

friday Review

THE HINDU

Tribute to a creative geniusCelebrating Tanjore S. Kalyanaraman's 95th birth anniversary **p2****A cultural network**How three women launched a virtual community of folk art enthusiasts **p3****TIMELESS MELODIES OF SALIL CHOWDHURY**Revisiting the poet-composer's musical oeuvre on his birth centenary **p4****N.C. Srinivasaraghavan**

When asked about the significance of Pride Month, Revathi said, "Pride is not just a celebration but a protest for survival, visibility and acceptance. From forced marriages to conversion therapy, queer people, especially those from working-class and rural backgrounds, fight to just exist without shame. We march to be seen, to affirm that our identities are not a disease or disorder."

Revathi published her first book in Tamil, *Uunarvum Uruvamum* (Our Lives, Our Words) in 2004, followed by *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*, published first in English (translated by feminist historian V. Geetha) in 2010, which, a year later, was published in Tamil as *Vellai Mozhi*. This autobiography has been turned into a play with the same name and was recently staged at Kulavai, a two-day festival, held at Alliance Française in Chennai.

Kulavai explored feminism, queerness and resistance in Tamil theatre. It also celebrated renowned theatre personality A. Manga's four-decade journey in the field. It was amidst this that Revathi performed *Vellai Mozhi* to a packed audience.

Power-packed narratives
The play's strength lies in Revathi's raw honesty as she brings her life story to the stage by selecting deeply personal moments from her book – those that resonate with the audience. "I use art – books, poetry, drama – to move hearts and spark a change," she says. "People must understand what I express. While some in the queer community reject sympathy, I see it as the first step. Sympathy can lead to support, and support can bring rights. Transforming society is not easy – it takes time, patience and persistence."

Revathi revisits painful chapters of her life, yet manages to convey queer joy to a largely cisgender, heterosexual audience. With wit and disarming honesty, she recalls the first night she slept in a woman's clothing – reflecting on the irony of how modesty demands women be fully covered, even when fully dressed. She ecstatically dances to actor Saroja Devi's songs, celebrating a femininity once shamed and rejected by her family and society. LGBTQ+ activists often stress that joy is a survival strategy, not just a feeling – it is a refusal to be defined by pain alone.

Her activism is grounded in the understanding that caste, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and ability overlap to shape people's experiences of discrimination or privilege. Revathi has consistently supported trans men and



Act of Pride

Trans woman activist A. Revathi, who recently staged her autobiographical play *Vellai Mozhi* at the Kulavai festival, uses art as a tool of protest and change



underprivileged cis-queer people, earning the love of the younger generation. In one scene in the play, she highlights the public gaze transgender women endure – seen as a nuisance for begging, judged for their appearance, and denied respect. She flips the script, asking society: "How dare you question us?" She exposes its brutal silence on child abuse, caste atrocities,



honour killings, and acid attacks – crimes where those who speak out are often silenced or killed.

Socio-personal triggers

Young queer people today worry about ageing, haunted by fears of loneliness, lack of traditional support, healthcare discrimination and legal or emotional insecurity. In a society obsessed with heteronormative ideals like marriage, LGBTQ+ people often feel anxious about not finding a partner. Revathi shares a painful truth: parents do not always understand these struggles. Many push their children into lavender marriages to have children for society's sake. But, she reminds us, no child – biological or adopted – owes care to their parents in old age. Though she lovingly adopted her brother's children, now with families of their own, she refuses to rely on them for support. At 60, she lives independently, determined not to be a burden. "A partner should be for true companionship," she says. "Love can come from parents, friends, or even adopted children – connection is not limited to romantic relationships."

Her message to the youth: "Education is key – studying and getting a job bring happiness and respect beyond sexuality or gender identity. Through work and social service, you can build supportive communities of friends and a chosen family. But do not limit yourself to work and education, nurture your talents, find creative outlets to keep your mind and spirit alive."

"If I had let depression stop me, I would never have written the books that now reach so many students across universities. I may not know English, but I still stand in classrooms, share story and fight for queer rights – because I refused to give up," says Revathi, who was recently honoured by Columbia University's Butler Banner Project, with her name displayed alongside iconic women writers, challenging the male-dominated facade of Butler Library and promoting inclusion in academic spaces.

At a time when transgender rights are under attack and identities are being erased by those in power around the world, voices like Revathi's offer hope, strength and visibility to a community fighting to survive and be heard.

Candid revelations A. Revathi offers hope and strength to LGBTQ+ people through her writings and plays. Scenes from some of her plays.

PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

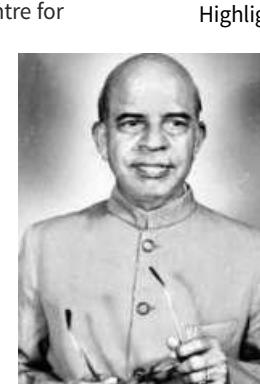


PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**CULTUREBRIEFS****Music, dance and theatre seminar**

Central Sanskrit University, New Delhi, in association with V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, Chennai, and The Samskrita Ranga, Chennai, has organised the Rashtriya Sangita Natya Nataka Sammelanam to celebrate the life and works of legendary Sanskrit scholar V. Raghavan, on June 15 at Dakshinamurthy Auditorium, P.S. High School, Mylapore.

It will be presided over by Prof. Shrinivas Varakhedi, vice-chancellor, Central Sanskrit University. He will deliver the inaugural address on 'Sanskrit, the bedrock of performing arts'. Sandhya Purecha, chairperson, Sangeet Natak Akademi, is the guest of honour and will speak on 'Sanskrit texts and contexts in performing arts'. Aneesh P. Rajan, director, Academies and



Performing Arts Bureaus, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, will deliver the valedictory address.

The inauguration will be followed by the launch of V. Raghavan's book *Ramayana - Text Tradition and Transmission*.

Highlight of the sessions – 10.45 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. and 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.: V. Sumitra speaks on 'Musical forms in sangita and nataka traditions'; Anupama Kylash on 'The Nayikas of Srngaramanjari - Lyrical Explorations'; Srikrishna Madhokkar on 'Purvarangavidhi in Mysore Bani of Bharatanatyam'; Aneesh P. Rajan on 'Sanskrit performing traditions of Kerala'.

The second session will feature Ketu Ramachandrasekhar's lecture on 'Natyadharma - Idealism in Rupakas'; Piyal Bhattacharya's 'Marga system of abhinaya and its prime aspects'.

The seminar is conceptualised by Nandini Ramani. The panel of observers include Radha Bhaskar, Kausalya Srinivasan, Priya Murle, Vasanth Kiran and Divyasena.

Dance series

SNS Arts Development Consultancy is conducting 'Re-Searching Dance: Body, Culture & Power', an interactive online lecture series till September 21. The series, which began yesterday, will be held on alternate weekends, from 6.30 a.m. to 9.30 a.m.

The panel of speakers includes Urmimala Sarkar, dance scholar, choreographer and anthropologist; Pallabi Chakraborty, Kathak dancer and visual anthropologist; and Yashoda Thakore, Kuchipudi and Devadasi Nrityam performer and scholar.

It is open to practitioners/researchers of Indian dance with specialisation in various styles. It bridges theory and practice, inviting dancers and scholars to explore Indian classical dance through critical texts and inquiry.

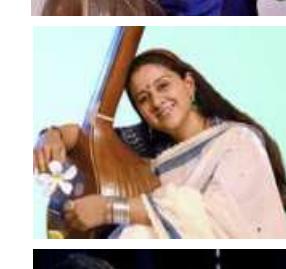
The course is open to all. No prior experience in dance or dance studies is required. For registration contact +91-86387-43551 or email: sayhello@shreyanagarajansingh.com

Lecture demonstration

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha has organised a lecture demonstration 'Music as a Therapy' by Ranjani Hariharan on June 14, 10 a.m. She will be accompanied by Meera Sivaramakrishnan. Venue: Vani Mahal, T. Nagar.

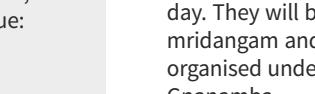
**Endowment concerts**

The Music Academy has organised the following concerts at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. **Schedule: Today, 6 p.m.:** Papanasam Ashok Ramani's vocal for Papanasam Sivan Day. He will be accompanied by B.U. Ganesh Prasad (violin) and Parupalli Phalguna (mridangam). The programme is held under the endowment instituted by Arun Excello Urban Infrastructure.



June 16, 6 p.m.: Annamacharya Day concert by Ranjani Sivakumar. She will be accompanied by Swetha Anadasivan (violin), Jayabharathi (mridangam). The event is organised under the endowment instituted by P. Obul Reddy and P. Gnanamba.

June 17, 6 p.m.: JT Jeyara Jayaraman and Jaysri Jeyara Jayaraman's veena duet for Dikshitar day. They will be accompanied by Arvind Ranganathan on mridangam and K. Ranganathan on ghatam. The recital is organised under the endowment of P. Obul Reddy and P. Gnanamba.





A special event was organised to celebrate the 95th birth anniversary of the creative genius, Tanjore S. Kalyanaraman



An unmatched repertoire

P Srihari

To connoisseurs of Carnatic music, Tanjore S. Kalyanaraman was many things – a virtuoso vocalist, visionary composer and a bold innovator. SKR, as he is widely known, was an illustrious disciple of the legendary G.N. Balasubramaniam. His most distinctive contribution to the Carnatic canon was the creation of the 36 dwi-madhyama panchama-varja melas – derived by excluding the panchamam and employing both shuddha and prati madhyamas in tandem. He not only ideated these ragas, revolutionary in theory and demanding in practice, but also gave some of them form and soul through his own compositions. Such was the incandescent brilliance of Tanjore S. Kalyanaraman.

On his 95th birth anniversary, Madhuradhwani paid a homage to SKR with a commemorative event at the Arkay Convention Center. The evening also featured a violin concert by Nagai R. Muralidharan, who was accompanied by Srimushnam V. Raja Rao on the mridangam and K.V. Gopalakrishnan on the kanjira. Also present on the occasion were Cleveland Sundaram and Bhushany Kalyanaraman (wife of the vocalist), among other dignitaries.

Born on June 2, 1930, in



Thiruvengadu near Mayavaram, Kalyanaraman belonged to the lineage of vidwans – Komal Muthu Bhagavathar (great grandfather) and Madhirimangalam Natesa Iyer (grand uncle). While his father N. Srinivasa Iyer initiated him into the art, musicologist Kittamani Iyer played a crucial role in bringing him under the tutelage of GNB, shared Muralidharan, quoting family sources.

Muralidharan recalled his first concert with SKR at George Town, Madras, in 1970. His guru R.S. Gopalakrishnan had requested that his student be permitted to accompany the maestro, alongside himself. That opportunity blossomed into a cherished association.

"People often link SKR with vivadi ragas because he sang them with finesse," he noted, "but his renditions of mainstream ragas were

Ever the innovator, Kalyanaraman even performed a whistle concert – dubbed ‘a flute concert without a flute’ – in the U.S.

equally compelling." He cited SKR's Thodi as an object lesson in raga development and breath control, evoking the grandeur of T.N. Rajarathnam Pillai's music, and played recordings of SKR's Thodi and Arabhi raga alapanas, which brought those memories alive for the audience.

The list of those who accompanied SKR reads like a roll call of Carnatic royalty – Lalgudi Jayaraman, T.N. Krishnan, M.S. Gopalakrishnan, M. Chandrasekaran, Palghat Mani Iyer, C.S. Murugabhoopathy,

Umayalpuram K Sivaraman, T.K. Murthy, Palghat Raghu, Karaikudi Mani, Mannargudi Eswaran, Raja Rao, and more – underscoring the esteem in which he was held, added Muralidharan.

Raja Rao fondly recalled SKR's love for scooters, cars, gadgets, and surround sound set-ups long before they became a commonplace. It was SKR, he reminded, who first perfected and popularised the Tyagaraja kriti 'Enta muddo' in Bindumalini. Subbudu once, in his review, likened SKR's sangatis to a bountiful cascade of parijata flowers tumbling down when the branches of the tree are shaken, Raja Rao said.

Sundaram reflected on his 18-year-long association with SKR, through his sister, who was his student. "SKR faced many challenges in his personal life. Bhushany was a pillar of support and instrumental in his several accomplishments. He was incredibly hard-working. It was a frequent occurrence that he would take up a single raga and kriti and practise for four hours, mostly in the company of MSG and Karaikudi Mani. He was never satisfied with himself and always looked for improvement. Never one to complain, he once lamented – words that not only saddened but left a lasting impression on me: 'uzhaikka kathundane thavira naan pizhaikka kathukkala' (I learnt to work hard, but

not how to make a living). SKR was unrelenting in his pursuit of perfection, said Sundaram. "Once, I gave him a recording of his concert. The next day, he returned it with the pallavi erased, saying it had not come out well. I argued that it was fine. He replied, 'If that is your idea of good music, and you are promoting it, then God save music!' This, he said, about his own music, which is rare to come across."

Sundaram recounted how SKR, on the advice of K.V. Narayanaswami, took a six-month break from *sadhakam* to regain his voice. Such was his discipline and respect for peer wisdom. Ever the innovator, SKR even performed a whistle concert – dubbed "a flute concert without a flute" – accompanied by Raja Rao in the U.S.

Music was his life; yet, recognition often eluded him. The Kalaimamani award came only on the eve of his demise – he passed away on January 9, 1994.

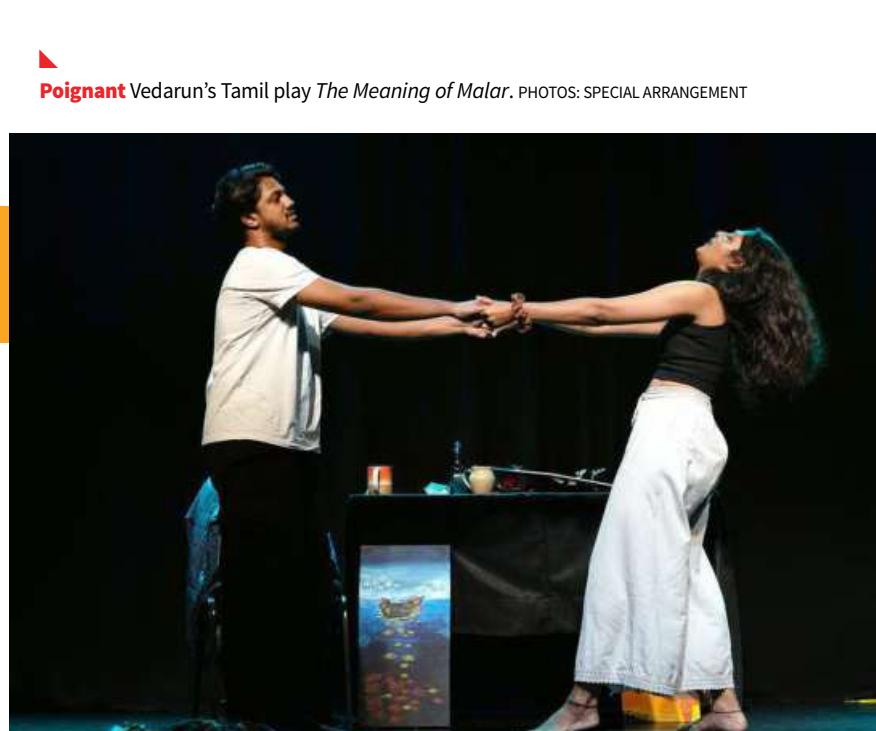
The evening then segued into a violin recital by Muralidharan – an offering that resonated with the spirit of SKR. Assisted by his disciple D. Badrinarayanan, Muralidharan opened with Papanasam Sivan's 'Tatvamari tarama' (Ritigowla), followed by Tyagaraja's 'Tolijanmamuna jeyu' (Bilahari). Neetimati and Vadageeswari – two vivadi ragas dear to SKR – were lovingly explored, the former through Koteeswara Iyer's 'Mohanakara mutukumara', and the latter in Tyagaraja's 'Paramatmudu velige'. The tani avartamam, featuring Raja Rao and Gopalakrishnan, sparked with vibrant and absorbing rhythmic interplay. SKR's own Darbari Kanada thillana in Misra Chapu served as a fitting signature from the master himself.

The seed of life

The Meaning of Malar explores relationship and gender dynamics

Aishwarya Raghunathan

A small, cozy space with minimal lighting, a floor-level performance area and props thoughtfully arranged across the stage made-up the unpretentious, yet evocative setting of Karpanai Kudrai's Tamil play, *The Meaning of Malar*. Written and



Poignant Vedarun's Tamil play *The Meaning of Malar*. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

directed by Vedarun, the play was staged at IDAM, Kodambakkam, Chennai. There were no backdrops or curtains raisers; the space felt less like a stage and more like an extension of a living room, inviting the audience into an intimate atmosphere.

The design and lighting choices set the tone for a theatrical experience that

privileges emotional authenticity and psychological depth over spectacle. And that is how the floor-level acting space collapses the distance between performers and audience, fostering a shared emotional space, and viewers were drawn into the drama unfolding in Malar's life.

The play's non-linear structure eschewed

chronological storytelling, instead, wove together moments from Malar's childhood and late 20s, revealing how the past and present coexist in a continuous emotional dialogue. This dramaturgical choice mirrored the fragmented nature of memory and trauma, compelling the audience to actively piece together the

narrative while inhabiting the emotional state of the characters. The absence of scene breaks or an interval, created a temporal and spatial continuum. This uninterrupted flow functioned as a metaphor for unresolved emotions and silences that permeated Malar's relationships.

Malar, portrayed with

Conventional, yet appealing

Rasika Rajagopalan and D. Dilip's *kuchipudi* recital, 'Mugdha Madhavam', consisted of compositions devoted to Krishna

V.V. Ramani

When thematic dance performances are the order of the day, watching one based on traditional repertoire was refreshing. D. Dilip and Rasika Rajagopalan presented a *Kuchipudi* dance recital, organised by Saila Sudha, at Rasika Ranjani Sabha, in Chennai. Titled 'Mugdha Madhavam', the performance consisted of compositions devoted to Krishna.

The dancers, in colour-coordinated costumes, began with 'Kasturi thilakam', a prayer from *Krishna Karnamritam* by Bilavangala. Next came the Niroshita Raga Svaravali (composed by Bhagavatulu Seetharama Sharma), which was marked by energetic dancing. The piece also stood out for synchronised movements and sculpturesque poses.

Performances based on Krishna songs would be incomplete without a Jayadeva



In perfect sync
Rasika Rajagopalan and D. Dilip.
PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

remarkable subtlety by Snehaa Sesh, is a woman caught in the complex web of her relationships with two men, Kumar (Sadasivam Suryanarayanan) and Benjamin (Rajbarath Balamurali). Through these relationships, the play probes the ambiguities of attachment. The interactions of the two men with Malar oscillate between tenderness and tension, reflecting the messy, often contradictory nature of human bonds.

The play's themes of emotional fragility, miscommunication, and the quest for freedom resonate universally, yet are deeply rooted in Tamil cultural idioms. The symbolic use of Malar (flower) evokes notions of beauty intertwined with impermanence and resilience. With subtle humour, the play speaks raw, balancing moments of levity with unflinching honesty.

Post show, Vedarun shared that he loves reading books on psychology. And one such is Amir Levine's *Attached*. "I drew inspiration from it while working on the play," he said. This influence was evident in the nuanced depiction of relationship dynamics that defined *The Meaning of Malar*.

Music concerts

Sarvani
Sangeetha Sabha
Trust will feature B. Lalitha Madhav's vocal concert on Annamcharaya compositions, today, 6.15 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall.

Madhuradhwani will feature the following at Arkay Convention Center. Today, 6 p.m.: 'Kanchipuram in Raga and Rhythm' a lecdem by Madhusudhanan Kalaichelvan with Bhava Hari (vocal). June 14, 6.15 p.m.: Bhavadhaarini Anantankar will render Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavat's kritis. June 18, 6.15 p.m.: Sattanatha Bhagavat's namasankirtanam.



Lakshmi Radhakrishnan's 'Krishna with Gopis' using Phad art SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

R. Revathi

It began with a single hashtag. Two hobby artists, Aishwarya Magesh and Lakshmi Radhakrishnan posted works for a themed Instagram challenge, organised by another creator, Megha Mocherla. They soon struck up a conversation and discovered a shared love for Indian folk traditions. Hence, they decided to set themes of their own and invited anyone, novice or seasoned, to join in.

Together they created Artistic Folklore (@artisticfolklore), an Instagram hub, where folk art challenges run quietly, yet persistently, week-after-week. Their experiment soon needed an extra pair of hands and that is when Jyoti Navin Sharma joined in.

What began as individual pursuits soon evolved into a shared space where artists and enthusiasts explored themes, learnt new techniques and celebrated together India's artistic heritage.

Indian folk art carries centuries of tradition, deeply rooted in regional customs, storytelling and religious symbolism. In today's rapidly evolving artistic landscape, folk art is finding a new momentum through

The collective canvas

Artistic Folklore, an Instagram hub, helps people connect, learn and create folk art

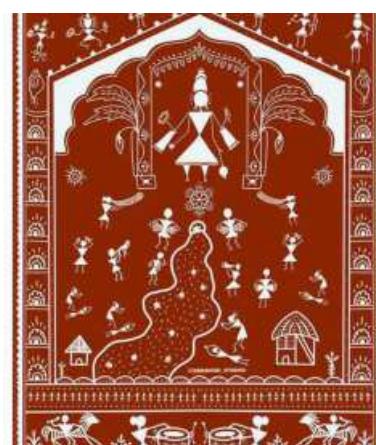
online platforms, spearheaded by passionate artists, who seek to reconnect with their heritage.

Virtual handlers

The three founders come from varied backgrounds – Aishwarya, originally from Tiruchi in Tamil Nadu, is a fashion designer with a degree in Costume Technology, now lives in the U.K.; Lakshmi, a medical data scientist from Kerala, grew up in Chennai and now lives in the U.S., while Jyoti Navin Sharma, from Mumbai, has a Masters in Biochemistry. Similarly, the trio also had artistic leanings, as in, Aishwarya, works as a freelance

artist educator in London, conducting workshops for children and adults on mental well-being using art. Besides this, her personal works have been displayed at the Rugby Art Gallery and Museum, U.K.

Lakshmi leaned towards Kerala aural art and Thanjavur art and delved deep into the folk arts during the pandemic. Jyoti comes back with a business in the textile industry. When her daughter joined the business, Jyoti returned to her long-desired passion and learnt various artforms from reputed artists such as Alok Ranjan Sahoo (Pattachitra), Mohan Prajapati and Dhani Ram (Kangra miniature), and



Ajit Dilipbhai Chitara (Mata ni Pachedi).

The trio, undeterred by the different continents they live in and the different time zones, found a way to collaborate virtually to plan strategies and workflows.

Rooted in tradition

Historically, folk art was a community-driven practice – be it murals on temple walls, intricate story-telling through scroll paintings or ritualistic symbols adorning homes. Today, in a world dominated by contemporary art and digital illustration, traditional folk art is finding new relevance. Online

collaborations allow artists to engage in cross-regional interactions and explore styles beyond native traditions.

Through these collaborations, many were introduced to lesser-known forms. While Madhubani remains familiar to most, the group's initiatives have inspired artists to explore lesser-known traditions such as Mata ni Pachedi (Gujarat) and Bhil tribal art (Madhya Pradesh).

An interesting part is the modern touch artists lend to these art forms. While some recreate them as digital paintings, others take up contemporary topics. For instance, 'Phad on Wheels,' a recent theme, saw artists paint people on bicycles, buses, even skateboards using Rajasthan's Phad style.

Lakshmi says, "Over time, the collaborations have not only expanded the artistic awareness, but led to significant improvement in technique and execution."

Breaking barriers

The initiative has drawn participants from all walks of life – home-makers, students, working professionals and senior citizens. They find this platform as a way

to create and connect with others. Aishwarya, who works with people with dementia, believes, folk art, with repetitive patterns, is extremely calming.

Anukrati Chauhan, a data engineer from Noida, describes the experience as therapeutic and credits the initiative for broadening her artistic horizons. She also finds the mentoring unique in this group. For Sonam Bansal, a software professional from Indore, the platform was all about rediscovering folk art and allowing her to reconnect with India's cultural roots.

Similarly, Chennai-based home-maker Shyamala Devi ventured into the initiative with *kolam* (rangoli), an intricate ground art drawn in front of homes in Tamil Nadu.

The collective has also attracted artists from across the globe. Deepa Chinni, a doctor based in the U.S., creates different art and craft works. "When I participate in theme, I know I am creating art alongside a group, and not in isolation."

"The initiative remains non-commercial, as in, no entry fee is collected, but all one needs to do is pin a schedule and tag #artisticfolklore," say the founders.

acted in multiple productions, not just learning technical aspects of theatre-making and multiple musical instruments, but also training many actors, over the last two decades. Though her work brings a feminine gaze to overlooked mythological characters like Tara and Urmila, Nimmy does not believe that artistes create "so they can talk about politics." She affirms, however, that it falls upon the artiste to "address society with their questions," that may then provoke reflective action.

She likens the actor's breath to a motor that animates emotion. "If the motor dies, the boat will not move forward," she says, later speaking of characters such as Araja and Ambika (both from the Adishakti production, *Bhoomi*, that Vinay Kumar has written and directed) as being at different stages on a continuum of courage. "Everything is cultivated – creativity and imagination, as also courage," she says. Calling herself a "reluctant writer," she points to the power of "surrender" in creative work. "I learnt this from my parents as farmers. You cannot hurry a seed to grow," says Nimmy.

Creative bond Nimmy Raphel balances managerial tasks with creative roles at Adishakti (below). PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & THE HINDU ARCHIVES



She agrees that this is "not easy in creative work," but "when it's there in the back of the head," it could be very enabling for a performer, whose body, in her words, "becomes a living archive" of

performances and knowledge systems.

Having emerged from the crucible of Veenapani Chawla's holistic and immersive performance training, Nimmy has written, directed and

Under the spotlight

Nimmy Raphel on her love for experimental theatre and finding her creative self at Adishakti



Charumathi Supraka

Nimmy Raphel's name is synonymous with Adishakti Laboratory For Theatre Art Research, founded by theatre practitioner Veenapani Chawla (1983 in Puducherry). Nimmy is also known as one of the propelling forces at the heart of Adishakti Theatre. The artiste, also trained in Kuchipudi and Mohiniyattam, has extensively dabbled in experimental theatre with the late Veenapani Chawla.

She is called "the engine of Adishakti" but there's nothing mechanical about Nimmy Raphel. On any given day, you might find her high up on a ladder, deftly fixing a snag during post-midnight light setup in the theatre or somewhere near the office, discussing the finer points of the day's menu, or guffawing with trainee actors at the red-oxide round tables.

Interacting after the 11th edition of the Remembering Veenapani

Festival, held recently in Adishakti Theatre, Auroville, Nimmy (also managing trustee) spoke about her relationship with the verdant campus, her work and her mentor Veenapani Chawla (founder of Adishakti).

Speaking about balancing managerial tasks with creative roles, she says, "It is easier to manage all tasks - creative and others, because I do not have an end goal. If I'm making something, it has to be worth my time and the audience's time. Time is the biggest investment an artist needs to make."

Nimmy firmly believes in "accumulated energy" that, she points out, is the way of a "lot of traditional performers." She works by "not doing everything at once" because stories work in mysterious ways, "generating curiosity and propelling you into unknown paths that can be very scary and uncertain." Though she thrives on these hidden paths, she's challenged by the lack of structure in Indian theatre, on the production front.

"We do not have real producers in theatre like in music, dance or films but, luckily, because there is an umbrella called Adishakti, we can make work and even take it to places where they cannot pay us but just fund our travel."

The hard places that even seasoned theatre practitioners traverse become evident when Nimmy says, "If we say we will go only if there is money, a lot of work will never be shown. Our way is to balance our processes of making and showing work. While travelling with a show, either Vinay (artistic director, Adishakti) or me are thinking about the next project. And when it starts, we slow down to give it time for exploration, for failure, for testing..."

Nimmy stresses the importance of failure, comparing it with "darkness that offers possibilities." Success, she says, "is like blinding white light. Once successful, everybody accepts you but when you fail, nobody pays attention to you. Then, you can do more."

THE POWER OF TOUCH



Dr. K.S. Kavitha Gautham, MBBS, MS (OG)
Managing Director, BloomLife Hospital Pvt. Ltd.

Baby massages are an important aspect of caring for your little one, as they provide a whole host of benefits, and are definitely worth including as a part of their routine.

Better bonding: Massages help to release oxytocin, or the 'love hormone', thereby deepening the bond between the parent and baby. It also provides a way for the parent to better understand the baby's cues.

Boosting weight gain: Regular massages help to enhance healthy weight gain in growing infants.

Improved overall well-being: Massages help to improve circulation, stimulate bowel movements, and alleviate colic.

Better sleep: Massages promote a sense of calm relaxation, thereby augmenting the quality of sleep.

Developmental benefits: Structured infant massages help to promote motor skills and body awareness, improved muscle tone, joint mobility, tactile stimulation, and better self-regulation.

Techniques of infant massage

Massages should be given in a calm room with minimal distractions (soft music can be played). The temperature should be monitored so that it is suitable for the baby. The baby can be given a bath in lukewarm water before the massage. Organic coconut oil is preferred for the massages

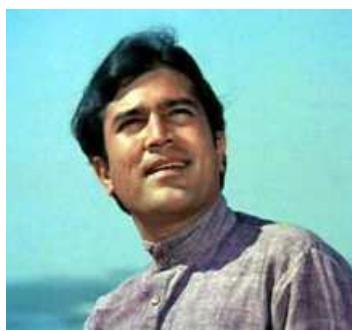
as it is easily absorbed. The massage should be centred on circumductive motion in trunk, and provided with gentle pressure and rhythmic touch. For a safe massage experience, please follow the below-given guidelines:

- Get your paediatrician's opinion before starting a massage routine.
- Choose an appropriate surface that is comfortable for the baby.
- Always do a patch test with the oil to be used; continue only if no adverse reaction is seen.
- Gentle pressure should be applied, with smooth strokes, avoiding stimulus-causing tickling.
- Don't massage over soft parts (such as anterior fontanelle or top part of the baby's head).
- Make sure that the baby is calm and alert during the massage. If the baby is crying or seems uncomfortable, don't force it.
- Avoid giving the baby a massage immediately before or after feeding.

In both cases, a break of about 20 minutes should do.
www.bloomlifehospital.com
For more details contact BloomLife Hospital Pvt. Ltd. Velachery & Ashok Nagar. +91-94989 94989



A century of melodies
Salil Chowdhury and stills from films that had his compositions: (clockwise from far right) *Madhumati*, *Anand* and *Do Bigha Zameen*.



The man, the music, the message

Revisiting poet-composer Salil Chowdhury's musical oeuvre on his birth centenary

Anuj Kumar

As I drove towards the hills to get rid of the scorching Delhi heat this past week, Salil Chowdhury was my trusted companion. Of course, the conversation began with the ultimate travel song, 'Suhana safar aur ye mausam haseen' (*Madhumati*), but, as rain clouds gathered, the subtle undertone of longing and wistfulness in Mukesh's voice gave way to an interplay of rain and romance in Lata Mangeshkar's ethereal voice in 'O sajna barkha bahar aayi' (*Parakh*). Soon, Talat Mahmood came on with a velvety riposte in the form of 'Itna na tu mujh se pyaar badha ki main ik badal awara' (*Chhaya*), and time melted away.

It was in the hills that the philosophical depth and lyrical beauty of Salil *da* (as he was fondly known) compositions took root. Salil grew up in the tea gardens of Assam, where his father was a medical officer. Surrounded by Europeans, his father Dr. Gyanendra Chowdhury, ardently followed Western classical music and staged plays with plantation workers. His rich collection introduced young Salil to Beethoven and Bach. The discerning can find the influence



of Mozart's symphony in 'Itna na mujhse'. He learned to play the flute and piano. The ambience of the tea estate exposed him to the folk traditions of the region.

When the family shifted to Calcutta, a teenage Salil underwent a socio-political awakening as Bengal was reeling under a manufactured famine – result of exploitative Colonial policies. The famine catalysed Salil's involvement with Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), a cultural arm of the Communist Party of India, which used art to address social issues and famine became a central theme in their performances. It shaped his musical and ideological outlook in the years to come.

After becoming a popular voice of resistance against the Colonial

rule and feudal values, Salil *da* came up with songs such as 'Bicharpatti', based on Bengali folk forms of Baul, Keertan and Bhatiyali. Encouraged by influential filmmaker Bimal Roy, Salil shifted base to Bombay.

Bimal Roy was impressed by Salil's poignant story 'Rickshawala' about an oppressed peasant forced to become a rickshaw puller in the city. He turned it into the classic *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953). Bimal's trust in Salil's ability to craft music was mirrored in the film's theme and cemented their partnership.

The song, 'Dharti kahe pukar ke', explores rural exploitation and Salil drew inspiration from the Russian Red Army's march tune. Bimal further consolidated their bond with *Parakh*, a political satire, again based on a story by

Salil. Its music has also withstood the test of time, with Lata picking the raag Khamaj-based 'O sajna' as one of her all-time favourite. The two created a unique musical synergy where Salil challenged her with complex compositions such as 'Ja re ud ja re panchhi' (*Maya*) and 'Na jiya lage na' (*Anand*) and liberally used her voice in Bangla and Malayalam films as well.

Meanwhile, Salil-Shailendra partnership too continued to grow, so much that, when Raj Kapoor took a neorealist turn with *Jagte Raho* (1956), he approached Salil. The master lived up to the faith reposed in him with the hauntingly contemplative 'Zindagi khwab hai, khwab main doob Ja'. Salil also painted a poignant ode to the motherland in *Kabuliwala* (1961) with 'Ae mere pyare watan' in Manna Dey's voice.

Jagte Raho's background score also has seeds of 'Aaja re pardesi', which Salil later developed (perhaps, on the advise of Shailendra) in his folk-classical style for *Madhumati*. The people's poet and Lata made Salil's simple-yet-intricate composition special by using *bicchua* (scorpion) in 'Chadd gayo paapi bichhua'.

Few know that Salil founded the country's first secular choir in Bombay and, together with Satyajit Ray and Ruma Guha Thakurta, created its Calcutta chapter.

The use of obbligato gave his songs a layered, orchestral quality, making them musically sophisticated, yet emotionally accessible, a rare balance in his era. In *Anand*'s iconic number, 'Zindagi kaisi hai paheli', a subtle string section provides a lilting obbligato. It complements Manna Dey's vocals and offers a reflective countermelody that aligns with the song's existential theme. In 'Kai baar yun bhi dekha hai' (*Rajnigandha*), a delicate flute and soft violin obbligato accompany Mukesh's vocals, creating a gentle countermelody that mirrors the song's theme of fleeting emotions and inner conflicts. Salil's background as a

screenwriter and lyricist informed his ability to craft music that mirrored a film's emotional arc and he became the go-to-composer for filmmakers. When editor Hrishikesh Mukherjee turned to direction with *Musafir* (1957), he reached out to Salil for music. The film is remembered for 'Lagi nahin chhute rama chahe jiya jaye', the thumri-based composition in which Dilip Kumar duets with Lata. It is the first, and perhaps, the last time that the thespian sang.

When Gulzar took up direction with *Mere Apne* (1971), Salil was the obvious choice. The lyricist says his melodies carried the soul of the story. Such was his range and appeal that both R.D. Burman and Hridayanath Mangeshkar sought him as a guru.

Having composed songs in more than a dozen languages, Salil was hooked by the progressive themes of Malayalam films and developed a deep bond with filmmakers such as Ramu Kariat and Aravindan. Many times, he would use the same tune in Hindi, Malayalam and Bengali. Starting with *Chemmeen* (1965), a landmark in Malayalam cinema, the collaboration between Salil and Yesudas deepened with *Chhoti Si Baat* (1975), where he sang the breezy 'Jaaneman jaaneman', mirroring director Basu Chatterjee's slice-of-life charm.

Salil is also credited as the pioneer in background score, composing for songless courtroom dramas and mystery thrillers, such as B.R. Chopra's *Kanoon* (1960) and *Ittefaq* (1969), where background score was pivotal to the narrative. For *Devdas* (1955), Salil created the background score for the climax, though the songs were composed by S.D. Burman. Similarly, Gulzar too reached out to him for the background score of *Mausam*. In Malayalam films such as *Dweepu*, *Abhayam*, and *Vellam*, as well as the Tamil film *Uyir*, Salil's background score aligns with the cultural milieu.

Salil Chowdhury family foundation is carrying forward his legacy, and musicians such as Debojyoti Mishra and Joy Sarkar, as well as the Jibonmukhi Gaan movement, seek to preserve his musical spirit and social consciousness.

For now, it's back to reality for me with the plaintive voice of Talat crooning 'Raat ne kya kya khwab dikhaye' (*Ek Gaon Ki Kahani*).

Singer-songwriter
Abdon Mech on how the Artisius Songbook Camp brought the best out of him

Anurag Tagat

Nagaland-based singer-songwriter Abdon Mech's journey makes you believe that dreams do come true, but not devoid of struggles. When Abdon started out as a musician two years ago, he felt drawn to cities such as Mumbai and New Delhi. But over time, he became a part of the growing movement of North East artistes to build their fanbase right from their hometowns.

His decision finally paid off, and the singer was recently in Budapest, as part of the Artisius Songbook Camp 2025, held in May, which also saw a total of 30 artistes from across



Beats from Budapest

the world. Abdon's participation was championed and sponsored by the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS), along with the Task Force for Music and Arts (TaFMA), Government of Nagaland. Abdon says, "I just

realised the importance of what my culture and identity mean to me and how important it is to bloom where you are planted."

He is now driven by the goal to represent and accelerate growth among

artistes in Nagaland. The Naga representation started right from his time in Budapest as part of the week he spent in Hungary, where Abdon even sported a traditional Sumi Naga jacket.

It has been a five-year-long journey for the singer, who launched his debut single 'Again' in 2020, scored a hit with 'Taking My Heart' in 2022 and recently put together a do-it-yourself open-air concert in March on his home ground, in Dimapur, with thousands in attendance.

artistes in Nagaland. The Naga representation started right from his time in Budapest as part of the week he spent in Hungary, where Abdon even sported a traditional Sumi Naga jacket.

It has been a five-year-long journey for the singer, who launched his debut single 'Again' in 2020, scored a hit with 'Taking My Heart' in 2022 and recently put together a do-it-yourself open-air concert in March on his home ground, in Dimapur, with thousands in attendance.

Where cover bands were more likely to draw crowds before, now original music is staunchly supported, right

down to artistes printing merchandise and bringing in the sales. "I think artistes alone cannot take the credit. It also needs to be given to consumers."

At the camp in Budapest, Abdon was exposed to the global music space and "how different cultures make music differently". He adds in terms of learnings, "I appreciate electronic dance music more because there were many of these artistes and producers who were incredible dance music artistes. Just being with

them and seeing how they have so much soul into what people classify as soulless music was something I took away."

Put in groups of three to four artistes each day, with a daily task to produce a new song, Abdon was interacting with producers, songwriters and singers. He says he has never worked within that kind of framework and structure to bring out a song in a day, it led to creating several songs with collaborators from the U.S., Hungary and elsewhere.

They officially created three songs during their camp hours, but Abdon shares: "Everyone was so inspired that after the day was over we would have these unofficial sessions, collaborate and make music till two or three in the morning."

We can expect more compositions coming out later this year as a result of the camp, along with his solo work – bolstered by the creative energy of Budapest.

CALENDAR



Special listening session

Ganakaladha Madurai Mani Iyer Rasikas Association has organised a special listening session to mark the 57th remembrance day of the legendary musician Madurai Mani Iyer. Titled 'Four decades of the Melody Master' the event will take place on June 15, 4.25 p.m.-6.25 p.m., at Vivekananda Hall, P.S. High School, Mylapore.

HCL concert

The Music Academy will feature Samanvitha G. Sasidaran's vocal concert as part of HCL concert series. It will take place on June 19, 6 p.m., at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Urmika Balaji (violin) and R.S. Pranav (mridangam) will accompany her.

Song and string



Naada Inbam has organised the following concerts at Ragasandra Hall, Luz, Mylapore. Details: June 14, 10.30 a.m.: Swetaranyam Sisters (vocal) with R. Raghu (violin) and Chidambaram S. Balashankar (mridangam).

June 15, 6.15 p.m.: Revathi Srinivasan and Shobana Swaminathan (veena) with J. Vaidyanathan (mridangam) and G. Ravichandran (ghatam).

June 19, 6.15 p.m.: Ameya Karthikeyan (vocal) will be accompanied by R.D. Shyam Raghav (violin) and Adharsh Devarajan (mridangam).

Namasankirtanam

The Music Academy has organised Srikanth Koundinya's namasankirtanam on June 18, 6 p.m. at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. It is held under the endowment instituted by Abhang Ganesh Kumar in memory of Swami Haridhosgiri.

Veena recital

Narada Gana Sabha, will feature Ramkumar Subramanian's veena recital on June 14, 6.30 p.m. at its mini hall. The accompanists are V.G. Viswesh (mridangam) and C. Ganapathy (ghatam). The event is organised under Mangalam Muthuswamy Veena Endowment.

Tamil play

Under the auspices of Narada Gana Sabha, the following plays will be staged at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall. Schedule: June 13, 6.30 p.m.: PMG Mayura Priya's *Ennadi Penne*. June 15, 6.30 p.m.: Koothapiran Navabharath Theatres's *Leela Vinodham*.



Soaring high Abdon Mech has crossed borders with his music. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

He credits TaFMA and IPRS for the boost along the way, where at first (like many artistes), he was not sure of what the copyright society did. He lauds IPRS for reaching out to Nagaland artistes and encouraging them to become members.

"For them, coming all the way to the North East and providing accessibility and inclusivity to someone from this side, shows that they are passionate about the scene as a whole, and not just one part of the country," he says.

Abdon also believes the idea that "lack of accessibility" to the North East has changed with more talents taking center stage. "Over the last few years, the growth has been incredible as far as original music is concerned."

Where cover bands were more likely to draw crowds before, now original music is staunchly supported, right