

friday Review

THE HINDU

On a rewind mode

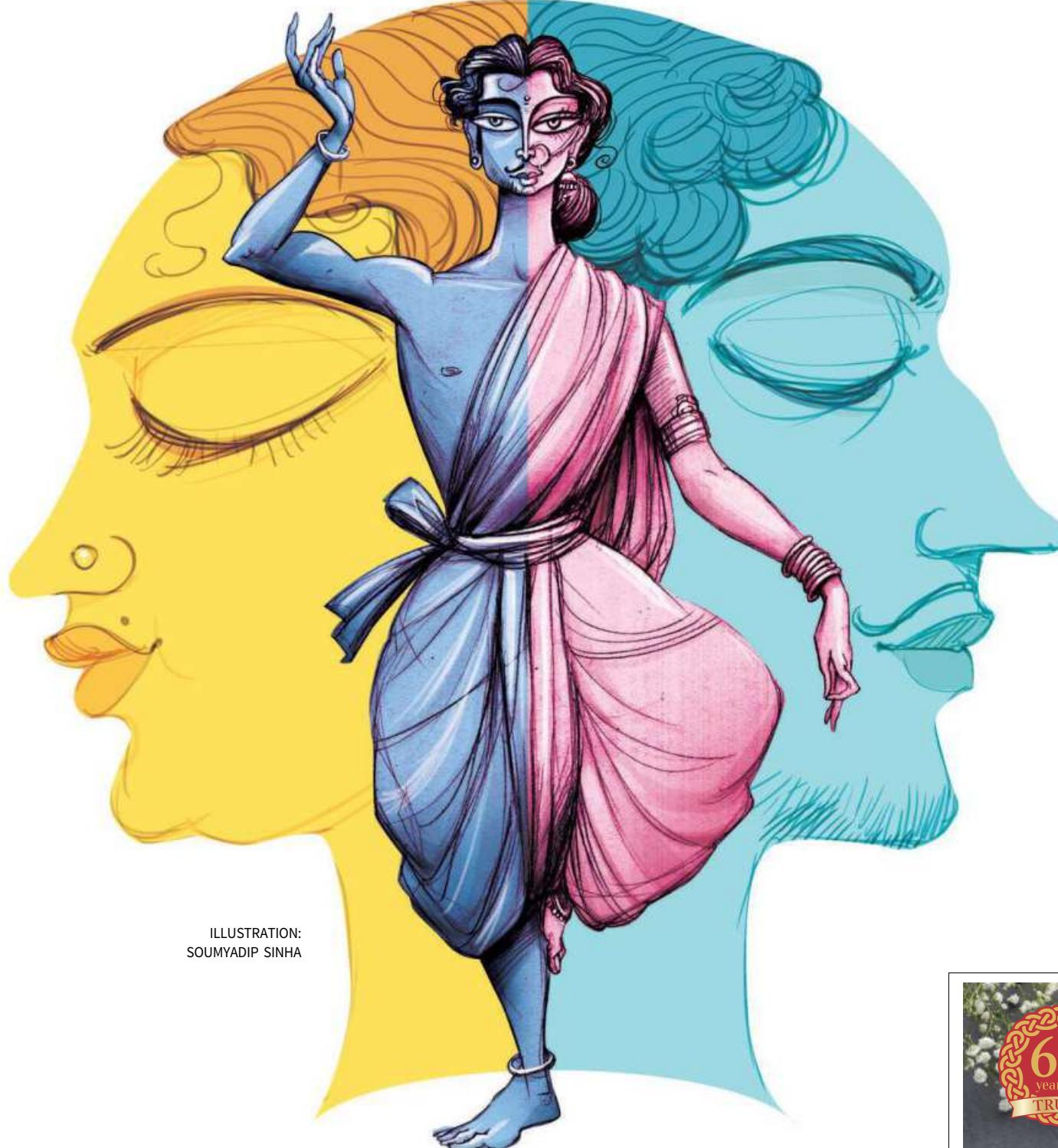
'MSV Isai Vizha' brings alive anecdotes behind the iconic composer's tunes **p2**

The charm of Chikankari

The onslaught of machine-made embroidery poses a threat to the craft **p3**

THE RESTORED MANTHAN BRINGS BACK MEMORIES OF SMITA PATIL

The actor's intense performance in the film still stirs viewers **p4**



Pride and proscenium

The ancient concept of Ardhanarisvara indicates that queer experiences have been a part of the history of Indian arts and literature, yet these find no space on the modern stage

Gayathri Iyer

There it stands, behind a glass case on the rotating platform in the centre of the Egmore Museum Bronze Gallery. Perfectly proportioned, rhythmic curves on one side, and graceful, well-defined lines on the other. Is the Ardhanarisvara supposed to represent contrast between man and woman? Or is it supposed to be a representation of equality?

The answer lies a little deeper, in the queer communities that worship Ardhanarisvara as an icon of liminal sexuality. The god is neither man nor woman, and falls on a spectrum in Hinduism that only a few mainstream deities or characters can lay claim to. While dancers have interpreted and reinterpreted the idol (most popularly through compositions by Dikshitar and Sankaracharya) can classical dance claim understanding or exploration of the queer experience?

Recently, dance has expanded its perspectives on mythological content by spotlighting queer characters, and tapping into the several stories from our rich literary tradition that demonstrate a pre-colonial Indian perspective on



the matter. Productions such as Harikrishnan's 'When Siva Kissed Vishnu' and Himanshu Srivastava's depiction of Shikhandi use traditional choreographic skills with a modern sensibility to treat the subject of the queer experience. Yet, it still feels like much of LGBTQ+ material is considered taboo amongst classical musicians and dancers. It is almost as if some self-appointed guardians of the art form see queerness as foreign to

India, and specifically to dance and music.

Does India have inherently queer performance traditions?

A vast majority of geographical regions in India have indigenous trans communities with specific performance traditions, such as the jogappas of Karnataka. Some of these traditions are ancient and well-incorporated into the cultural fabric of the region they represent, begging the question of whether the stigma around queerness is unique to the classical realm.

To find an answer, we must journey back in time. In addition to numerous mythological stories, sociological texts such as the Kamasutra refer freely to homoerotic encounters. Similarly, we have evidence of trans performers in the royal courts of south India, often serving as interlocutors for professional dancing women. These figures were extremely important as they traversed around the palaces easily, moving from spaces restricted to women, into the private chambers of the king carrying with them exceptional musical and mimetic ability as well as sensitive information.

To find visual representation of the LGBTQ+ community in sacred



architecture is effortless. From Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh to Odisha, all manner of queer, social and sexual activities are depicted on our temple walls, with some sculptures boasting a history of 1,000 years or more. The Madurai Meenakshi temple contains a beautiful sculpture of a figure with breasts, a beard and a moustache, considered by scholars to be a depiction of Brihanalla. The diversity in depicting queerness visually spans across geographical regions, cultures and media – including painting, sculpture, music and dance.

Diverse perspectives

Furthermore, literature seems to reflect the same type of diversity in perspectives. There has been much debate about whether Kshetrayya's open love for his lord Muvagopal has erotic undertones. Similarly, a close reading of the *Tiruvaasagam* reveals extremely detailed, romantic descriptions of Shiva, lending a queerness to the voice of Manickavasagar. While more conservative scholars dismiss these details as the author "impersonating" a woman as a literary device, the descriptions are so detailed that one is compelled to explore all the explanations for this style of writing.

When it came to dance mimetics, we did not bat an eyelid when Pt. Birju Maharaj or Pt. Kelucharan Mohapatra depicted a graceful, ultra-feminine Radha or when Yamini Krishnamurti portrayed Rama's handsome form. There is space within the tradition to take on multiple identities and become

a vessel for gender – a reality that is also reflected by the cross dressing Lila-Hava depictions of Krishna and Radha in North Indian painting.

With forms that are so expressive and malleable, it is hardly a surprise that many queer dancers and musicians have used their classical practice to establish deeper connections with their identities, and find their voices. Some of the earliest pieces that began the

When queer dancers themselves struggle for acceptance, how can we expect the subject of queerness in art to be unequivocally welcomed? The genuine social acceptance of the spectrum of sexuality will be the most effective catalyst for more queer-centric performances and research in classical arts

conversation around queerness and the classical space came through Internet platforms – specifically the work of Indian Raga ("Revelations") and Patruni Chidananda Sastry. It is no surprise that proscenium stages in Chennai are still hesitant to showcase this subject matter. When queer dancers themselves struggle for acceptance, how can we expect the subject of queerness in art to be unequivocally accepted?

Perhaps, the answer lies in looking to the past, before our sensibilities were encumbered by Victorian ideals, to a society that produced the image of Ardhanarisvara – neither man, nor woman, but both simultaneously.



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A new series

'MSV Isai Vizha' will bring alive stories behind the iconic composer's tunes

Suganthy Krishnamachari

A series of programmes titled 'MSV Isai Vizha' is being organised by Mohan Nair, son-in-law of the legendary music composer M.S. Viswanathan. The series will have thematic presentations of MSV's tunes. The inaugural (event support Abbas Cultural; orchestra Udhaya Ragam UK Murali Innaisai Mazhai), gave the audience a glimpse into the Kannadasan-MSV collaboration.

TMS's son Balraj sang 'Pullanguzhal kodutha moongigale'. Gandhi Kannadasan spoke of how the song came about. AVM'S Saraswathi Stores wanted to make an album of songs about Krishna, for HMV.

Song in Sanskrit
When AVM Kumaran approached Kannadasan, eight songs poured forth from the poet in quick succession. MSV took less than a day to compose the music. One of the songs is 'Amarajeewitham' – Kannadasan's first song in Sanskrit, which MSV sang. The album titled *Krishna Ganam* turned out to be a huge hit.

A.V. Ramanan's light music troupe, Musiano, took 'Pullanguzhal kodutha' to every corner of Tamil Nadu, by making it their opening song in all concerts, said Gandhi.

'Agayapandalile' was presented by Balraj and Mathangi Ajithkumar. The background music, suggesting two people racing to meet each other, plays a major role in the appeal of the song. In the film *Ponnojal*, before

MSV once more

the song begins, Sivaji and Usha Nandini tear through fields, to fall into each other's arms panting. Full marks to Murali's orchestra for bringing out the beauty of the background music.

Kavitha and U.K. Murali took the stage with 'Yaadum oore' from the film *Ninaithale*

inikkum. Kannadasan begins the song with the famous line from *Purananuru*.

Balraj sang the TMS song 'Paramasivan Kazhuthilirundu' (film *Suryakanthi*). In the film, Kannadasan is shown singing this song on stage. Annadurai Kannadasan

shared an anecdote about this song. Major Sundararajan was supposed to be the singer in the film. But Jayalalithaa insisted that Kannadasan should portray the singer. The poet had fractured his collarbone and appeared on screen with a black shawl draped over his shoulder to hide the bandage.

O.S. Arun recalled that he was in the audience during a programme, when MSV called out his name, and asked him to sing. Arun sang a Sindhubhairavi bhajan. When Arun finished, MSV sang 'Raman ethanai Ramadani', a song which he (MSV) had set to tune in the same raga. As Arun sang

'Adhisaya ragam' (film *Apoorva Ragangal*), one couldn't help marvelling at MSV's genius. The song is in raga Mahathi, with the charanam 'oru puram paarthaal' in Bhairavi. Who would have thought that Mahathi with just four swaras could lend itself to such a grand song?

Music director Bharadwaj said that he and MSV presented a programme called 'Andrum Indrum'. When Bharadwaj sang 'Unnodu vaazhaada', which he (Bharadwaj) had tuned, MSV wanted to play the harmonium, because he liked the tune. Bharadwaj said that a song was nothing but dialogue in musical form. Every song has to convey something. This is possible only if the music is appropriate, and MSV scored it that way. "MSV's improvisations were amazing," said singer Srinivas, who sang MSV's 'Nilave ennidan', in hushed tones, without any background music.

"While what I now sang is what we have all heard, I wonder how many versions MSV came up with before finalising the tune," said Srinivas. While all the songs chosen for the programme had lyrics by Kannadasan, some were songs tuned by MSV and T.K. Ramamurthy together.

Sapna Soundararajan, who sang 'Andru vandadum' (music by MSV and TKR), deserves special mention for her pleasant voice.

Chandru, MSV's right hand man, was given a cash award. Jayanthi Thangabalu, who did a series on MSV for Mega TV, received the MSV award.



Dynamic duos MSV and TMS during a recording; the composer with Kannadasan; and a music programme dedicated to MSV.
PHOTOS: K.V. SRINIVASAN AND THE HINDU ARCHIVES

**Sreevalsan Thiyyadi**

A Sankarabharanam package that the twin brothers, Heramb and Hemanth, unfolded in the second half of their concert bore elements of universal appeal that befit the unusual theme: birds in Carnatic music. The third in Madrasana's five-part 'Prakriti' series showcased how winged creatures enhance the aural aesthetics beyond their appearances in the lyrics.

Syama Sastri's 'Sarojadala netri' was the centrepiece by the Bengaluru-based flautists (disciples of Neyveli Santhanagopalan), coming after a detailed alapana of purist's delight and tanam high on eclecticism. As artistic director Vinay Varanasi said, the kriti extolling Meenakshi carries not one but two references to divine parrots – shukapaani and shukashyamala.

Yet the overall presentation was not literature-driven. The wind instrument anyway produces only notes, and Heramb took off from the anupallavi (that mentions

shukapaani). In fact, the siblings wound up the composition in just three minutes and coasted on to swaraprastara. Violinist Sayee Rakshit toed the serene beauty of the flautists, who soon went for a change of ragas. Hamsanandi (by Heramb), Hamsanadam (Hemanth) and Hamsadhwani (Sayee) lit the line-up. Their tonal quality alone should have appealed, but the listener was reminded that 'Hamsa' implied the floating swan.

Flight of imagination
The twins then resorted to an interesting grahabhedam, revealing that the pivotal 'sa' and 'pa' of Sankarabharanam are prakriti swaras, believed to have derived from the peacock and cuckoo respectively. And when Heramb explained how certain shifts in the tonic tones would lead to ragas such as Kharaharapriya, Thodi and Kalyani, his brother kept the rhythmic flow intact by tapping the two-kalai Adi on his lap. Soon, Sankarabharanam returned and a crisp kanakkai capped the solfa sequence. The 12-minute tani avartanam



On wings of song
Flautists Heramb and Hemanth presented kritis on birds at Madrasana's 'Prakriti' concert series

between B.S. Prashanth (mridangam) and Chandrasekhara Sharma (ghatam) was seamless with stress on resonance and cadence than arithmetic complexities.

Earlier, the alapana of Sankarabharanam sounded largely conventional, but the duo's explanation made the phrases sound all the more sonorous. Together the brothers sketched the raga for

Seamless synergy

Natyarangam's 'Vaggeyakara' programme brought together accomplished performers



Aesthetic
Dancers performing at the Vaggeyakara programme.
PHOTO: M. SRINATH

V.V. Ramani

Drawing ideas and compositions, which would lend themselves to dance, from our rich cultural treasure was the focus of 'Vaggeyakara' programme. It was presented by Natyarangam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha and supported by Nrityopasana Trust.

The teaming up of accomplished artistes such as violinist R.K. Shriramkumar, vocalist Amritha Murali and dancer Brigha Bessel, to explore the synergy between sangeetham and nrityam, raised the bar of expectations.

The opening ragamalika number in praise of Ganesh, written by Narasimha Bharathi Swamigal of Sringeri, in Adi talai (Tisra Nadai) was set to tune by Shriramkumar. The performance by dancers Shruti Priya, Sakshi, Sundaresan and Aditi, exploring varied facets and attributes of Ganesh, was interesting.

Depicting river Tunga and the sylvan surroundings of Sringeri as a prelude, Brigha went on to portray goddess Saraswati in the song 'Sharadhe karunandithe' by Sri Chandrasekhara Bharathi, set to raga Hamirkalyani, and Misra Chapu tala. She described the goddess as the epitome of knowledge and benevolence. Amritha Murali came up with a brief alapana of Hamirkalyani followed by the rendition of the song.

Then came 'Sarojakshilo', a varnam composed by Vadivelu of Thanjavur Quartet in raga Kedaram, which had jathis composed by guru Adyar Lakshman. The four dancers described their emotional state of longing

for the lotus-eyed lord through relevant sancharis. Noteworthy among them was the depiction of a reclining Padmanabha as seen through the three doorways of the sanctum sanctorum.

Impressive javali
The theermanams stood out for the clarity of footwork and synchrony of movements. But the lack of coordination in the execution of the adavus slightly disturbed the flow of nritya. Also, in the absence of any distinct choreographic pattern, monotony set in with repetitive expressions and movements reducing the appeal of the varnam.

Sung soulfully by Amritha Murali, the facets of raga Madhyamavathi in the ninda stuti 'Adigisukamu' (Tyagaraja) came through as a fine aesthetic experience along with Brigha's sensitive delineation of the idea embedded in the song.

The Kannada javali 'Mathada baradeno' by Bangalore Nagarathnamma in raga Khamas was another impressive piece. The apologetic svadeenapatika nayika pleads with the hero to let go of his anger and speak to her. She reminds him of the good times spent together. Brigha did justice to the piece through her portrayal.

The presentation, which was meant to be a sangeetham-nrityam interface, felt like a routine margam with some novel compositions added to it. One expected a more creative outcome from such a collaboration.

K.P. Rakesh (nattuvangam), Srilakshmi (violin), Karthikeyan Ramanathan (mridangam), Charulatha (veena) and Shakti (tambura) were the other members of the musical ensemble.

popularly called Andolika in modern times.

Anandabhairavi, with its oscillations, came as the second raga when 'Marivere gati' was rendered. It substantiated a preamble that highlighted the kriti's association with the goddess at Kanchipuram and the famed buzz of the parakeets in its precincts. The graceful unevenness of Misra Chapu tala added to the leisure of the Syama Sastri kriti.

The gentle touch of the feathers of Vishnu's carrier formed the subject of the third piece. Tyagaraja's 'Gnanamosa gada' follows with the words 'Garuda gamana' or the gait of the giant eagle. Its meditative spirit, as mentioned in *dhruba Charitam*, came through in the unhurried alapana, but the kriti was reasonably pacy. The swansong was Annamacharya's 'Narayana te' in Behag. Prudently, it also attempted a throwback to the themes of the first two concerts in the Prakriti series: mountains (nagadhrava: hill-lifting Krishna) and flowers (pankachanabha: the lord with lotus from his navel).

Craft legacy (Clockwise from below) Sample of Madras chikankari; Anjul Bhandari's couture designs; and chikankari artisans working in Lucknow.
PHOTOS COURTESY: PAOLA MANFREDI,
ANJUL BHANDARI



Nahla Nainar
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Embrodery lovers watching the coverage of Bollywood actress Sonakshi Sinha's marriage to her long-time beau Zaheer Iqbal this week, would have been excited to see the actor's main bridal outfit of the day: an ivory chikankari georgette sari that her mother Poonam had worn more than 40 years ago for her own marriage to actor Shatrughan Sinha.

The off-white drape, an unusual choice of colour in the usually blingy and jewel-toned Indian wedding couture scene, seemed to reiterate the longevity of chikankari embroidery, a craft that has a long association with India.

A Geographical Indication (GI) tag 15 years ago has placed chikankari embroidery in and around Lucknow today. Earlier this year, Naseem Bano, a Lucknow-based practitioner of Ankh Chikankari, where the embroidery is invisible on the reverse side of the fabric, was conferred the Padma Shri.



Lucknawi style
But did you know that the delicate style originated in East Bengal and travelled all over undivided India before settling down in Lucknow? In the early 19th century, Madras Chikankari, along with that of Calcutta, Dhaka, Lucknow, Bhopal, Peshawar and Quetta, was described in detail in 'Indian Art at Delhi 1903', the official catalogue of the year-long public exhibition that was held as part of the Delhi Durbar to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII from 1902-1903. Written by Sir George Watt, a Scottish botanist, who served as the director of the Delhi Exhibition besides other government positions, 'Indian Art at Delhi' was a valuable source of information on the country's rich heritage of crafts.

Chikankari (a Persian/Urdu coinage indicating needle as a metaphor) is known for its thread work done on diaphanous and breathable fabrics, and is thought to have been brought to the Indian subcontinent by noble families of Iranian descent in the Mughal court. It is considered to be the oldest form of indigenous embroidery in India.

Lucknow-based designer Anjul

to go down to two or three villages to get work done on a single garment. For instance, Kakori, is known for the finest version of a stitch called the 'Murri' (shaped like rice), while in Malihabad, the 'Phanda' (millet) stitch is famous. Encouraging the craftsmen in the villages around Lucknow, has helped us to revive nearly 18-20 stiches of Chikankari from oblivion," says Anjul.

There are several stages integral to creating a fabric with Chikankari embroidery. Hand-drawn sketches of designs are used to create wooden blocks for printing. Specialist printers use the indigo-dyed blocks to lay out the design on white material. "This is the only language that the embroiderer understands. If the printer misses something, the embroiderer will not be able to work," says Anjul.

Common motifs
Jaali' making artisans take over once the basic embroidery is done, creating meshes within the warp and weft of the base fabric. This is followed by *dhulai* (hand-washing) in the Gomti river, and then dyeing. Common motifs include the paisley, *paan'* (heart-shaped betel leaf), kairi (unripe mango), trailing vines and linen.

Watt also lists out descriptions of 32 stitches that were used by craftsmen of yore.

"When fast fashion came in, we lost karigars (artisans), and the finesse that they had honed over the years," says Anjul.

As royal patronage vanished, Chikankari evolved from being a male-dominated trade into a home-based cottage industry led by women artisans."I may have

other floral patterns. Coloured fabrics were gradually incorporated to cater to modern tastes.

"With over 10,000 shops thriving on Chikankari sales in Lucknow, connoisseurs have to look hard to find an authentic piece," says Anjul.

While the craft thrives in Lucknow, its southern Indian variant, which Watt described as "distinct in its preference for silk textiles, with just satin stitch embellishments", seems to have vanished. Even at the time of the catalogue's publication, Madras silk embroideries were not classed as Chikan work, but rather as satin-stitch embellishments. Master craftsman Daday Khan of Mount Road, Madras, won the first prize for a series of silk dress pieces embroidered in silk at the Delhi Durbar exhibition in 1903. But it is impossible to find any more links to him or the craft today.

Paola Manfredi, Italian author of the 2017 book *Chikankari, a Lucknawi Tradition*, says Watt's catalogue is essential to understand the lost history of Indian crafts. "The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has a few specimens of Chikan embroidery from Madras that were purchased at that time from the exhibitions and therefore their origin is somehow 'fictitious,'" she writes in an email interview.

It is a pity that the craft has been erased from its south Indian milieu, and even its fate in Lucknow, so to speak, hangs by a thread in the face of automated textile production.

"If you want to keep Chikankari alive, you have to give the artisans their due. Anyone investing in a Chikankari garment is morally supporting the artisan," says Anjul.



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Tribute to CVC



Natyaratnam will pay homage to Natyacharya C.V. Chandrasekhar on July 4, 6.30 p.m., at Narada Gana Sabha mini hall, Malavika Sarukkai, Praveen Kumar, and Manjari Rajendrakumar will speak. The event also includes a slideshow and the screening of a varnam performed by CVC. All are welcome.

CALENDAR



Heritage talk

'Ancient Temples of Tamil Nadu', an illustrated lecture by historian Chithra Madhavan, will be held today (6 p.m.). Organised by Tattvaloka, it will be held at its venue (76, Eldams Road, Teynampet). Entry is free.

Shloka classes

FACET, the arts and cultural wing of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai Kendra, has launched systematic value-based teaching of Vishnu Sahasranamam, Lalitha Sahasranamam and Soundarya Lahiri for all age groups. For enrolment call 98843 64700, 98843 66700 or 044 2464 3420-50.



Blend of genres

Carnatic musician Saketharaman will unveil his latest project, 'Carnatify'. On June 30 (6 p.m.) at Narada Gana Sabha. Over 200 students from Saketharaman's Kalashiksha school will present Carnatify through a blend of genres. From kindergarten rhymes to popular movie songs, the event will highlight the versatility of Carnatic music.

Special event

Bhaktha Padha Seva Trust, Mylapore, has organised special rituals dedicated to Bhadrachala Ramar from today to June 30 at Sri Krishnaswamy Kalyana Mandapam, T. Nagar. The event includes upanyasam, vocal concerts, bhajan renditions, Sita kalyanam and Ramar Pattabishekham.



Dedicated to MDR

The two-day centennial celebrations of M.D. Ramanathan will be held today at Narada Gana Sabha. After invocation by Om Easwar (5.30 p.m.), 'The Boho Baritone - excerpts from a documentary on MDR' by Savita Narasimhan's MOPA will be screened (5.40 p.m.), followed T.N. Seshagopalan's commemorative address and Ranjani-Gayatri's vocal concert (6.30 p.m.). Tomorrow's event will be held at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Presentation of compositions by Varadadasa (5.30 p.m.), set to music by R.K. Shriramkumar, will be followed by Ramana Balachandran's veena recital.

At Kalakshetra

Kalakshetra has organised a two-day workshop (July 1 and 2, 9 a.m. -11.30 a.m.) on MDR's compositions. It will be conducted by P. Ramakrishnan, former professor and principal, Sri Swathi Tirunal College of Music, Thiruvananthapuram and Chembai Memorial Government Music College, Palakkad. Concerts by Vijay Siva (July 1, 6 p.m.) and Sowmya (July 2, 6 p.m.) will form part of the celebrations.

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Nivedita Jayaram Pawar

In 1976, Indian cinema did something unheard of. A one-of-a-kind movie called *Manthan* (The Churning) was funded by half a million dairy farmers. Directed by Shyam Benegal, a torchbearer of independent Indian cinema, the film was inspired by the White Revolution pioneered by Verghese Kurien. Girish Karnad's character in the film was based on Kurien. Along with a stellar cast of Naseeruddin Shah, Amrish Puri and Kulbhushan Kharbanda, the ground-breaking film also starred a 20-something Smita Patil as the feisty Bindu, who leads a revolt against the milk mafia. As a young woman caught in the caste and gender complexities of life in rural India, she exuded a vulnerability that tugged at audience's heartstrings.

Almost 50 years after its release, *Manthan* was back in the spotlight when it was recently screened at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, alongside classics by Jean-Luc Godard, Akira Kurosawa and Wim Wenders. Following a successful film festival run, the restored version of *Manthan* hit the big screen in 50 cities and 100 theatres across the country spiralling a renewed interest in Smita Patil's searingly brilliant work as one of India's earliest parallel cinema superstars.

Perfect ambience

She was born in Pune on October 17, 1955 to a Maharashtrian politician Shivaji Rao Girdhar Patil and social worker-mother Vidyatai Patil, a city that also boasted a thriving theatre scene that nurtured acclaimed directors such as Vijay Tendulkar and Jabbar Patel, who later transitioned into filmmaking. Furthermore, Pune housed the FTII, a breeding ground for the Indian New Wave cinema movement, which aimed for realistic portrayals of society and the human condition. This environment heavily influenced Smita's early career, though she



The arthouse star

never really intended to be an actor. Even while studying at Elphinstone College in Mumbai, her striking beauty led to her being featured in student films and even landing a newsreader's job in Doordarshan.

Her debut film, *Teevra Madhyam* (1974), was an FTII project directed by Arun Khopkar. Shyam Benegal gave her a break in *Charandas Chor* (1975), which set the ball rolling for one of Bollywood's most illustrious and tragically short-lived careers.

Smita dominated the 1970s and the early 80s with a series of intense portraits of formidably strong women discovering their own agency. This included films such as *Manthan* (1976), *Jait Re Jait* (Marathi, 1977), *Bhumika* (1977), *Akaler Sandhane* (Bengali, 1981), *Chakra* (1981), *Umbartha* (Marathi, 1982; *Subah* in Hindi), *Arth* (1982), *Bazaar* (1982), *Tarang* (1984) and *Aakhir Kyon?* (1985).

"Small cinema began with the portrayal of the real Indian woman, who happens to be very much a 'zamin ki aurat' (woman of

the earth). I am continuing to do earthy roles because I am that sort of a person myself. I was fortunate that I could extend the kind of person I am to the roles that were given to me in the beginning of my career," she said in an interview in 1985.

Trailblazer Smita Patil. (Left) with Girish Karnad in *Manthan*. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the earth). I am continuing to do earthy roles because I am that sort of a person myself. I was fortunate that I could extend the kind of person I am to the roles that were given to me in the beginning of my career," she said in an interview in 1985.

New perspective

No one can possibly dispute Smita's enormous range, her vocal and physical craft, and her peerless skill at conveying complexity, intensity and humanity. She along with collaborators and competitors Shabana Azmi and Deepa Naval, brought a whole new perspective to what female characters could be and accomplish. Unlike most Bollywood films, which tend to focus on portraying women as attractive but powerless objects trapped in dramatic situations, these actors played characters that blazed a trail. Only a few actors before them managed to defy the stereotype and capture the audience's attention.

Smita in her early prime had it all: a glorious unpredictability, a flawless technique, an intellectualised approach, and a deep, personal subsumption in every role.

Being a poster girl of the parallel or new wave cinema didn't deter Smita from jumping over to the glitzy side of Bollywood and taking on purely commercial roles, something she had previously avoided. Her performances in movies such as *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai*, *Shakti*, *Namak Halaal* and *Aakhir Kyon* solidified her reputation as a highly adaptable actress.

On the personal front, Smita Patil was a free-spirited and an adventurous soul, who cruised the streets of Pune on her bike, wearing her soiled blue jeans. The actor also drove the military Jonga jeep from Delhi through the Chambal Valley to Bombay. A skilled photographer with a discerning eye, she was also a well-rounded aesthete, equally comfortable creating costumes and crafting the visual world of her films as a production designer. Sadly, her life was cut short at 31. And though the 70-odd films that Smita Patil did earn her both critical praise and box office triumphs, it's impossible not to wonder what incredible things she would have accomplished if she had lived longer.

Celebrating Tamil theatre

Kartik Fine Arts will conduct the valedictory event of its founder Kartik Rajagopal's birth centenary function on July 3, 6 p.m., when the Kartik Rajagopal Memorial Award will be presented to veteran theatre artistes TV Varadarajan and Bombay Gnanam. Venue: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. The evening will begin with the screening of an audio-video presentation 'Kartik Rajagopal – The Divine Kala Poshakar', written and directed by S.B. Khanthan; presentation of Kartik Rajagopal Centenary trophy to Geetha Narayanan, for taking Tamil theatre to Gen Next, and the release 'Elango Kumaran Ner Kanalgall' dedicated to Kartik Rajagopal, the first copies of which will be received by R. Sekar, N. Ravi and TSBK Mouli. The evening will conclude with TOM Medias' 'Mounam Sangadam' featuring YG Madhuvanthi and S. Sureshwar.

Bandish contest

A unique national contest 'Gunjan Bandish' has been launched by Grace Foundation as a tribute to Hindustani vocalist C.R. Vyas in his birth centenary year. The contest is open to Indian classical singers aged between 16 and 30. The contest has been ideated by Hindustani vocalist Aparna Kelkar and curated by Shashi Vyas, son of C.R. Vyas and founder of Pancham Nishad, a Mumbai-based cultural organistaion. The winner will be awarded a cash prize of ₹1.25 lakh while the winners of the second and third prizes will be given ₹75,000 and ₹50,000 respectively. Registration are open. For details log on to www.gunjaanbandish.in

CULTURE BRIEFS

Remembering KB



Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan celebrates legendary filmmaker K. Balachander's 95th birth anniversary with 'Pancha Mugham' drama festival from July 4 to

July 9 at its main auditorium. The inaugural function will be presided over by N. Ravi, chairman, Bhavan's Chennai Kendra, and the guest of honour is Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti, vice-chairman, Bhavan's Chennai Kendra. S.Ve.Shekher will receive the K. Balachander award. Plays to be staged include UAA's *Ithu Nyayama Sir?* (July 4), Stage Creations' *Pillayar Pidikka...* (July 5), Natakhapriya's *Alwaha* (July 6), United Visuals' *LKG Asai* (July 8), and Crazy Creations' *Meesai Aanalam Manaivi* (July 9).

Show time: 6.30 p.m. The festival is open to all.



Dance film

Sita, a dance performance film created by Apsaras Arts and inspired by selected paintings of Raja Ravi Varma of Sita, will be screened (organised by Aalaap) on June 30, 11 a.m., at Tagore Film Centre NFDC, R.A. Puram. Created using CGI technology, music composition is by Rajkumar Bharati while Bombay Jayashri brings alive Kambar's verses with her singing. Concept and artistic direction are by Aravindh Kumarasamy. Choreography and costume design by Mohanapriyan Thavarajah. Tickets available on tikkl.com

KGS drama festival



Sri Krishna Gana Sabha's four-day drama festival began yesterday with JC Creations' *Meendum Thanikuditham*. PMG Mayurapriya's *Big Boss* will be staged today at 6.45 p.m. Crazy Creation's *Meesai Aanaalm Manaivi* on June 29 (6.45 p.m.) and Dummies Drama's *Thottu Mayakkangalo* on June 30 (6.45 p.m.). At the valedictory function on June 30 (5.45 p.m.) S.L. Naanu will be honoured with the 'Nataka Choodamani' title and Bombay Gnamam with the Iyakunar Sigaram K. Balachander Lifetime Achievement Award. Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti, president of the sabha, will preside and confer the awards. D.S. Rajagopalan, secretary, Kartik Fine Arts, will felicitate the awardees. SL Naanu, (S. Lakshminarayanan) has been associated with Stage Creations, founded by Kathadi Ramamurthy, since 1984. He has written 28 Tamil stage plays and has scripted stories for AIR and Doordarshan and has penned short stories for a few Tamil magazines as well.

Bombay Gnamam founded the Mahalakshmi Ladies Drama Group in 1989. Women donning male roles and plays dealing with social and religious themes make her plays stand out.

Bharatanatyam performance



Narada Gana Sabha will feature a Bharatanatyam performance by Sreka Bharath and students of her dance school Tejas on June 30, 6.30 p.m. at Swami Haridoss Giri Hall. The presentation is based on Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavat's compositions.

Namasankirtan

Hamsadhwani has organised namasankirtanam and special abhang by vocalist Savitha Sreeram on June 30, 6.30 p.m. at Swami Youth Hostel, Adyar.

Musical tribute



Sarvani Sangeetha Sabha Trust celebrates the 95th birth anniversary of the legendary musician Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna with the vocal concert by Ramya Kiranmayi Chaganti. The concert will be held on July 3, 6.15 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall, Mylapore, Mantha Sri Ramy on the violin, Akshya Ram on the mridangam and Hari Kishore on the kanjira are the accompanists.

Music concerts

Madhuradhwani has organised the following concerts at the Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. Details: July 3: Delhi Muthukumar and July 4: Bhavatharini Anantaraman. Time: 6.15 p.m.

SATHYAM | ESCAPE | INOX | DEVI | SANGAM | CASINO | ANNA | WOODLANDS | EGA | PVR - AMPA | PALAZZO KAMALA | TNAGAR AGS | UDHYAM | S2 PERAMBUR | BHARATH | IDREAM | MAHALAXMI | KRISHNAVENI | MM THEATRE KKNAGAR KASI | KASI TALKIES | INOX LUX | PVR GRAND - VELACHERY | PVR GALADA - PALAVARAM | PVR ICON VR MALL REDHILLS - PVR | ECR - PVR | INOX NATIONAL | INOX MARINA | S2 THIYAGARAJA | MAYAJAAL | MAMANDUR - C3 CINEPOLIS | EVP | CINEMAS | AMBATUR - RAKI & MURUGAN | VILLIVAKKAM - AGS | OMR - AGS | MADURAVAYAL - AGS KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI | PORUR - GK | THAMBAM - VIDHYA & MR & NATIONAL | CHORMPET - VETRI | KOLATHUR - GANGA PADI - SIVA SAKTHI & LAXMI BALA | GREEN CINEMAS | REDHILLS - RADHA MOVIE PARK | THIRUVALLUR - RAKI & ROJA & THULASI ST THOMAS - JOUTHY | PONNAMALLE - SUNDHAR & VIGNESWARA & BHAGAVATHY | CHENGALPET - SRK & LATHA PALLAVARAM - JANATHA | THIRUNINRAVUR - VELA CINEMAS | MINJUR - MANI & KK CINEMAS | MEDAVAKKAM - KUMARAN KANCHIPURAM - BABU & ARUNA & KARTHIKEYAN & BALAJI | MOOLAKADAI - SHANMUGA & PANDIAN | THIRUVOTRIYU - MSM & ODEAN MANI ANAKAPUTHUR - GANESH & VELCO | AVADI - MEENAKSHI & REMI | UTHUKOTTAI - KUMARI | GUDUVANCHERRY - VENKATESWARA MAPPEDU - AVK | KARAPAKKAM - ARAVIND | MANALI - MEENAKSHI | ALANDHUR - SK MERLIN | MANAMPATHY - GK POONGA

RUNNING SUCCESSFULLY

