

fridayReview

THE HINDU

Celebrating saint-poets

Bolava Vitthal concert showcased the lyrical beauty of abhangs **p2**

True colours of Thodi

Bhavadhaarini Anantaraman conveyed the nuances of the raga **p2**



EXPLORING KATHAK’S BOND WITH CINEMA

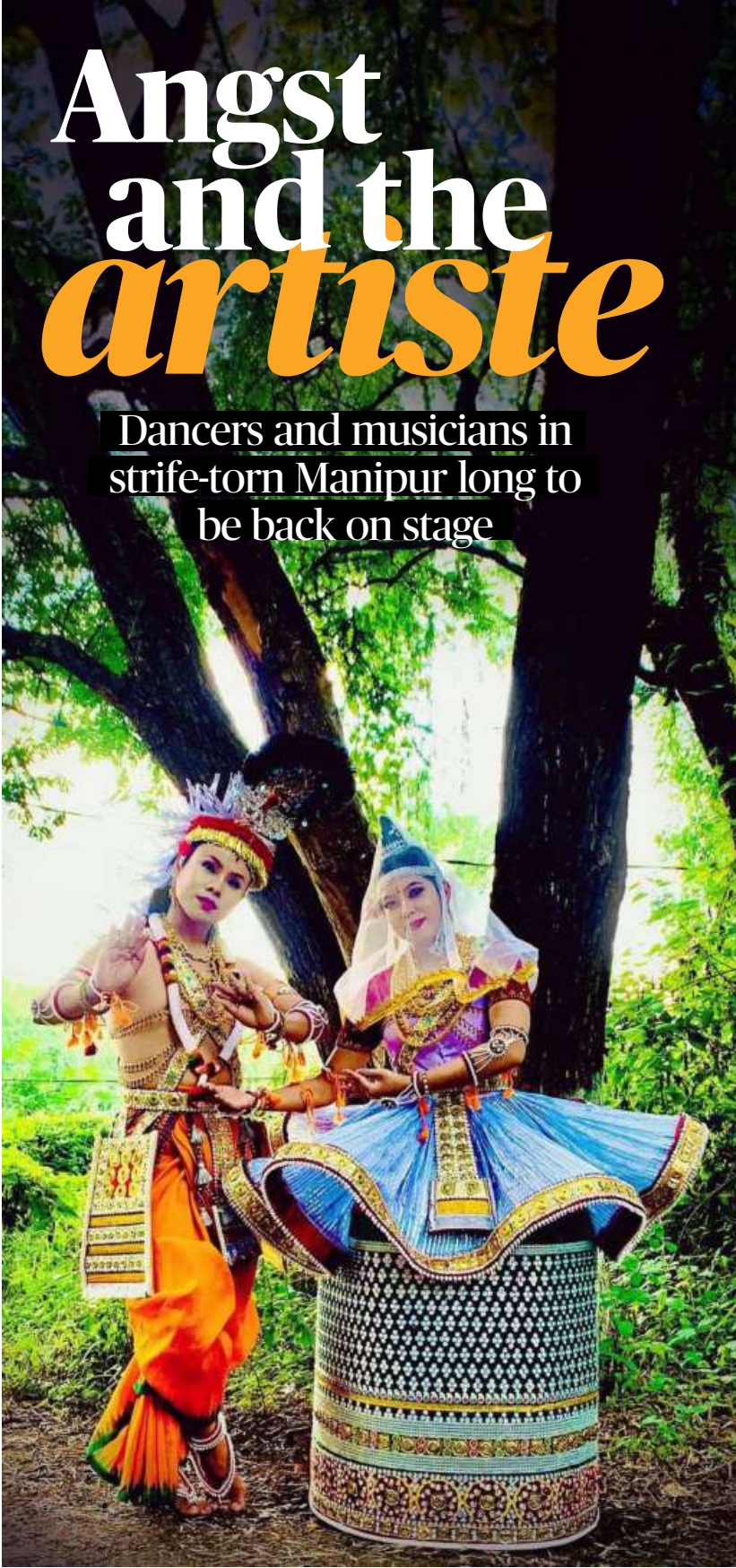
Siddhi Goel’s research shows how the dance form influenced filmmaking **p4**

On a hopeful note (Clockwise from right) Bidyananda with Vanna Waheng; Akhu Chingangbam; a Pung Cholam artiste; Surjit Nongmeikapam with his students. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Sudipto Mullick

Travelling for pleasure or work is one thing, but travelling just to access the Internet is unheard of. Filmmaker Longjam Meena Devi had scheduled the post-production of her documentary *Andro Dreams* (2023), on the sexagenarian Laibi Devi, who helms an all-girls soccer team in a remote Manipuri village, a week before the submission-deadline for the International Film Festival of Kerala. Within four days of the breakout of the conflict in Manipur, even private Wi-Fi was snuffed. Initially, Meena, the first woman filmmaker from Manipur to receive a National Award, tried to make do with DIPR’s (Directorate of Information and Public Relations) facilities but the waning net-speed was not conducive to heavy uploads. Though Meena somehow managed, many others, including artistes, have suffered immensely due to lack of connectivity. At Manipuri Nartanlalaya, dancer-scholar Yumlembam



Angst and the artiste

Dancers and musicians in strife-torn Manipur long to be back on stage



Chennai-bound

Sinam Basu Singh and his wife Monika are delighted to travel to Chennai to perform at the Smriti Festival on August 3 at Kalakshetra. The young Manipuri dancer couple sees it as a sign of hope. “We want tourists back in our culturally-rich state. Manipur is home to more than 200 temples and several art forms. This is only our second performance since the violence broke out last May. I have decided to talk about the importance of peace and harmony before every performance,” says Sinam.

Bidyananda Singh, a resident of Keishamthong in Imphal, rues that he couldn’t participate in a Kolkata youth dance festival only because he couldn’t receive any mail. Later, when the organisers called

Bidyananda, he couldn’t travel because of the exorbitant air fare. “I had to forego at least five shows. But the one I missed the most was the 2023 Sangai Kumhei festival, organised each year from November 21 to 30 by the Manipur Tourism Department,” says Bidyananda, who is an assistant professor at Manipur International University. Acclaimed contemporary choreographer-dancer Surjit Nongmeikapam (Bonbon) had to shelve the staging of his pet project ‘Soul Strings’, which aims to knit together all Manipuri communities. After shows at Churachandpur and Phayeng, close to Kuki valley, the next one had been planned at Haipi, a Thadou-Kuki village,” says Surjit speaking from his Imphal-based Nachom Arts Foundation’s studio. Though there is no blanket embargo, the locals are in no mood for recreation. Bidyananda, who was in the organising committee of the Viksit Bharat series presented by his teacher Thounaojam Haridas’s institute Guru Sanaton Apunba Hari Sankirtan Neinashang on February 21 this year, said, “I cannot even explain how it felt when doing the event. We had deliberately booked a small-auditorium near the institute since we wanted fewer people to attend. We also avoided a commercial sound system and professional videographers. Nowadays, we do only daytime shows because it becomes risky after dark.”

Fear factor Rumours of organisers and artistes being attacked that initially emerged from Keishamthong have instilled fear in people’s minds. The abduction of Akhu Chingangbam, singer-lyricist and founder of alternate folk-rock group Imphal Talkies, from his Khurai residence and release were widely reported. Despite grave risks, practitioners are braving it out for sustenance. Without

performances, learning and rehearsal have become redundant. “I used to previously conduct classes for students of Manipur University (central) and Manipur University Of Culture (state) in my courtyard but since the place is visible from the street, I decided to shift indoors for the safety of the students and my family,” says Bidyananda. In contrast, Surjit, in keeping with his desire to “build a movement culture” is rethinking his approach to the art during these trying times. “I am planning to conduct lessons in the open so that people can either observe or join. The purpose is to soothe minds and souls.” Bidyananda is lucky to have a job; though his last month’s salary has still not been paid. Some of his colleagues have taken up sundry jobs. Income for Surjit, who shuns grants, comes chiefly from renting out his mini-truck while his recently inaugurated multi-disciplinary Yumpham Arts Space has been converted into a makeshift boarding school for students of the burnt-down Moreh school, where his uncle was the teacher. Then, there are the Shumaang Leela (Meitei courtyard theatre) artistes, who have also borne the brunt of the violence. This traditional theatre is popular for its ‘Nupi Shabis’ – male actors performing female roles. With no platform to perform, these artistes have turned to construction work or are driving taxis and autorickshaws for a living. A few like Sagolsem Sana are trying to earn through online performances. “We also been making appeals for donations.” Sana, an award-winning actor, who lives in Paonabazar in Imphal, used to do 100 shows a month, almost three to four shows a day, earning around Rs 1,200 per show. “The stage is my world and I cannot survive without it,” says Sana, with anguish in her voice.



N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

The unpredictability is what makes a T.M. Krishna concert special and his recent performance at the Asian College of Journalism’s M. S. Subbulakshmi auditorium did not disappoint the audience in this respect. Till today, Krishna is the only Carnatic musician who has the ability to elicit contrasting opinions from two music lovers who may even identify as his die-hard fans. His experiments with the format and manodharma could annoy one, while the other could squeal with joy at the attempt. Such is Krishna’s spontaneity that even a padam, quite often sung by him, sounds different each time one hears it. **Tagore’s poem** The auditorium, which is acoustically designed for performances without any form of electrical amplification, enabled the audience to hear even the micro sangatis that Krishna generously improvised in the pallavi of ‘Yaarukagilum’, a sringara padam, symbolic of rebellion. His demonstration of about half a dozen ways to end the phrase ‘Penne’ exhilarated the listeners. One of Arun Prakash’s significant contributions to the arrangement is no doubt his no-fuss arudis; here it rounded up the anupallavi and carefully connected it to the charanam. The charanam ended with the phrase ‘Kasugusena’ at the upper gandharam. A round of



Triumph of the voice

Every little nuance was clearly heard at T.M. Krishna’s mikeless concert

swaras was rendered by Krishna at this point with a set of whirlwind phrases that touched the lower and upper gandharams. Just when one thought this was not enough of a deviation, Krishna next chose to explore the mandra sthayi with a round of swaras at ‘Enna’ in the pallavi. One must say this was an astute choice to use the setting effectively as the auditorium facilitated even the lowest mandra

sthayi phrases to be heard clearly. One of the pieces that Krishna chose to present was ‘Shubh sukh chain’, a Hindustani translation of Rabindranath Tagore’s poem ‘Bharoto Bhagyo Bidhata’ whose first stanza is used as the national anthem. Rewritten by Subhas Chandra Bose with the help of writer Mumtaz Hussain and Colonel Abid Hasan Safrani, the song is a reimagination of the national

Soul-stirring T.M. Krishna with K. Arun Prakash and H.N. Bhaskar. PHOTO: M. SRINATH

anthem and makes significant departures from the original text and melody. Krishna mentioned that he chose this piece as certain verses in it echoed his thoughts on nationalism.

Possibility is what Krishna has shown the Carnatic music world from the beginning. Take for instance his dissecting of the Surutti nishadam. Without going into many of its standard phrases, he chose to exhibit how much the madhyama to upper nishadam section can be exploited to get the best out of the raga. Next, he added the shadjam to panchamam layer, later moving on to approaching the nishadam from the upper rishabham. H.N. Bhaskar set out on a similar expedition to unearth the potential of ‘Ni’ in Surutti when Krishna interjected to infuse the kakali nishadam into the alapana to make it into a soulful Desh. Ultimately, however, the kaishiki nishadam reigned supreme and wrestled itself back to become Brindavana Saranga. Muthuswami Dikshitar’s ‘Soundararajam’ was rendered at a breezy pace leading up to the thani. **The bird song** Arun Prakash provided a seamless stream of soft strokes throughout the composition and his thani was a direct extension of this sophisticated approach. Some would even be bold enough to ask if what they heard was a ‘Soundararajam’ in the middle of that incessant mridangam flow – such was Arun’s melodic presence that evening. Eminent poet Perumal Murugan’s poems on birds are filled with beautiful imageries and employ tasteful alliterations. His fascination with the Indian Roller

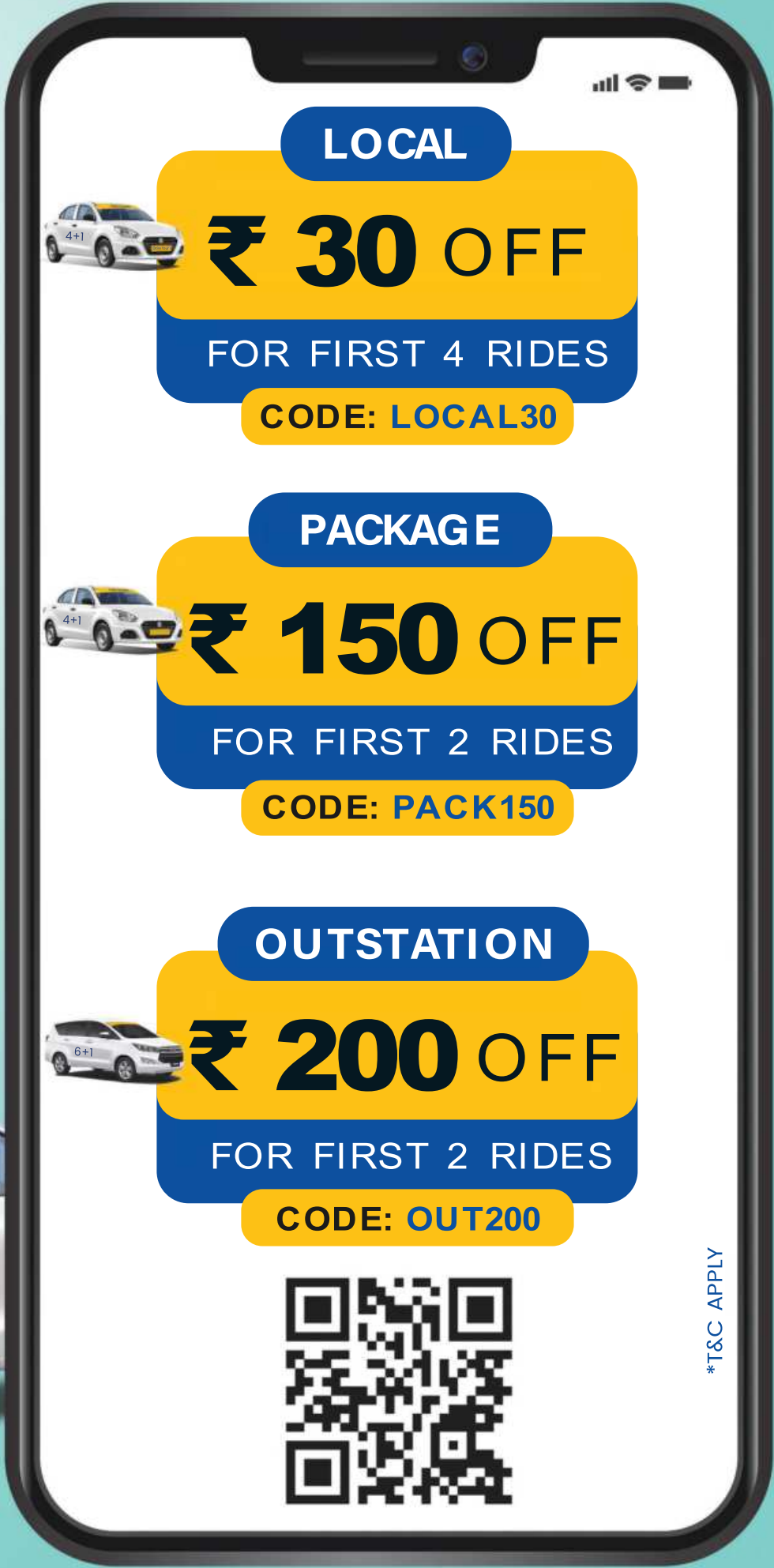
known as ‘panangaadai’ in Tamil resulted in him going through the works of M. Krishnan, a world-renowned ornithologist. Tuned and presented by Krishna in Khamas, the composition uses some characteristic phrases involving the kakali nishadam to highlight the unique features of the bird in the lines ‘neela nira rakkaiyai serkka virithu sellumbodhu’ and ‘porambaai padakkendru paayumi’. They talk about the bright blue markings on its wings, which are prominent in flight, and its tendency to display aerobic twists and turns. Asking Bhaskar to take up an alapana, Krishna observed as the violinist played a clear Mayamalavagowla alapana. During his turn, Krishna tactfully removed the daivatam to turn it into Jagannohini topping up the segment with superfast one-avartana swaras for ‘Sobillu Saptaswara’. Many in the audience were happy to hear him sing ‘Bhare Panduranga’ and felt that it was apt post Ashadi Ekadashi. When rendering ‘Koluvamaregada’ in Thodi, Krishna’s niraval at ‘Tambura jekoni’ was punctuated by meaningful pauses where the harmonic drone of the two tamburas on stage accentuated the mood of the sahitya. Krishna is a musician who has shown us how to unshackle art from orthodoxy. The only pledge we all must take is to allow diverse forms of artistic expression to co-exist in harmony, without one overpowering the other.



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The best of both worlds (From left) Madhubala in *Mughal-E-Azam*; Gopi Krishna with actor Sandhya in *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje*; and Siddhi Goel. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES



Dedicated to Pt. Birju Maharaj

Kathak Darpan Institute presents Smriti Festival in memory of Pt Birju Maharaj from August 1 to 4 at Kalakshetra Foundation. Vyjayanthimala Bali is the chief guest. Padma Subrahmanyam will receive the award instituted in the name of the legendary dancer. This will be followed by 'Kuchelopakhyanam', a Kathakali performance, by Sadanam Balakrishnan. On August 2 Saswati Sen will perform at 5.50 p.m., Priyadarsini Govind (Bharatanatyam; 6.30 p.m.) and Uma Dogra (Kathak; 7.20 p.m.). Day 3: Tejaswini Sathe and group (Kathak; 5.50 p.m.), Sinam Basu Singh (Manipuri; 6.30 p.m.) and Bragha Bessell (Bharatanatyam; 7.20 p.m.). The festival closes with Indu and Nidheesh (Bharatanatyam; 5.50 p.m.), Sunanda Nair (Mohiniyattam; 6.30 p.m.) and Neha Banerjee and Kalashram group (Kathak; 7.20 p.m.)



Theatre Shraddha's next

Theatre Shraddha is all set to stage its latest production *Kongai Thee*, by Indira Parthasarathy (*Ee Paa*) on July 27 and 28, 6.30 p.m., at Alliance Francaise, Nungambakkam. Tickets available on insider.in.

A whirl of glamour

Dancer-teacher Siddhi Goel's research project looks at Kathak's bond with cinema



considered works of art. "I was keen to highlight how dancers were an integral part in the making of these films. For instance, in 'Teere nazar dekhenge' from *Pakeezah*, choreographed by Pt. Gauri Shanker, the entire dance sequence supports storytelling. So my study was not just about its aesthetics but also about a method of choreography that enhanced the

emotional impact of the story." Siddhi has tried to go beyond the big three magnum opuses: *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan*. "One of my favourite *mujra* songs is 'Ye raat phir na aayegi' from *Mahal* (1949), choreographed by Pt. Lacchu Maharaj. The dance sequence stands out for its impeccable choreography and the way it has been shot." *Heeramandi's* success is a testimony to Kathak's continuing bond with celluloid. In its journey from royal courts and celluloid to the proscenium, Kathak has been deeply impacted by changing historical, social and cultural milieus.

well-known actors of the time including Jeevankala, Rani, Padma Khanna, Jayshree T and Bela Bose had learnt the dance form. Then there were dance assistants and background dancers, who were basically classical dancers. My research extended up to the arrival of Madhuri Dixit and includes creations of Sanjay Leela Bhansali. I have also explored the contemporary trends in Kathak as far as cinema is concerned," says the Delhi-based artiste.

Creating a dance piece Choreographies such as 'Piya tose naina lage re' from *Guide* (1965), 'Hothon pe aisi baat from *Jewel Thief* (1967), 'Thade rahiyo o banke yaar' and 'Chalte Chalte' from *Pakeezah* (1972) by Sohanlal, Hiralal, Pt. Lacchu Maharaj and Gauri Shanker respectively impacted the aesthetics of dance in films. Siddhi's research focussed on the process of creating a dance piece and how song and dance took the movie's narrative forward. Siddhi wanted to understand the reason behind why these artistes made a shift from classical to cinema. Was it because patronage for the art was on the decline? Kathak's repertoire was also largely impacted by the tawaifs, whose lives inspired many films of the time. Songs such as 'Lagat karajwa main chot', 'Thaade rahiyo o baanke yaar' and 'Mohe panghat pe nandlal' are proof of dadra, thumri and kajri finding a place in kathak. According to Siddhi, who holds a Masters in Arts and Aesthetics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, the close interaction between classical legends and artistes of the film world resulted in classics such as *Mughal-E-Azam* and *Pakeezah*. These movies are still

Shailaja Tripathi

Remember the number of times you have watched the iconic song 'Chalte chalte' from the Hindi film *Pakeezah*. Apart from the dreamy eyes of Meena Kumari, you would have noticed the two dancers in the background, dressed in pearly white Anarkalis, cutting a picture of grace and poise. The song is unimaginable without the two dancers, yet they remain unsung. Kathak dancer Siddhi Goel took it upon herself to find the identities of the two. She looked through IMDB data, spoke to actors of the time and watched the credits of several films from the period. Her research didn't yield confirmed answers but indicated that the two could be Leela and Sujata. Siddhi's biggest source of information was Anjana Mumtaz, a disciple of Pt. Gauri Shanker, who choreographed the song. Anjana was on the sets of *Pakeezah*, especially during the shooting of the song. Siddhi embarked on a research journey (supported by an arts research grant from India Foundation for the Arts) to trace the presence of Kathak in Hindi cinema over a period of 100 years. "It's a work in progress. People can support my research by sharing information(<https://www.instagram.com/allthingskathak/>)." **Focus on choreographers** "I have focussed not just on the dance songs in films but also on choreographers such as B. Sohanlal, B. Hiralal and Gopi Kishan. They were exponents in Kathak. Even some of the

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CALENDAR

Rhythm workshop

The Music Academy, has organised a percussion workshop 'Playing between the line' - An approach to Kanjira accompaniment for students and rasikas on July 27, 10 a.m. - 12.15 p.m., at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Kanjira artiste V. Anirudh Athreya conducts the session. For registration and other details contact 2811 2231 or 2811 5162. The programme is organised under the endowment, instituted by Dr S.A.K Durga, in memory of her father S.A. Venkataraman.

Bhajan competition

Sri Radha kalyana Mahotsava Seva Committee, Nanganallur, will conduct a bhajan competition for those in the age group of 20 and below, on August 11. Schools and bhajan mandalis can participate. Entries must be mailed to vittalapandurangan05@gmail.com. For details call 98415 43054 or 99628 50746.

Vocal concert

Musiri Chamber presents the vocal concert by Bharat Sundar on July 28, 4.01 p.m. He will be accompanied by Sayee Rakshith on the violin and N.C. Bharadwaj on the mridangam. Venue : 48/2, (Old no: 28/2,), Musiri Subramaniam Road, Mylapore.

Workshop for dancers and actors

Basement 21 is organises a workshop 'Interplay' by inter-disciplinary artiste Andrea Hackl on August 3 and 4 (10 a.m. to 2 p.m.) at Goethe-Institut. The workshop is open to dancers and actors. To register send a mail to mail.basement21@gmail.com by July 31.

Book launch

Surya Kala Foundation launches a book on Kshetranya padams authored by Kanakam Devaguptapu on July 30, 6 p.m., at Tatvaloka. A culmination of several years of research, it offers translation of exhaustive commentaries of 35 rare padams of Kshetranya, written by Veturi Anandamurthy originally in Telugu.

Radha kalyanam

Sri Ram Seva Trust, Puzhuthivakkam, celebrates the 18th year Radha kalyana mahotsavam with a three-day special programme beginning today. It features veda parayanam, special rituals and performances by different bhajan mandalis. Radha kalyanam will be performed on the last day of the festival (July 28, 9 a.m.-12.30 p.m.) by Shree Vittal Bhajan Mandali. The festivities concludes with Anjaneya utsavam at 6 p.m. Venue: Sri Lakshmi Mahal, Adambakkam.

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