

fridayReview

THE HINDU

A poignant love story
Kathak dancer Divya Goswami brought alive the Sohni-Mahiwal romance **p2**

Timeless compositions
Musicians rendered songs composed by Pt. C.R. Vyas at a tribute festival **p3**



THE MAHINDRA BLUES FESTIVAL IS BACK

Watch out for pedal street guitarist Robert Randolph **p4**

Rousing voice Nagore Hanifa, who began singing professionally from a young age, had a wide repertoire of songs. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



The minstrel from Nagore

Sung in a distinctive baritone, the devotional and political songs of Nagore Hanifa continue to draw in listeners. A birth centenary tribute

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Of the many singers in South India with a universal appeal, 'Isai Murasu' Esmail Mohamed Hanifa stands tall in the pantheon of greats with origins in Tamil Nadu's Cauvery delta region. Hanifa, an iconic minstrel of Islamic devotional songs in Tamil had strong links with Nagore, the town in Nagapattinam that hosts the 16th century shrine to Sufi saint Syed Abdul Qadir. It eventually became the prefix to his name too. Recently, the Tamil Nadu

government kickstarted the celebration of Hanifa's centenary year by naming a street and public children's park in Nagore after him. It is a fitting tribute to a man who captured the hearts of fans with his distinctive baritone from the early 1930s. Even posthumously, the Hanifa fan base continues to grow, as seen by the number of cover versions of his 'Iraivanidam Kaiyenthungal' and his other songs that are available online. The youngest of three children of Mohamed Ismail, a railway worker in Malaysia, and Mariam Biwi of Ramanathapuram, Hanifa began singing mainly to support his family.



The singer spent his early childhood in Ramanathapuram, and later went to work for his paternal uncle Abu Bakr Rowther in Tiruvavur. It was here that Hanifa's musical talent was noticed. His first professional concert at the age of 13 set him off on a trajectory no one imagined. "My father's rousing voice owes much to the Ghousia Bait-us-Sabha at Nagore, for whom he used to sing," says his son Naushad Ali,

based out of Chennai. "At the time, there was a practice of taking out a pre-wedding procession to introduce the bridegroom to the families in the neighbourhood. A team of young drummers beating 'thabs' would head the procession, followed by the groom in a car or on horseback. My father and his accompanists would be in the middle, with the hosts and guests making up the back of the crowd. He learned early on to beat

the competition from the 'thabs' boys by singing loudly and in tune, without the help of a microphone. It was a skill that he developed out of necessity," he adds. Naushad, now in his sixties, was his father's caregiver in his later years, and also renders vocal concerts in the Nagore Hanifa style. Hanifa's devotional and wedding songs continue to hold sway in Tamil Muslim social functions. His devotional songs were often based on 'nasheed' (Islamic chants sung a cappella or with instruments) and 'naat' (poetry in praise of Prophet Muhammad), referencing the Muslim faith, history, and current events. Quite a few of them were modified to suit Tamil listeners. 'Hasbi rabbi jallalah', for instance, has just the first stanza in Arabic; the rest of the song in Tamil adds elements from Ramanathapuram's history. "It was first recorded in the 1970s for a school function, and I was among the children who sang the chorus," recalls Naushad. 'Maalai soodum manamakkale', 'Vazhga, vazhga, vaazhgave' and

Political anthem

In his heyday, Hanifa used to be known as the 'voice' of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), because of his political anthems for the party. His warm friendship with DMK leader and former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi began in their adolescence and stayed strong through their lifetime. Some of the songs he sang for the party are still used by the DMK to raise the morale of party cadres.

'Deen kula kanne' were among the songs that he presented at marriage concerts, usually held a day before the nuptials or after the wedding reception. He was a mainstay at most of the 'Urs' festivals held by the Sufi dargahs in the State. Nagore Hanifa married past the age of 30, and his wife A.R. Roshan Begum looked after the couple's six children in Nagore while Hanifa built his career.

"We did not get to see our father much while growing up, because he would always be on tour. At the peak of his career, he would have at least 45 engagements in a month. He rarely declined any offer. Those were different times, with no marketing, public relations or copyright. Many songs were set to popular film tunes re-arranged by his small orchestra. I wonder how he managed his career all alone," says Naushad. Hanifa's songs were known for their profound lyrics. He was helped in this by poets Abidin and Nagore Saleem, among others. The self-taught maestro picked up tips on Carnatic music from S.M.A. Qadir at the Nagore dargah. Naushad was tasked with the job of copying out the lyrics and taking care of his father's correspondence. "Much of what I know about Tamil literary expression and pronunciation is due to my father. He would rap me on my head if I got the spelling or grammar wrong," he laughs. Though he had a prodigious memory for lyrics, Hanifa would always take his notebooks with him on stage. "If he noticed mistakes in the rendition, he would skillfully re-sing the portion in a way that the audience would not notice," shares Naushad.

Nagore Hanifa performed in all kinds of venues – from five star hotels and modest homes – with the same flair, and never let his celebrity status get in the way. He would also do any number of encores – he had no ego, says his son. Hanifa occasionally lent his voice to Tamil films – in movies such as *Gulebakavali* (1955), *Paava manippu* (1965) and *Chembaruthi* (1992) – but consciously kept away from cinema because he was not open to adopting a ubiquitous name such as 'Kumar', which was what some composers demanded. "My father used to say that it is more satisfying to sing four songs as Hanifa than a crore songs as Kumar. Having held the stage in live concerts that ran into hours, he did not appreciate his craft being adapted for light music," says Naushad. When Hanifa passed away on April 8, 2015, at the age of 96, a veil fell forever on an era of homespun superstars produced in Tamil Nadu.



Mystic melodies

The TCS Ruhaniyat festival is back with its engaging line up. The 24th edition features a series of performances by artistes from across the globe and genres. Organised by Banyan Tree Events, the Chennai segment will take place on February 9, from 6.15 p.m., at the Madras Race Club, Guindy. 'Gorakhnath Come Alive' featuring Suchitra Balasubramaniam, Wakar Ali and Shafi Khan will open the evening. In 'Mystical Tunes From The Land of Rumi', Ahmet Baran's qanun will bring alive the sufi poet's verses. 'A Glimpse Into The World Of Bulleh Shah' will present Madan Gopal Singh and Chaar Yaar, who will explore history, spirituality, and storytelling. 'Ubuntu - The Spirit of Togetherness' with Dumza Maswana and Volley Nchabeleng from South Africa will weave a soulful mix of harmonies. Warsi Brothers, the torchbearers of the Delhi Gharana, closes the evening with their qawwali. Tickets at BookMyShow.com.



Bala Shankar

Cricket test matches were once without time limit. Then came timed tests and now we play international games within about four hours. Carnatic music saw similar trends in the shrinkage of time. However, not many would have reckoned that it would also mean short-changing of kritis. The penchant for music known as 'manodharma' has now reduced concerts to very few songs or kritis. That's a big change of fortunes for our venerated compositions. Rasikas always treated manodharma with a sense of awe and musical greatness. That respect continues. However, concerts in recent years have triggered a few questions – what constitutes genuinely creative manodharma? How much manodharma is too much? Is there a herd mentality in pursuing more manodharma, which also means less time for kritis and ragas. The basic definition of manodharma is the basket that includes raga alapana, niraval, swaras, tanam and pallavi. Enlightened listeners would agree that much of this manodharma is also Kalpita Sangita or rehearsed. Swaras have long been algorithm-led for many musicians. The korvais are more certainly of that variety. Raga alapana can be very



innovative as some musicians show. But many have a cut and paste approach to it. So, you may hear a 15-minute Kamboji alapana that has cliches, repetitions and meander for 12 minutes and a few spots that invoke nods and chuckles. Similarly, one can sing or play a first speed niraval (similar or different) for up to 15 avarthanams of an Adi tala structure and then the rapid strokes. The clock would have moved 15 or 20 minutes just during the niraval. Many

musicians think that the length of time for each manodharma exhibition tantamounts to more musical wizardry. It is reinforced by manufactured moments that invite grand applause. The end always justifies the means, as they say. This pattern needs some discussion and musicians' reflection. What this means is that we do not have concerts with more than seven or eight pieces in about two-and-a-half hours – the lower bookend is three or four. Concerts by yesteryear masters

typically had 15 to 20 pieces and manodharma was never in short supply. Even some like GNB, who is considered a pantheon of manodharma, packed in many songs amidst elaborate creative alapanas. The range of flavours that listeners look for via different ragas, compositions, tempos, talas and lyrical values are now in danger of being sacrificed at the altar of manodharma. In private conversations with some present-day musicians, a few things emerged. The competitive spirit has taken over.

'If X can do it, I can do it too' is an argument one hears. It is a race in the name of manodharma. There is also a FOMO (fear of missing out) syndrome that has resulted in contrived swara patterns that Hungarian mathematicians would be proud of; or singing or playing a non-mainstream raga for 20 minutes. Audiences are also now conditioned to deliver a thunderous applause after every long exercise. It thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The stretched manodharma is great for practice and training, but diminishes the allure in performance context. How does one cut to the chase? An efficiency audit will help. Take out the 15-20 minutes of repetition or non-value-addition in manodharma in a concert and supplant it with kritis of good standing – this is very doable. This is not to belittle manodharma. It certainly is the highest form of skill, knowledge and innate talent. The concern is about its overuse. Lest one misunderstands the point, this is not to demand more tukkadas, but more mainstream kritis. Gurus could have a guiding role in this, but many take a *laissez-faire* attitude to shaping concert styles. One, however, sees some green shoots with a few young singers trying to reverse the trend, perhaps to showcase their repertoire.



Graceful lines
Divya Goswami.
PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

Love in a spin

Divya Goswami brought alive the Sohni-Mahiwal romance in her Kathak performance

Rupa Srikanth

Kathak dancer Divya Goswami's themed show 'Aqeedat' (meaning faith) was a tribute to love through the 18th century Punjabi poet Fazal Shah's *kissas*. It was a poetic coming together of beautiful music by Praveen D. Rao and poignant Kathak. At her performance for The Music Academy dance festival, Divya combined the precision of Kathak beats, its grace and lyrical fluidity in the retelling of the age-old romance between Sohni and Mahiwal (the popular Punjabi love story).

The curtain opened to Divya seated on stage, "Love..love..love.. What is love? Some say love is a river that drowns the need ...Love is a storm that uproots you from your core... A bit of you, a bit of me.... until we transcend beyond....," she said.

She followed it up with an invocation to divine love with the Punjabi song 'Aval amad suna khuda tain', in Sufi style in Yaman Kalyan and Addha taal. It was sung by Keerthi Kumar. There was no hurry as the dancer set the tone in stillness, with her back to the audience, and the melodious alap (Siddhartha Belmannu) captured the magic of love.

Divya followed the abstraction with a nritta piece in teen taal (16 beats), alternating tihais in 3s and 4s, some known, some upaj-impromptu and some parans. Graceful wrists and precise timing marked them, as she ended with a chakkar and a sharp stop.

She did not leave the stage for one-and-a-half hours. Seated again, she spoke of this 19th century tragic love story between the beautiful maiden and

the rich trader-turned-buffalo herder.

Dressed up, Sohni dances her way to the Chenab, picking up her baked pot on the way. 'Tang tang' she taps the top, and 'dhan dhan' below, showing the nature of the pot. As she fills it with water, she sees the reflection of a handsome man. She looks up and their eyes meet. Thus begins their *saccha ishq*. The music and the lighting (Keerthi Kumar and Yonita) enhanced this brewing romance.

Longing to meet him, she creeps out of her home, takes her pot bravely, taps it to check, and jumps into the river. Once she's reached the opposite shore, the lovers unite in a cascade of nritta – they alternated with pretty tihais, stronger parans, with interesting parmelu animal-bols such as 'Dha ri ri kukku'. There was an arresting 30-chakkar sequence as well.

Divya is not the fiery, dramatic-nritta kind of dancer. She prefers to stick to the pleasant, well-timed style - the story always bigger than the rhythm.

Sohni is to visit another day. This time, there's lightning and heavy rain. She is indecisive. Finally she decides to cross the river. When she takes the pot, she instinctively knows its not the same. Someone has replaced it with an unbaked one. Since she has given her word, she jumps into the choppy waters. Between the crocodile and the dissolving pot, she dies.

Mahiwal is looking for her from the other shore. Tearing, he realises her *qurban* (sacrifice) and jumps into the river, holding onto her tightly. 'Aqeedat' concludes with some agitated tatkar, while the commentator is speaking of the power of love and the high-pitched music keeps the tragedy fresh in our minds. The visualisation (Divya), lighting and music were spot on – the artistes brought out the high drama through the language of suggestion. The other artistes were Sameer Rao (flute) and Shruti Kamath (sitar).

The Ashtapadi's timeless appeal

K.P. Rakesh unravelled the beauty of Jayadeva's verses



Immersive K.P. Rakesh. PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

V.V. Ramani

The Ashtapadis of Jayadeva are preferred compositions for dancers across styles. How they attune themselves to it determines the impact of the piece. At The Music Academy Dance Festival, K.P. Rakesh's delineation of 'Kshanamadhuna' was an aesthetic delight.

From the delicacy and grace that marked his entry as Krishna in the bower to the melodic strains of the flute by Sujith Naik, Rakesh immersed himself into the character.

The intense love that this Ashtapadi in raga Dwijavanti brims with was portrayed with restraint and dignity. The gentle manner in which Krishna beseeches Radha to place her feet on his body, caressing it and her bashful response to his touch, and the transition from the portrayal of man to woman – Rakesh's rendition was poetic.

Rakesh's nritta was marked by clarity of movement, powerful footwork and pleasant demeanour, evident in the Saptha Talaragamalika composed by Ponniah Pillai with jathis by Packiriah Pillai.

'Ninaindodi vanden' is an interesting composition with ragas and swaras conceptualised for a musical rendition. Choosing this varnam, with limited scope for dance was a deterrent but Rakesh managed to explore a few ideas related to Shiva. He needs to move beyond the narrative mode and choose varnams that lend themselves to emotive expressions.

The musical ensemble consisted of Girish Madhu on the nattuvangam, G. Srikanth on vocals, Sivaprasad on the mridangam, Sujith Naik on the flute and N. Ananthanarayanan on the veena.

G. Ananthakrishnan

Sometime in 1974, Vedantam Parvateesam designed a flag for the dance form of Kuchipudi. It featured a sugarcane stalk and a pink flag with Satyabhama's braid.

Last December, to commemorate 50 years of the Kuchipudi flag, hereditary Kuchipudi guru and founder of Kuchipudi Heritage Arts Society Vedantam Venkata Naga Chalapathi Rao conceptualised the Kuchipudi Natyapathaka Swarnotsavulu in Kuchipudi village in Andhra Pradesh, where the art form was born around the 1300s. Rich tributes were paid to Vedantam Parvateesam for his contribution to the art form.

The event brought together students, performers and academicians. The mornings commenced with prayers at the Balatripurasundari Ammavaaru

Holding it aloft

Commemorating 50 years of the Kuchipudi flag, which symbolises the continuation of a dance tradition



Kuchipudi Bhagavatulu (right) at Natyapathaka Swarnotsavulu held in Kuchipudi village
PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Ramalingeswara Swamy temple followed by a soulful Nagarasankertanam.

Kuchipudi Yakshagana legend Pasumarthi Rattaiah

Sarma led a workshop focussed on bhavabhinaya and musicality of Kuchipudi Yakshagana.

There were also insightful

seminars by the Kuchipudi Bhagavatulu and other senior artistes.

Noteworthy performances included a Kuchipudi

Yakshagana by students of Pasumarthi Seshu Babu in Rama Natakam, 'Mohini Bhasmasura' by students of Chinta Ravi Balakrishna, and Vempati Chinna Satyam's 'Ksheera sagara madhanam' by students of Chavali Balatripurasundari.

The festival's finale was the unveiling of a 50-ft stupa and the hoisting of the Kuchipudi Natyapathaka.

Celebrations were also held at the Indian Embassy, Washington DC, in association with Kuchipudi Kala Nilayam and the Kuchipudi Heritage Arts Society.

It featured North America-based artistes showcasing the beauty of the dance form, commencing with 'Vande vande vaani bhavani', the Kuchipudi patriotic song written and tuned by Vedantam Parvateesam, followed by excerpts from the drama tradition, both Kuchipudi Yakshagana and Nrityarupakas.

Well-etched raga contours

Vasudha Ravi's concert was an ode to the MLV bani and that of Lathangi Sisters was dedicated to Tyagaraja

Kalyan Gopalan

Vasudha Ravi, who is adept at singing abhangs and bhajans, guided the second half of her concert with a soulful rendition of 'Tulsidas nainan un mein siyaram' in raga Subhapanthavarali, followed by a virutham in Sindhubhairavi reminding us of the MLV bani, to which she belongs. This was followed by a poignant presentation of 'Karunai deivame karpagame'.

Vasudha's 20-plus years of training came to the fore in the way she structured her two-hour concert for Kedaram Isai Vizha and sang kritis confidently with the correct diction and intonation.

The artiste's *akaras* were adorned with oscillations that sometimes stretched a bit, with an avoidable vibrato, especially in the higher octaves. Vasudha chose a less



sung Dikshitar kriti 'Gunijanathi nutha' in raga Gurjari.

J. Vaidyanathan's mridangam was measured and accompanied the chittaswaram like clockwork. The main kriti for the evening was Tyagaraja's 'Etavunara nilakada niku' in Kalyani.

Vasudha's exposition of Kalyani was elaborate, both in her alapana and niraval.

The tani avartanam featuring J. Vaidyanathan and H. Prasanna on the ghatam

was simple and well-coordinated.

Vasudha started her concert with Kothavaasal Venkatrama Iyer's varnam in Saveri. The chowka kalam and the racy dhurita kalam were delivered with poise. This was followed by 'Rama nannu brovara' in Harikamboji. Vasudha's expressive singing shows how she internalises the lyrics. For instance, in 'Tappu panulu leka unde', where the composer pleads to Rama for protection, saying that he

didn't indulge in any unscrupulous acts, Vasudha captured the emotions in the lyrics.

Vasudha's exposition of Anandabhairavi was extensive. She sang 'Mariveri gathi'. Her soulful rendition for the evening also included Tyagaraja's 'Ganamurthe' in raga Ganamurthi.

She concluded the concert with Lalgudi Jayaraman's thillana in Khamas. R. Raghu's violin was clear and crisp and in tune with the singer

throughout the concert.

In perfect sync Archana and Samanvi are popularly known as Lathangi sisters. While one has a powerful voice, the other has a melodic texture. Their presentation focussed on the compositions of Tyagaraja and avoided too much manodharma.

The artistes began with 'Sobillu' in raga Jagannamohini. The sisters complemented each other during the



Wide repertoire Vasudha Ravi and (right) Archana-Samanvi.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

kalpanaswaras.

They next sang 'Koluviayunnade' in Devagandhari. They brought out the poignancy in 'Durmargincharam' and were at their expressive best in the niraval at 'dharmaatmak dhan dhaanyamu daivamu neevai undaga'.

A brisk 'Vara raga laya' in

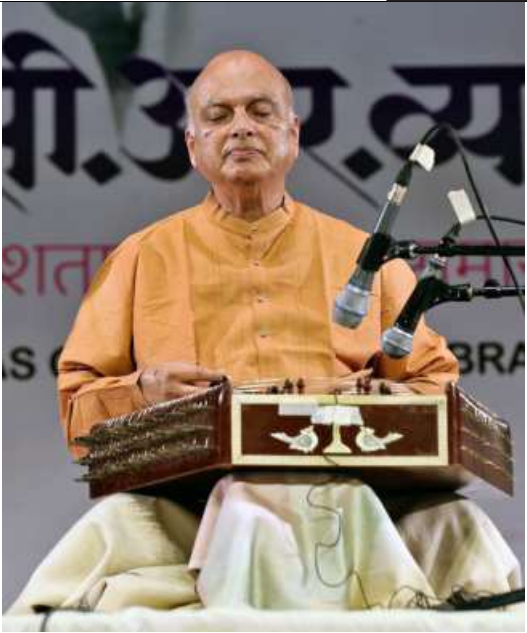
Chenchukamboji was marked by synchronised singing of the chittaswaras.

A detailed exposition of Bilahari followed, where the sisters sang 'Dorakuna ituvandi seva'. They adopted a kalapramana that allowed them to demonstrate the exquisite phrases of the raga. However, it was quite apparent that the sisters need more experience when it comes to manodharma.

The violin accompaniment by M. Vijay was neat, and he stuck to the grammar of ragas well.

The singers concluded the concert with another Tyagaraja kriti 'Sompaina manasutho' in Ahiri. Senior artistes Poongulam Subramanian and A.S. Krishnan accompanied the sisters on the mridangam and morsing, respectively. Their sarvalaghush, farans, nadais and korvais reminded one of the traditional style of playing.

Ode to a master (Clockwise from right) Pt. Satish Vyas; Pt. Sajan Mishra with son Swaransh; and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Notes from the past

Musicians drew from Pt. C.R. Vyas’ treasure trove of compositions at a tribute festival

Manjari Sinha

Pt. Chintamani Raghunath Vyas (1924-2002) was a prolific performer, composer, scholar and a dedicated guru who trained many disciples. To propagate Indian classical music, he founded the Maharashtra Lalit Kala Nidhi in 1973, and started the Gunidas Sangeet Sammelan in memory of his guru Pt. Jagannath Bua Purohit (Gunidas). Recently, the Maharashtra Lalit Kala Nidhi organised the Pt. C.R. Vyas Janm-Shatabdi Sangeet Samaroh in Delhi’s Kamani Auditorium. The two-day music festival’s finale

featured Ustad Amjad Ali Khan’s sarod recital. Pt. C.R. Vyas held a full-time job with the ITC, but his passion for Hindustani classical music saw him train under renowned gurus of the Kirana, Gwalior and Agra Gharanas. Inspired by his guru Gunidas, Vyas also created new raags and compositions under the pseudonym ‘Gunijaan’. Remembering his compositions, Amjad Ali Khan said: “Artistes go away but what remains are their creations.” He also paid tribute to Ustad Zakir Hussain by getting Aditya Kalyanpur and Amit Kaotekar, disciples of Ustad Alla Rakha (Zakir’s father), to accompany him. The Ustad eschewed the customary alap-jod-jhala and, with

just a short introductory auchar, played traditional compositions in raags Tilak Kamod and Bihari (an old raag with similar romantic fervour) in the slow and medium tempos of Teentaal, respectively. Amjad Ali Khan chose raag Durga next and portrayed the predicament of women through the discordant notes in the alap, before playing compositions in the conventional *swarup* of the raag in

A two-day festival featuring performances by well-known musicians was organised to celebrate the musical genius of Pt. C.R. Vyas

six-and-a-half beats time cycle and drut Teentaal followed by a scintillating jhala. Concluding his recital with the Carnatic raga Charukesi, instead of the customary Bhairavi, he incorporated the Ram Dhun ‘Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram’ and followed it with shades of other Carnatic ragas such as Saraswati and Hamsadhwani. He provided ample scope to both the tabla players. The evening opened with a vocal recital by Pt. Suhas Vyas, the son and disciple of Pt. C.R. Vyas. He was accompanied on the tabla by Pt. Vinod Lele and on the harmonium by Vinay Mishra. Kushal Sharma, a young disciple of Pt. Madhup Mudgal, provided vocal support. The two compositions in the timely raag Shree comprised a Bada Khayal set to Vilambit Jhumrataal and the Chhota Khayal in Teentaal and were composed by his guru Pt. C.R. Vyas.

Suhas’ full-throated voice and meticulous performance brought alive the memory of his father. Bhupali was a comely contrast after the sombre raag Shree before he concluded with a Nirgun bhajan. The main attraction of the inaugural evening was the vocal recital by Pt. Sajan Mishra along with his son Swaransh. Pt. Sajan Mishra thoughtfully chose raag Jog-Kauns, created by Gunidas, and presented two compositions of Bade Ramdas Ji, known for the melodic and philosophical content of his bandishes. He was accompanied on the tabla by Pt. Vinod Lele, who provided perfect theka, and Vinay Mishra, who mirrored the vocal nuances on the harmonium.

It was a delight to watch Sajan Mishra negotiate both the gandhars while elaborating the raag. Swaransh brought out the bhavas of the compositions ‘Kahe guman kare Bavare’ and ‘Jagat hai sapana / Kou nahin apna’ set to Vilambit and Drut Ektaal, respectively. The duo complemented each other, playing hide-and-seek with alap and a variety of taans. One only wished they had more time for another raag instead of concluding with a short Sohini. Pt. Satish Vyas, Pt. C.R. Vyas’s son and Suhas’ brother opened the samorah with his santoor recital. He trained under Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma. He played Dhankoni Kalyan, a raag created by his father. As the name suggests (Dha-na ie dhaivat nahin and Ko-ni ie komal nishad) there was no dhaivat, nishad komal and teevra madhyam of Kalyan. He played a detailed alap-jod and jhala in this raag, followed by three compositions set to slow Jhaptaal and medium and drut Teentaal. Pt. Ram Kumar Mishra supported him on the tabla. Since he was also the host, it would have been wonderful if guest artiste Sajan Mishra had been offered more time.



Rise of the evil

What inspired Kavalam Narayana Panikkar to pen *Kalivesham*?

V. Kalandharan

Amongst a plethora of Kathakali plays, Unnayi Warriar’s four-part *Nalacharitam* brims with poetic intensity, theatrical subtlety and imagination. Possessed by the evil spirit Kali, King Nala loses everything in his life, including his kingdom and is driven to the forest along with his wife Damayanthi. Kali is a major character in *Nalacharitam* Part II. Acclaimed playwright, director, poet and lyricist Kavalam Narayana Panikkar was fascinated by Kathakali actor Nelliyoode Vasudevan Namboodiri, who enacted the role of Kali time and again on stage, contrary to his desire to present only noble characters.

As a person, Vasudevan was gentle. On stage as Kali, he was the embodiment of vice. Narayana was in awe of this dichotomy and penned the play *Kalivesham*, which speaks of the irredeemable conflict between an actor and his character.

As a theatre-director, Narayana had taken various inputs from Kerala’s traditional performing arts. Indigenous music too was integral to his directorial ventures, and *Kalivesham* was no exception.

It was recently staged at the T.D.M. Hall, Ernakulam, under the auspices of BEAME, a cultural organisation. The protagonist (Gireesan V.) of the play admirably portrayed the predicament of an innocent, righteous person/actor besieged by the evil spirit, Kali. His behaviour with his wife too turns bizarre. But, the very next moment, he realises this, and is filled with remorse. King Nala and Damayanthi too appear on stage



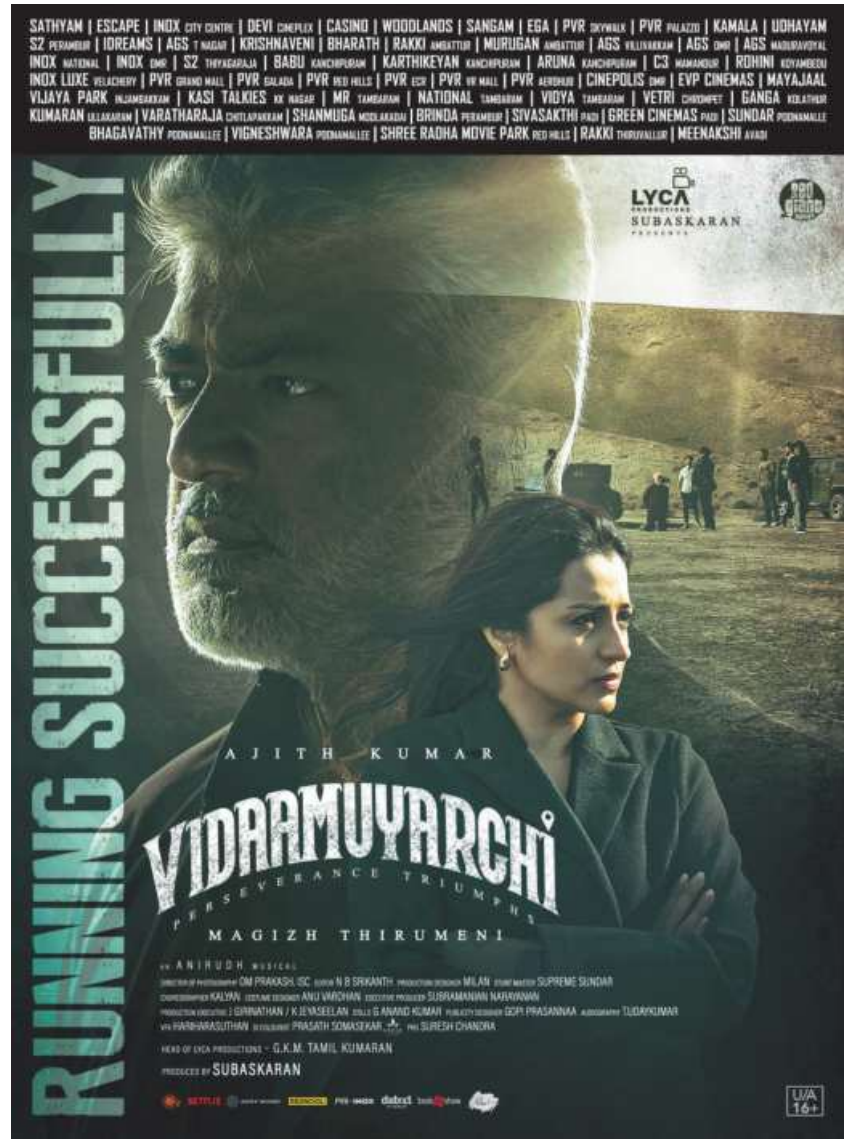
Veil of time From *Kalivesham*
PHOTOS: ABHIRAMY

and the scene progresses with Nala being possessed by Kali. Kali and his mate Dwapara, appear in the forest in the disguise of two birds, and fly away with the sole garment worn by Nala. Similarly, Nala rescuing the serpent Karkotaka from the fire, only to have the latter bite him was poignantly depicted. The acting techniques from Kathakali, Koodiyattam and Ottanthullal were sparingly employed. Lines from the Kathakali play *Nalacharitam* were sung in *Sopana*-style. The mizhavu beats lent rhythmic support to the movements and expressions of the actors. The *thiraseela* (curtain) held by the two actors formed an effective theatrical device to transcend time and space.



Dedicated to Tyagaraja

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha conducts the Tyagaraja aradhana at Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Mahaswami Auditorium, endowed by Sri. P.Obul Reddy – Smt. P. Gnanambha Trust, T. Nagar, until February 11. The six-day festival was inaugurated February 6. On the occasion, the ‘Thyaga Brahma Nadha Vibhushan’ title was presented to senior Nagaswaram artiste Sembanarkoil S.R.G. Rajanna. Concerts by senior musicians and lecture series will form part of the aradhana celebrations. Details: Feb. 7, 6.30 p.m.: Gayathri Girish. Feb. 8, 6.30 p.m.: Shertalai K.N. Ranganathan Sharma. Feb. 9, 10 a.m.: Rendering of Pancharatna kritis by eminent vidwans and vidhushis. From February 9 to 11, at 6.30 p.m. there will be a special series titled ‘Sumati Tyagaraja’ — an insight into the musical, lyrical and philosophical genius of the saint composer, to be presented by senior violinist R.K. Shriramkumar with Amritha Murali (vocal), Madan Mohan (violin) and K. Arun Prakash (mridangam).





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HEALTHCARE CENTRE
Ashok Nagar



DR. MARIE GOWRI GENTLE BIRTH MOTHA METHOD

Your Empowered Birthing Journey Starts Here

Meet

Dr. Gowri Motha

Founder of the Gentle Birth Method
Global Pioneering Obstetrician

In Collaboration with

Dr. Kavitha Gautham

MD, BloomLife Hospital Pvt Ltd..
Renowned Obstetrician and
Fertility Consultant

FIRST TIME IN CHENNAI

09 February 2025 | By invitation*

Call / Scan for Registration +919786686889



*For pregnant women only. Couple to attend the session together.

