAX and Ranjit Barot and Roysten Abel's Beatroute

Venue: Prestige Srihari Khoday Centre for Performing Arts, Bengaluru

Tickets on bookmyshow

Promoted & produced by Hyperlink



Catch the rhythm
(clockwise from left) Kanaxx and Sumesh Narayanan; Ravi Chary team; Ranjit Barot; Trilok Gurtu; and Aruna Sairam PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

would often be part of the same gigs, doing sound check together. Says Kanaxx, "During the lockdown, we met often in my home studio without any agenda. But we played a lot and recorded a bit, and that's what led to the basic idea behind Snax."

The group blends the traditional and the contemporary, with Kanaxx using his fondness for rock, heavy metal and jazz, and Sumesh using his Carnatic training and experience. Both artistes have interesting stories of how they got into music.

Kanaxx's house was next to the KFI school in Chennai, and he once happened to watch a lecture on drums through a hole in the wall, and that got him engrossed. Sumesh was attending a concert where the musician saw him mimic what he was playing on his water bottle. That musician became his guru.

The festival will conclude with BeatRoute. Roysten is known for his thematic musical shows. His popular *The Manganiyar Seduction* and *The Manganiyar Classroom* focus on the music of the Manganiyar community of Rajasthan, whereas *Weaving Voices* uses different styles of singing in a narrative format.

Using Ranjit's drumming as centrepiece, along with an assorted ensemble of folk drummers, BeatRoute "serves as a musical ode, bridging the past and the present, the masculine and the feminine, and the everyday and the divine. A focus area of the performance will be how drummers adapt to diverse musical landscapes and engage with multiple genres."

That's a lot of variety spread over two days. As Sumesh of SNAX puts it, "It's heartening to see so many percussion festivals taking place in India. One can never ignore a strong beat, as that makes your body move."

percussion festival, since it draws from the footwork of dance, the syllables of the mridangam and ghatam and other percussive elements, and translates all of that into the voice," shares the senior singer.

Aruna, who always loves to think out-of-the-box, will be accompanied by B.C. Manjunath on the mridangam and

konnakol, Giridhar Udupa on the ghatam, drummer Arun Kumar, violinist Jyotsna Srikant, bassist Shalini Mohan

While Trilok will himself play the drumkit, tabla, djembe, his trademark water drum and a host of other percussion instruments, he has curated a special set incorporating a collage of sounds. Trilok, who is also scheduled to perform today at the Mumbai Drum Day concert, has created a distinct soundscape.

SNAX will showcase tracks from its album *Thrilllex*, released in September 2024. Having been prominent on the Chennai music scene, Sumesh and Kanaxx

CULTURE BRIEFS



Tribute to a guru

Saraswati Vaggeyakara Trust, in association with Kedaram, will present Sarasa Natya Mala, the 13th dance festival in memory of guru K.J. Sarasa on February 22 and 23 (5.30 p.m.) at Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Mylapore. The festival begins with the lighting of the traditional lamp by Chitra Visweswaran. K.N. Ramaswamy, director, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, will be the chief guest. On the occasion, the K.J. Sarasa Memorial award will be given to veena artiste Mudicondan S.N. Ramesh, Harikrishna Kalayanasundaram (director, Sri Rajarajeswari Bharatha Natya Kala Mandir, Mumbai) and Senthil Kumar of Shanthi Tailors. This will be followed by performances of Kavitha Ramu (6 p.m.), Lakshmi Ramaswamy (7 p.m.) and Sri Mudhraalya's 'Prakeerthi'. Day two will begin with Sharmada Vishwanath's performance followed by Ramli Ibrahim's 'An invitation to Odissi' and Shanmuga Sundaram's recital at 7.30 p.m.



Tamil music festival

Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Mylapore, conducts 'Bhavan's Tamizh Isai Vizha' from February 24 to 28 at its Main auditorium. It features a series of performances by well-known artistes. Details: February 24, 6.30 pm: Vidya Kalyanaraman's concert on 'Sitham Yellam Sivamayam'. February 25, 6.30 p.m.: Gayatri Girish's 'Devi Darisanam'. February 26, 6.30 p.m.: Odhuvar Sargurunathan's Tevara isai. February 27, 6.30 p.m.: Amirtha Murali on 'Vazhga Nirantaram Vazhga Tamizh Mozhi' and February 28, 6.30 p.m.: Akshay Padmanabhan on 'Thaaya Dayapari'.

Saraswati Vaggeyakara Trust, in association with Kedaram, will present a series of concerts as part of its Tamil music festival, to take place at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore, from today to February 23. Details: Today, 6.30 p.m.: V.K. Manimaran. February 22, 4.30 p.m.: Nanditha Kannan; 6.15 p.m.: R. Suryaprakash. February 23, 4.30 p.m.: Prithvi Harish; 6.15 p.m.: Vidya Kalyanaraman.



In memory of maestros

Event Art presents a special music concert, 'Melodies and Memories', dedicated to Mandolin U. Srinivas and tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain, on February 25, 6 p.m., at Anna Auditorium, Kotturpuram. Well-known musicians, including Sivamani, Selvaganesh, Rajesh Vaidya, Ustad Fazal Qureshi, Stephen Devassy, Steven Samuel Devassy, Anil Srinivasan, Devi Sri Prasad, Karthik, Lydian Nadaswaram, and U. Rajesh will come together to pay tribute to these two legendary artistes, whose music and rhythm transcended boundaries and inspired people across ages.



Remembering a visionary

A series of thematic productions will form this year's 'Remembering Rukmini Devi' festival, to be hosted by Kalakshetra Foundation from February 27 to March 1, at Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium. The following is the list of performances to be presented on the occasion. February 27, 6 p.m.: 'Kannappar Kuravanji'. February 26, 6 p.m.: 'Paduka Patabishekam'. March 1, 6 p.m.: 'Sabari Moksham'.



Srividya

What happens when Bharatanatyam meets the Budapest Scoring Orchestra? It results in a mosaic of live movements and well-structured recorded music. It was indeed a feast for the eyes to see Kalidasa's *Abhijñānākuntalam* re-conceived with splendour by dance choreographer and music composer Madurai R Muralidharan, in his 27th production.

Recreating an ancient Sanskrit play for a contemporary audience is no mean task. During a brief post-performance chat, Muralidharan shared, "It involved a lot of research and took almost a year to

Innovative ensemble

Madurai R Muralidharan's take on Kalidasa's play stood out for its visualisation and teamwork

choreograph the music and dance. As for roping in the Budapest Scoring Orchestra, since I am familiar with their work, I was keen to come up with a production where I could involve them. This is the first time they are collaborating with an Indian classical dancer. I felt *Abhijñānākuntalam* beautifully lent itself to this

blend of music." Held under the auspices of Aalaap at Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall, the musical started with a brisk invocatory number set to the tune of nagaswaram, where a group of dancers paid obeisance to Saraswati.

The dancers were precise in executing intricate footwork

and conveyed a range of emotions through their expressive eyes. The music accompaniment kept perfect pace. The story unfolded through the narration of the Sutradhar, in this case, the Shakunta birds that initially find and take care of the abandoned baby Shakuntala. Muralidharan was assisted

in the choreography by Kavya Muralidharan and Chithra Muralidharan.

Nature plays an integral role in the play, reflecting the mood of each of the characters. The Sanskrit verses were set to tune by Muralidharan, and the instrumentalists included senior artistes such as Rajesh Vaidhya on the veena, N.C. Kesavan on the mridangam, kanjira, chendaai and mathalam, and Raghavendra on the violin. Muralidharan's composition in Vijayavasantham was rendered by more than 60 members of the Budapest Scoring Orchestra, conducted by Zoltan Pad and scored and orchestrated by Balaji Gopinath.

The lighting, costumes and animation recreated the idyllic world of the play.

The rasa experience

Jyotsna Vaidee presented a composition on the goddess as creator



V.V. Ramani

Beginning with a pushpanjali, Jyotsna Vaidee moved on to Subbaraya Sastris 'Janani nimuvina' for her performance at Krishna Gana Sabha. This composition extolling the goddess as a creator was interpreted by the dancer by bringing into it her experiences as a mother. A rare Tevaram was used to depict Shiva's form and his attributes, before Jyotsna moved to the varnam in Sankarabharanam, a

composition by Papanasam Sivan in praise of Kapaleeswarar. The dancer shifted effortlessly from depicting admiration for Shiva in the line 'Kapaleeswara darisanam', to the state of a lovelorn nayika. The entire sequence of Adikara Nandi procession, with detailing of the nagaswaram and thavil accompaniments, the heroine falling in love with the lord and her tormented state due to his indifference, and the final jathi, where she incorporated peacock movements, were some of the

significant moments.

In the padam and javali, the dancer portrayed two contrasting emotions. The padam, 'Unnai thoodhu anuppinen' (Ghanam Krishna Iyer, raga Saveri), was about the nayika being distressed over the unfaithfulness of her friend for becoming close to the nayika's beloved. In the javali, 'Samayamide rara' in raga Behag, the heroine is torn between her love for husband and another man.

A thillane interspersed with the Kanda Sashti Kavacham, choreographed by Rama Vaidyanathan, was vibrant, but the sahitya did not blend with the nritta-oriented piece.

Venkateswaran Kuppuswamy's singing was high on bhava. Guru Bharadwaj on the mridangam, Vijayakumar on the nattuvangam, Nandini Sai Giridhar on the violin and Anjani Srinivasan on the veena added value to the performance.

Heroine-centric

Aishwarya Balasubramanian explored the emotions of a nayika

Rupa Srikanth

Aishwarya Balasubramanian is a well-rounded dancer whose performance shows her growing maturity as an artiste. Starting with an interesting Pushpanjali in ragamalika in Adi, composed by violinist Easwar Ramakrishnan, and visualised with offbeat usi sollus that were intoned perfectly by nattuvanar Jayashree Ramanathan, she displayed a good sense of timing at her performance for Krishna Gana Sabha.

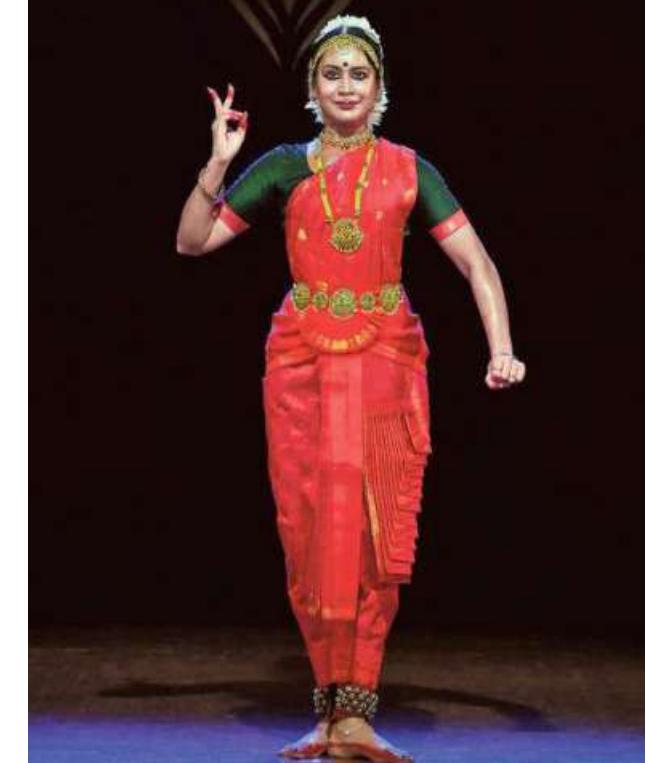
Aishwarya, following sadir-researcher Jeetender Hirschfeld, who advocates concentrating on the nayika bhava in nayika-centered compositions than moving the attention to the nayaka as is the practice today, interpreted the nayika as a strong, serene woman, confident of Rajagopal's love in 'Mohalahiri' (Todi, Adi, Sivanandam). She walks into his presence, smiling coyly.

The dancer, a student of Anita Guha, created visuals of sringara using props of a painting that she talks to, a feather that reminds her of the nayaka's touch, and a calf that reminds her of him. The yearning was there, but it was mild and matter-of-fact. The bhakti, as the nayaka was Rajagopal, was present, but not overly emphasised. In fact, Aishwarya introduced a raas-lila to show how understanding she was, sharing her beloved with other women. She turned an almost physically-debilitating yearning into a 'happily-waiting for him' piece.

Mridangist Ram Shankar Babu's jathis were rhythmic, but did not sound as catchy during the first piece. Credit goes to Jayashree for her firm, soothing intonation. Aishwarya is light on her feet, but tends to avoid steps with *raimandi*. Her tattu-mettu showed the deep-seated posture and the contrast was dramatic. Some rooted steps will be welcome.

The music came together very well: Hariprasad's best, and possibly the evening's, was the Nattakurunji 'Vazhi maraithirukkude' (Adi, Gopalakrishna Bharati). The melody flowed while the percussion was unobtrusive. Aishwarya was suitably mature without overdoing the pathos. There was some build-up to the highpoint when Nandi moves, and that was avoidable.

While Easwar's violin was melodious throughout, he also shone in the Maand thillana (Adi, Lalgudi Jayaraman). Sujit Naik (flute) was tuneful as well.



Suganthy Krishnamachari

Women were educated in the Sangam era. In the *Purananuru*, 15 women poets have sung 57 verses. Seven of these have also composed verses in the *Agananuru*, shares Sarala Rajagopalan, Tamil litterateur. She was recently awarded the Amma Ilakkia Virudhu for the year 2023, by the Tamil Nadu government.

Sarala owes her interest in Tamil literature to her brother, who used to borrow books for her from libraries. She decided early on that she would major in Tamil. Because of her sympathy for the feminist cause, she chose 'Feminism in Sangam literature' as the subject for her thesis. Her engagement with feminist thoughts made her a fan of later writers such as Vedanayagam Pillai, Bharati, Thiru Vi Ka and Bharatidasan.

"In the Sangam age, a woman had the freedom to choose the man she wanted to marry. Women were bold enough to stand up to power. Avvaiyar served as King Adhiyaman's messenger to King Thondaiman. Venni Kuyathiyan boldly told Karikalan that the Chera king was a much better man than Karikalan," she adds.

Sarala draws extensively from the past to show how progressive the



Gender lens
Sarala Rajagopalan on how women in Sangam literature engaged with feminist thoughts

thinking was. "Vedanayagam Pillai was the first person to emphasise that education for women was a must. He wrote a book titled *Penn Kalvi*. In his novel *Sugunasundari*,

the heroine is as educated as the hero. Pillai wrote *kirtanas* stressing the importance of women's education. In one of them, the women tell the men: *Viththayai*

A slice of culture Sangam Art Gallery in Madurai, which gives a peek into the way of life in the era and (below) Sarala Rajagopalan

PHOTOS: SHRIKUMAR AND M. SRINATH



padippiyungal (give us education). In the magazine *Chakravarthini*, Bharati wrote that there were only three ways in which the status of women could be improved – education, education and education. Bharatidasan said that as long as women were denied freedom of speech and remained shackled, freedom for the country would remain a distant dream," she says. Vedanayagam Pillai said that proverbs demeaning women should not be used. Sarala, cites a few

examples. 'Penn sirithaal pochu': a woman's smile is disastrous!

Another suggests a woman's smile would give a man the idea that she is ready for physical intimacy. There is one that says that a tree that bears no fruit and a woman with no children burden the earth. There are proverbs that convey the idea that men bond together easily, but if a few women get together, a quarrel is in the offing.

Sarala says Sangam literature abounds in similes. One of the similes says that just as Bhima took his family to safety when Duryodhana set fire to the lac palace, so does an elephant guide its herd to safety when a forest fire breaks out.

"Reading Tamil literature helps glean historical information too," says Sarala. "We learn about kings such as Adhiyaman Anji, Aruman, Azhici, Ahkuthai, Ori, Nalli, Nannan, Paari, Poraiyan and Malayanam Irumikkari. Poet Paranar describes Cheran Senguttuvan's victory over the Kadamba kings. The *Silappadikaram* also talks of his military expeditions in North India. We learn about towns, cities, mercantile settlements and hills. We come across the names of Kurumbur, Kundrur, Puzhinadu, Arkadu, Paatali, Maandai, Kaveripoompattinam, Thondi,

Urundai, Kollimalai and so on."

Has she studied Tamil folk songs? "Of course. I even wrote a book *Malayaruvu - Oru Paarvai*, in which I analysed Ki Va Ja's book on folk songs.

You find folk songs even in Tamil epics. "In *Civaka Chintamani*, a woman sings a verse that is part oppari (lament) and part thalattu (lullaby) when she delivers a baby even as her husband dies. We find the influence of folk in religious literature too. For example, Kulasekara Azhwars ten verses beginning with *mannu pugazh* are thalattu verses."

Does she read modern literature? "I don't read novels or short stories. But I do enjoy modern poetry. Tamil Oli's narrative poem *Veerayi* is one that I like very much. It reflects his Communist sympathies. Kannadasan's *Attanathi-Adimandi* is another narrative poem that I like. It is based on the love story of Attanathi and Adimandi, which we find in Sangam literature. Attanathi is actually Attan Athi, Attan being a prefix he acquired because he was a good dancer and dance teacher. The MGR film *Mannadi Mannan* was based on Kannadasan's poem," says Sarala, a retired Professor of Tamil from Queen Mary's college. She has written more than 100 books, has participated in more than 150 seminars and has won 66 awards.

Over generations, the Tamil poet has inspired people. But who inspired him? The film *Shaktidasan* explores this angle

Subha J Rao

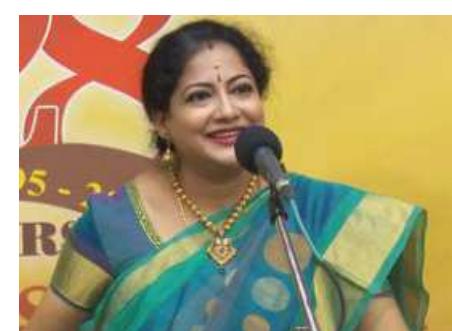
In his short lifetime of 38 years (1882-1921), Subramania Bharati left an indelible mark on Tamil society. His rousing poetry and prose introduced many to the concepts of patriotism and female emancipation, and enhanced them in those who already possessed it. His love for the country, and towards his Parashakti, the divine feminine, are well-known. The *nimirndha nannai* (graceful walk with head held high) and *nerkonda paavai* (straightforward vision) he visualised women to possess still serve as an inspiration to some and an aspiration for others.

Despite multiple readings of Bharati's life over the ages, there's still scope to analyse the various facets of his life. And, that's what the film *Shaktidasan* (devotee of Shakti) by director Usha Rajeshwari sets out to do.

The 70-minute film that's part documentary and part drama, also features illustrations (by S.A.V. Elaiyabarthi) and shadow play. Scholars on Bharati, his family members and those familiar speak about him, while actors enact certain important aspects of the patriot-poet's life. Among these are the people who turn out to be very important in his spiritual and political journey – Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Sister Nivedita, who is his guru, and the washerman Kullachami, who makes him understand that



Memories of a poet (From far left)
A scene from *Shaktidasan*; and
Rajkumar Bharathi, who has
scored music for the film. PHOTOS:
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & R. RAVINDRAN



Songs on Shiva

Layapriya presents a series of concerts as part of its 33rd Mahashivaratri festival, to take place from February 26, 5 p.m. to February 27, 5 a.m. Venue: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Mini Hall, Mylapore. The event, to be inaugurated by Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti, will begin with Dr. Sudha Sesayyan's discourse 'Sivarathri Mahimai' (5 p.m.). The 12-hour series will feature

concerts by Unnikrishnan (6 p.m.); Bonala Shankar Prakash (veena at 7 p.m.); Palghat R. Ramprasad (8 p.m.); Salem Gayathri (9 p.m.);

Vasudha Ravi (10 p.m.); Savitha Sriram (abbang, 11 p.m.); Vivek Mozhikulam (February 27, 12.05 a.m.); Jayamangala Krishnamani (1 a.m.); S.M. Vilasini (2 a.m.) and T.G. Athmanabhan (3 a.m.). The line up concludes with Mylai Sargurunathan's Tirumurai rendition (4 a.m. - 5 a.m.).

Naadhabrahmam's Shivaratri line up, from February 26, 6 p.m. to February 27, 6 a.m., will be held at Panigraha, Arya Gowda Road, West Mambalam.

Odhuvar Kudanthai Lakshmanan will be honoured with 'Naadha Padhika Sevaka' title on the occasion followed by his Tirumurai rendition (6 p.m.). The line up includes vocal concert by Chinmayi sisters (8 p.m.), namasankirtanam by Papanasam Ramani (10 p.m.), and group singing led by Kamala Ramanathan (12.01 a.m.). Tevaram rendition by Mathangi Shankar and Aadesh Krishna at 2 a.m. on February 27 followed by G. Adesh Krishna's vocal concert (4 a.m.) will complete the series. Live telecast on www.dinamalar.com

Why Bharati still matters

only through experience can he feel/experience God. Many of these meetings and the pondering that followed transformed Bharati from a free thinker to a devotee of Parashakti.

If Bharati is seen as a feminist today, credit must go to Sister Nivedita, who made him understand that without freedom for women, there is no freedom for the land. And, full marks to the film for the scene that follows – Bharati apologises to his wife Chellamma, for yelling at her, and for beating her twice. He promises her that the old Bharati is dead. This scene is rare at a time when creators tend to paint their

subjects as paragons of virtue. This is also the time Bharati visualises a resplendent Bharata Mata in front of a tree, and decides to write poetry for the emancipation of the country.

The film speaks of his time in Pondicherry, the hours spent with Aurobindo, Vivekananda's influence on his life, the idea of illusion (*maaya*) in Bharati's eyes and his poignant relationship with the concept of Shakti. Tamil scholar Isaikai Ramanan puts it beautifully: "His relationship with Shakti was not born out of devotion; the devotion came after he understood the depth of his relationship."

The film is on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icSRoOsXMZM>) and the comments section is proof of why Bharati is still relevant.

If many still remember Bharati by his white turban, well-kept moustache and spirited eyes, some also remember him as the person with the scrawny beard, fierce, expressive eyes and the man who dared to hold his Chellamma close to him in a photograph. It is more of the latter Bharati you see, essayed beautifully by Karthik Gopinath. And, he is effective, because you get to see both the evolved Bharati and the work-in-progress version.

The film also features some of the renaissance poet's verses, rendered by his great grandson Rajkumar Bharathi (who also scored for the film), and singers Sikkil Gurucharan and Abhishek Raghuram. It has been shot in places the poet visited and lived in, such as Ettayapuram, Varanasi, Chennai and Pondicherry.

The film spends substantial time on his bond with Sister Nivedita, and producer Soundarya Sukumar, in her press note, says that the film began with the thought: "Where did Bharathi meet Sister Nivedita?"

Others who are a part of the film are research scholar Nirjan Bharathi, Rajkumar's son and Bharati's great grandson, and Elango Kumaran. Cinematography is by Anand Thiagarajan and sound engineering is by M T Aditya Srinivasan.

So, why is Bharati such an important part of Tamil consciousness? There are many reasons, and among those are his extraordinary felicity with words and the pace at which he wrote – it is almost as if he knew he did not have much time.

In his 38 years, he wrote 228 poems, 1,259 essays, 69 translations and 55 short stories, ran two magazines, and was a political and spiritual being. And, he surrendered himself to Parashakti – hence the title, *Shaktidasan*.

But, most of all, Bharati inspires because his life was proof that people can evolve. And that one can bring about change over generations with one's distilled thoughts.

Thumri's expressive power

Singer Indrani Mukherjee on why she loves to engage with the musical form

Neha Kirpal

As a practitioner of Purab Ang Thumri, Hindustani vocalist Indrani Mukherjee has come to experience the most empowering aspect of womanhood – where a daughter, wife and mother become fearless and expressive. "A woman becomes a communicator of emotions," says Indrani ahead of her first solo performance in Mumbai. The concert presented by Pancham Nishad will be held on February 23 at NCPA's experimental theatre.

Born into a musical family, Indrani loves singing khayal as much as thumri. "I strive to delve into the depth of the lyrical content. While classical music is a 'swar-pradhan' gayaki, showcasing the huge canvas of a raga, semi-classical music is a 'shabda-pradhan' gayaki, showcasing the emotional nuances of words," she explains.

At the age of three, Indrani's musical journey began with the Kirana gharana style of singing, when she started training with her mother, aunt and maternal grandfather.

Sanjib Banerjee. When she was around 14, Indrani's grandfather casually asked her what her aim in life was. He gave her a few days to decide and let him know. After a great deal of thinking, she told him that she wanted to be a singer. Thereafter, in 1996, she became a scholar at the ITC Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata under the mentorship of Pt. Arun Bhaduri. Later introduced to the thumri, she received *taleem* for many years from vidushi Purnima Choudhury. In 2008, Indrani began learning from Pt.

Ramashraya Jha and vidushi Manju Sundaram.

Through this path, she imbibed the essence of the Agra gharana.

Indrani feels that a raga does not need a particular style to reveal its *roop*. Further, Indrani is working on bhajans with a unique soundscape, incorporating various percussion instruments such as shree khol, mridangam and tabla. In March, she will go on her first Australian concert tour, performing in Sydney as well as at the Melbourne International Festival for Hindustani music. "I'm also excited to meet new audiences and connect with aspiring musicians during my two-day vocal workshop in Melbourne," says Indrani.



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The NSD Repertory staged Mohan Rakesh's iconic play *Aadhe Adhure* after three decades with the same lead cast

Anuj Kumar
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Not many have mapped the inner lives of middle-class India as writer Mohan Rakesh has. One of the foremost proponents of the *Nayi Kahani* (new story) movement that swept the Hindi literature scene in the 1950s and 1960s, Rakesh explored the moral architecture of the burgeoning middle class when a feudal India was gingerly pacing towards modernity after Independence.

This week, the National School of Drama Repertory

Return of the classic

paid a fitting tribute to Rakesh in his centenary year by staging his iconic play *Aadhe Adhure* with the same lead cast, Pratima Kannan and Ravi Khanvilkar. The duo performed it three decades ago under the direction of Tripurari Sharma.

Like most of Rakesh's works, *Aadhe Adhure* juxtaposes the shapeshifting rigidity of a patriarchal society with the aspirations and desires of a working woman.

A product of his times, Rakesh drew from personal experiences, and also put his female protagonist Savitri under scrutiny. Unlike her mythical namesake, she is not ready to sacrifice herself for a husband who takes out his professional frustrations by finding faults in her character. As Pratima says, some "relationships become a habit"

you can't do without. First staged by theatre stalwarts Om Shivpuri and Sudha Shivpuri, the play has, over the years, opened up space for deeper conversations about gender and social constraints.

Some progressive writers and feminist voices feel that, in the end, the play reinforces the male agenda to cage women. Others find its portrayal of a woman's struggle, caught between traditional roles and personal aspirations, relatable.

It is this in-betweenness of emotional takeaways that keeps the play and its characters relevant more than five decades after it was penned.

It is so tightly woven, says seasoned theatre critic Diwan Singh Bajeli, that directors don't take the liberty to tweak it. "The dialogues are constructed in a way if you take

away a pause or a comma, the context will change."

Pratima recalls that when Tripurari Sharma had given Savitri a little more nuance in expression, "it created a flutter because, the audience used to take a slightly negative image of the character with them".

Known names in the TV and film circuit, Pratima and Ravi took a break from their commitments for the play. "When the offer came, I was scared because we have become used to cuts and retakes. Theatre demands much more energy and presence of mind. But when NSD director Chittaranjan Tripathi insisted, we put all our commitments on hold and dedicated three months to the production," says Pratima.

It is the complexity of the characters that excites Ravi. "I approached the four characters in the same way as I did then, but years of practice and life experiences allowed me to add detail to the performance. It is like a painter returning to one of his best works to add a few more colours."

Describing the performance as an authentic portrayal of the play, Mohan Rakesh's wife Anita Rakesh, says it draws from her family's experiences.

Flow of tunes

Anupam Shobhakar's new album *Liquid Reality* blends Indian classical with global sounds

Neha Kirpal

A new fusion album combines the Hindustani classical tradition with global sounds. Brooklyn-based composer, record producer and sarodist Anupam Shobhakar's *Liquid Reality* releases on March 14, coinciding with the festival of Holi.

"I wanted to expand the scope of the sarod as just an Indian classical instrument," he says, talking about the idea behind *Liquid Reality*. And so, Anupam collaborated with an ensemble of global talent, including Swaminathan Selvaganesh, Satoshi Takeishi, Gumbi Ortiz, Santiago Leibson and Utsav Lal. "The album kept populating itself with cool ideas derived from diverse genres of music," says Anupam.

'Hey Ghilab', a track dedicated to Mirza Ghilab, has Shobhakar lending a jazz perspective to ghazal. 'Anjaneya' is propelled by the percussive prowess of young kanjira artiste Swaminathan Selvaganesh and Satoshi Takeishi on the drums. 'Ladders to the sky', featuring Barcelona-born vocalist Ona Kirei and percussionist Gumbi Ortiz,

brings in a Brazilian flair. 'Formless' has Anupam joining Swaminathan for a spirited duet. Further, Anupam's take on Shakti's iconic 'La danse du bonheur' has Brooklyn-based Indian pianist Utsav Lal lending his distinct touch.

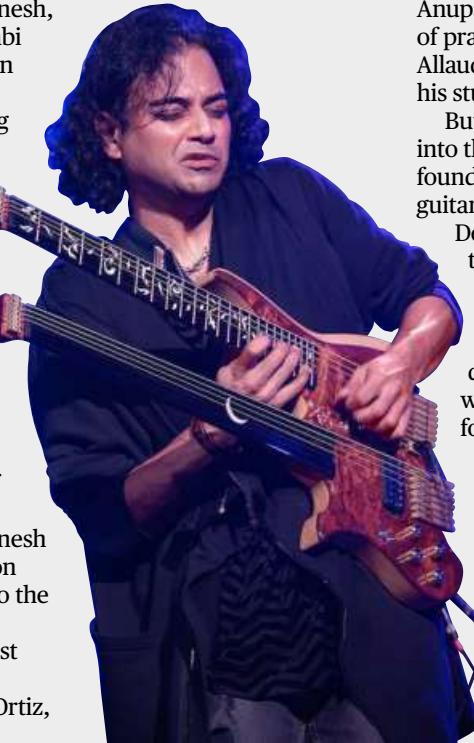
Anupam hails from a family of Hindustani musicians belonging to the Maihar gharana. However, growing up as a "Bombay kid" in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Anupam was deeply influenced by guitar virtuosos Eddie Van Halen, Joe Satriani and Allan Holdsworth. But at 16, Anupam Shobhakar attended a concert by Ustad Ali

Akbar Khan at the National Centre for Performing Arts in Mumbai. The evening turned into a life-changing moment for him - he decided to put down the guitar and start playing the sarod.

It was Ustad Aashish Khan who took Anupam under his wings and opened the doors of Indian music to him. "Having lived in the West and having worked with several musicians, including the inimitable The Beatles, he had this amazing open-mindedness that resonated with someone like me," says Anupam. His greatest memory is going to Maihar with his guru, where Anupam had the honour of practicing on Ustad Allaoudin Khan's sarod in his study.

But as he delved deeper into the sarod, Anupam found himself missing his guitar. It was Annapurna Devi who advised him to follow his own path. This led him to commission the Kalima, a bespoke double-neck guitar, with one fretted neck for western techniques and one fretless neck for sarod-like expressions.

"I literally had it come to me in a dream, or maybe it was always germinating in my subconscious," he says.



Annual festival

Hamsadhwani will feature the following programmes as part of its 35th annual music and drama festival, at Youth Hostel, Adyar. Schedule: February 21, 6.15 p.m.: R. Suryaprakash (vocal). February 22, 6.15 p.m.: S. Kanakavalli and students' Abhang and namasankirtanam. February 23, 6.15 p.m.: Chitravina N. Ravikiran.

New Tamil plays

Under the auspices of Kartik Fine Arts the following plays will be staged. Details: Theatre troupe thRee will premiere its new play *Mental Madhil* on February 23, 6.45 p.m., at Narada Gana Sabha. Written and directed by V. Sreevathson.

Mali's Stage will present its new play *Kannan Vandha Neram* on February 25, 6.45 p.m., at TAG Mylapore Fine Arts Club Hall.



*Check online for updated showtimes as they may vary.

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CALENDAR

HCL concert series

The Music Academy will feature a vocal concert by Sarvepalli Sisters (Sreya and Rajalakshmi), today, 6 p.m. and Janane Sethunarayanan's Bharatanatyam recital on February 25, 6 p.m. at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.

United Visual's next

Organised by JB Cultural Foundation, United Visuals stages the 177th show of Sri Thyagarajar on February 22, 6.30 p.m. at Krishna Gana Sabha, T. Nagar. As a prelude to its next play *Sangeetha Mummoorthigal*, a special scene featuring the Music Trinity meeting at the saint-composer's residence and rendering a composition in praise of Rama has been added.

