

fridayReview

THE HINDU

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A FILM ON KASHMIR’S FAMOUS POETESS

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Carnatic vocalist Ajith Namboothiri’s introduction to and understanding of Swati Tirunal’s works happened during his student days at the Sree Swathi Thirunal Government College of Music in Thiruvananthapuram. He discovered the many facets of the king among musicians and musician among kings. And, all this led to *Swathi Mudra*, a book on the composer-musician’s body of work.

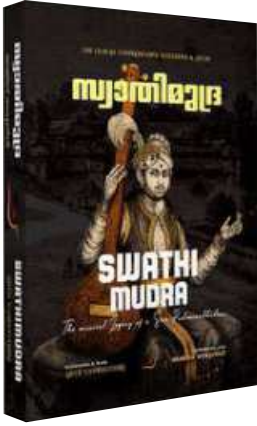
Released recently at a special event in Chennai, the book, which runs into 1,232 pages, traces Swati Tirunal’s musical legacy and has notations of his original compositions in Malayalam and English. There is also a section with lyrics in Sanskrit (Devanagari script).

Says Ajith: “The seed was planted in 1991 when I met Semmangudi swamy (Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer) while studying at Sree Swathi Thirunal College of Music to prepare an article on the king-composer. I asked him about the general perception that Swati Tirunal’s original compositions were lost and that what we hear now are tunes set by later day musicians. He told me that the tunes were already there in the book *Balamritham* and he had just refined them.”

Significant source
Balamritham was written by S. Renganatha Iyer, son of Sankara Bhatt Sasthrikal, court musician during Swati Tirunal’s reign. It is believed to have original notations of the tunes composed by the king. “There began my search for this book published in 1917. I met RP Raja, who had written *New Light on Swathi Thirunal*, which is considered one of the most authentic works on the ruler. The book had a scanned page from *Balamritham*,” shares Ajith. Although Raja directed him to the person who had *Balamritham* in his collection, Ajith could not get it. The wait

Swathi Mudra reproduces the original notations of Swati Tirunal’s compositions and explores his musical legacy

All the king’s songs



The seed for this book was planted in 1991 when I met Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer while studying at Sree Swathi Thirunal College of Music in Thiruvananthapuram.

ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

second part.” The book also has Renganatha Iyer’s notations of the 12 kritis from Swati Tirunal’s ‘Kuchelopakhyanam’ harikatha from the book *Sangeetha Rajarangam*.

Comprehensive study
Coming across the notations motivated Ajith to undertake a comprehensive study of Swati Tirunal’s music journey, which covers Indian classical music as a whole. The king composed kritis both in Carnatic and Hindustani styles.

“In 2017, I received the Central Government’s senior fellowship for my study on ‘Cultural nationalism in the Life and Music of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal’. He was known for hosting musicians from across the globe. Even then, some people said that the tunes attributed to the king were actually composed by experts in his court. I had to find the truth. *Swathi Mudra* carries findings of my research to prove the ingenuity of his works.

“A major source was the book *Isaikkalai Vallunargal*, written by Gomathi Sankara Iyer. It is based on the diary of his father, Pallavi Subbayya Bhagavathar, a disciple of the legendary Mahavaidyanaatha Iyer, who used to frequent the courts of the Travancore rulers. The book details how three of them – Swathi Tirunal, his nephew Ayilyam Thirunal and Vishakam Thirunal – promoted art and culture during their reign. The notes also say how Swati Tirunal used to compose the tunes and then let his court musicians fine-tune them,” shares Ajith.

The author adds that doubts were also raised about how he could compose so many kritis at a young age – Swati Tirunal died at 33. “In *Swathi Mudra*, I have arrived at certain conclusions that vouch for his musical genius. He has composed over 300 kritis. While Mullammoodu Bhagavathar preserved the tunes, greats such as Muthiah Bhagavathar and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer popularised the compositions,” says Ajith.

CULTURE BRIEFS

Spotlight on Dikshitar kritis



Guruguhaamrta’s annual event ‘A Day with Dikshitar’ is back. The day-long event, which will feature concerts and lecture demonstrations by established and young musicians, will be held on November 10, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall, Myslapore. The day begins with Mylai Karthikeyan’s nagaswaram recital at 9 a.m. This will be followed by Aishwarya Shankar’s lecdem ‘Insights on compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar, as given in A.M. Chinnaswamy Mudaliar’s Oriental Music in European Notation’ (11 a.m.). Also to be featured are: 2 p.m.: Rakshita Ramesh’s veena recital with Jayendra Kumar (mridangam) and Ganapathy (ghatam).

3.30 p.m.: Swarathmika Srikanth (vocal) with CS Chinmayee (violin) and Vamsidara Anand (mridangam); 4.30 p.m.: lecdem by Prof. R.S. Jayalakshmi on the compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar in raga Anandabhairavi as listed in the *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini*; 5.30

p.m.: Snigdha Desiraju (vocal); 6.30 p.m.: distribution of prizes to the winners of the global competition on Dikshitar kirtanams and launch of the new episode of ‘Dikshitar Kshetra Darshanam’.

Prizes have been instituted by Kothamangalam Subbu Trust, in memory of Vijayalakshmi Rajasundaram and Meena. Art patron Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti will preside over. The series concludes with Ashwath Narayanan’s vocal concert at 7.15 p.m. He will be accompanied by Sayee Rakshith on the violin and Sumesh Narayan on the mridangam.

Reaching a milestone

Alapana, the annual festival of music and dance, presents its 25th edition with a series of music concerts by eminent artistes (November 8 to 10) at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Myslapore.

To be inaugurated today, the line up begins with Sembanarkoil SRGS Mohandass’ nagaswaram recital at 5.30 p.m. Krishnan Akileswaran, Group CFO, Apollo Hospitals, is the chief guest. Akhila Srinivasan, director, Shriram Life Insurance, K.N. Ramaswamy, director, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, and art patron Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti are the guests of honour. The evening also includes the presentation of Alapana award 2024 to musician Radha Venkatachalam. This will be followed by Chitravina Ravikiran’s recital (7 p.m.).

Beginning with a namasankirtanam, a series of concerts, each spanning 45 minutes to one hour, will mark the events on the next two

days. Details: Nov. 9, 9.45 a.m.: Seetha Narayanan; 10.30 a.m.: Athul Kumar (flute); 11.15 a.m.: Kolkata Padmavathi Saranathan; 12 noon: Lakshmi Kannan’s Jathiswaralaya (kathak); 1 p.m.: S. Nithyasree (veena); 2 p.m.: Bharathi Thirumagan (villupattu); 3 p.m.: Savita Sreeram and ensemble (abhang); 4 p.m.: H. Sooryanarayanan; 5 p.m.: Sikkil Mala Chandrasekhar (flute); 6 p.m.: Priya Sisters; and 7 p.m.: K.S. Vishnudev. The day concludes with Kunnakudi Balamurali Krishna’s vocal concert at 8 p.m.

The concerts to be featured on November 10 are Bhavadharini Anantaraman (9.45 a.m.); K.R. Shrievats (veena, 10.30 a.m.); R. Rajiv (11.15 a.m.); Disha Rengarajan (Bharatanatyam at 12 noon); Jayashree Vaidyanathan (1 p.m.); Bhavya Hari (2 p.m.); Sunil R Gargyan (3 p.m.); T.V.S. Mahadevan (4 p.m.); Sankari Krishnan (5 p.m.); Sikkil Gurucharan (6 p.m.); Prince Rama Varma (7 p.m.) and O.S. Arun (8 p.m.).

The programme is open to rasikas.



Remembering KVN

Sri Ariyakkudi and Sri K.V. Narayanaswamy Memorial Trust presents the 101st birth anniversary of legendary vocalist K.V. Narayanaswamy from today to November 10 at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Mini Hall). The event will begin with an invocation by the students of KVN and Padma Narayanaswamy. This will be followed by the lighting of the traditional lamp by T.T. Narendran, retired professor, IIT Chennai. The evening will end with a concert by Pattabiram Pandit (6 p.m.). He will be accompanied by M. Narmada (violin) and B. Ganapathiraman (mridangam). On November 9 there will be a guru vandanam at 5.30 p.m., followed by lamp lighting by Venkatachalam, deputy director, BVB. Vocalist H.S. Prashanth will perform at 6 p.m. He will be accompanied by M. Vijay (violin) and B.R. Srinivas (mridangam). On the last day (November 10) the guru vandanam will be followed by chief guest Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti’s address. Vocalist Anuradha K.N. will perform at 6 p.m. with Mysore Srikanth on the violin and B.R. Srinivas on the mridangam.



Team and tala The Heartbeat ensemble; and (below) Karthick. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Deepa Venkatraman

“You have chosen to learn an upapakkavadhyam (a secondary percussion instrument), and I support your desire to pursue a career in it. However, you will have to work very hard to excel,” said E.V. Subramaniam to his son Karthick. Following his father’s advice, Karthick worked hard to be known today as ‘ghatam’ Karthick. Once he gained proficiency in playing the instrument, he widened his musical reach as a lyricist, composer and vocalist. “I took these additional roles as a lead member of my Heartbeat ensemble that I launched to celebrate the power of rhythm,” says Karthick, amidst preparations for the special event on November 14 to mark the ensemble’s silver jubilee.

Early training “I still have a long way to go. There is so much one can do in music,” adds Karthick, who holds a PhD in Sanskrit. Influenced by his mother Padma’s singing for dance performances, he was drawn to Carnatic music when in school. He initially underwent training in vocal music under vidwans Thiruvengadu A. Jayaraman and Vairamangalam Lakshminarayanan, which helped him understand the nuances of Carnatic music. But it was the ghatam that captivated him. Unlike the traditional training method where students learn the mridangam first, his first percussion lesson was on the ghatam. He learnt from maestros Vikku Vinayakram and his brother TH Subash Chandran for over 40 years. “Seeing me play rhythms on utensils at home, Vikku sir felt I should learn to play a percussion instrument, particularly the ghatam because of my large palms. I am blessed to have imbibed both my gurus styles and techniques.” Karthick soon began accompanying legendary Carnatic musicians such as M.S. Subbulakshmi, D.K. Pattammal, M.

Heartbeat is 25

‘Ghatam’ Karthick on how his love for the clay pot instrument led to the creation of a percussive ensemble

Balamuralikrishna, and Lalgudi Jayaraman. Apart from classical music, he loved listening to songs by Boney M, Michael Jackson and Ilaiyaraaja. Inspired by his gurus who popularised the clay pot instrument worldwide, Karthick sought to explore his creativity by creating

compositions that combined various genres. “Thus was born Heartbeat, a harmonious blend of different percussion and melodic instruments.” The name ‘Heartbeat’ and Karthick’s maiden composition ‘Pulse’ were dedicated to his father. “Heartbeat was formed two years after he passed, while ‘Pulse’ was based on raga Ratipati Priya and featured melodic and rhythmic exchanges inspired by my father’s favourite kriti – ‘Jagat Janani’,” shares the musician. Karthick credits his close friends and co-artists vainika Kannan Balakrishnan and mandolin U.P. Raju for their support. When I shared the idea behind ‘Pulse’, Kannan immediately offered to feature in his concert. When other musicians

and rasikas too appreciated it, it boosted my confidence,” he recalls. Motivated by the positive feedback to incorporate singing in Heartbeat, Karthick began to pen lyrics in Sanskrit and Tamil and composed varnams, swarakshara kritis, ragamalikas, instrumental orchestrations and devotional, romantic and folk songs – blending tradition and contemporary sounds. “When I look back at the ensemble’s 25-year journey, I realise it wasn’t easy. But the rasikas’ overwhelming response has made the effort truly rewarding,” says Karthick. Talking about his family’s role in his creative pursuits, Karthick says his son Sarvesh, a multi-percussionist, has been working to develop Heartbeat’s portal and manages their studio, Swaraksham. Daughter Sravisha works on ideas for the ensemble’s presentations. “I owe it to my wife Anjana for her unstinted support.” The Heartbeat Ensemble has released six albums and performed worldwide. “The audience abroad enjoys rhythmic orchestration. They even show keen interest in learning it. This led to the launch of HARP: Heartbeat Academy of Rhythms and Percussion in 2020 – many international students learn konnakol and ghatam there,” informs Karthick. Collaborations with young and talented artists have lent a novel touch to the ensemble’s presentations. “Their improvisations in Carnatic music using Western instruments such as the handsonic, keyboard and mandolin are remarkable. Their knowledge of technology is impressive. I feel rejuvenated working with them.” On Heartbeat’s 25th anniversary, Karthick has established the HEARTBEAT Cultural Foundation, which aims to connect traditional arts with modern education and pass on cultural legacies to future generations. “The initiative will include thematic concerts, workshops, and music curricula for institutions that foster innovative musical expression,” says Karthick.



An evening of rhythm

The silver jubilee event will be held on November 14 (6 p.m.) at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. It will be presided over by ghatam maestro Vikku Vinayakram, singer P. Unnikrishnan and arts aficionado Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti. The evening also includes an audio-visual presentation ‘Silver Hearts’, featuring Karthick’s students and international musicians, and a Heartbeat concert showcasing young talents from Samagana School of Carnatic Music. Sahrudaya awards will be presented to Kannan Balakrishnan and U.P. Raju.

The core of Meenakshi

What it means to be the warrior princess of the Pandya dynasty

Refreshing approach Jyotsna Jaganathan and Brindha Manikavasagan PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ



V.V. Ramani

Having watched innumerable portrayals of goddess Meenakshi, both in solo Bharatanatyam margams and group productions, it was with a lot of trepidation that one sat down for yet another presentation of the warrior

goddess – this time by Jyotsna Jagannathan and Brindha Manikavasagan at Nritya Samutsavam - Shakti Mahima, organised by Charsur Arts Foundation and Kala Sadhanalaya. However, their refreshing approach focussed on the persona of Meenakshi as a child, young girl, woman, and as

an individual in her own right. And so, while the presentation did narrate the familiar story of the daughter of King Malayadwaja Pandya, who ruled the Pandya kingdom, her birth from fire, her conquests on the battlefield, meeting her prospective consort Shiva and her marriage, its focus was on ‘What it means to

be Meenakshi’. The beautiful blend of musical phrases and movements kept alive the momentum. The violin took centre stage when they portrayed Bala Meenakshi. A soothing lullaby in Nilambari was used to focus on the mother-daughter bond, and percussion was used to denote valour. Jyotsana’s portrayal was filled with delicate, graceful movements and unhurried pace, where each idea and expression were explored in depth. The depiction of a mother’s indulgent admiration – her doting on the lotus feet of child Meenakshi and the gentle sounds of her anklet bells – was impressive. Equally enjoyable were the visuals of Meenakshi’s martial training backed by swara passages. Brindha Manickavasagan’s singing was in sync with the mood of each sequence. Srisudarshini’s nattuvangam, Sukanya’s melodious violin and the restrained and impactful performance of mridangist L. Sriganesh turned the performance into a wholesome one.



V.V. Ramani

The vibrant expression of the artistes who came together for the production ‘Prakriti’ showed the effort and idea behind the concept. Presented by Team Gandiva, spearheaded by vocalist Sai Vignesh and his dancer-wife Kavya Muralidharan, this contemporary collaboration of Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam was part of the Vazhiya Vayyakam festival held recently at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. ‘Prakriti’ was conceived as an ode to Nature through pieces focussing on deities associated with the five elements. It highlighted the process of creation and protection. Popular songs from the Bharatanatyam repertoire were chosen to highlight the

In life and art Sai Vignesh and Kavya Muralidharan PHOTO: M. SRINATH

synchronising well with the percussion accompaniment. The detailed description of Shiva followed in the song ‘Bho Shambho’ that reached a crescendo when the sounds of the guitar, violin, mridangam and drums merged with powerful vocals. The electrifying soundscape brought out the vigour of the Tandava. There was a shift in mood when the duo fused two melodic songs – ‘Krishna nee begane’ and ‘Jagadhodharana’. Kavya’s abhinaya captured the innocence and mischief of Krishna and the vatsalya bhava of Yashoda, while Sai Vignesh’s inspired singing resonated with the emotions. Though his singing of ‘Varaha Roopam’ from the film *Kantara* elicited enthusiastic response from the audience, it didn’t fit into the show’s format. Kavya’s attempt to perform to this song wasn’t a good idea. The entire presentation followed a routine pattern yet managed to impress because of its refreshing soundscape. The four musicians – Vigneshwar on the keys, Karaikkal Venkat on the violin, Sarvesh Karthik on the mridangam and Rhythmic pad, and Bharath Dhanasekharan on the drums – contributed immensely.

Experiments with the repertoire

An interesting soundscape lent a refreshing touch to the format

theme. They were backed by an interesting narration in Tamil by Ganesh. The show began with the Mallari. The dancer and the singer seemed totally in sync as they performed compositions in diverse kalapramanams. The Khamas raga Daru varnam ‘Mathe malayadwaja’ began with a beautiful depiction of Meenakshi. Kavya’s crisp nritya patterns and fine footwork came to the fore in the fast-paced ‘Shyaame’,

Composer’s special

Pathangi brothers presented unusual ragas and kritis by Oothukadu Venkata Kavi



Musical ode Pathangi Brothers with V.S.P. Gayatri Sivani on the violin and Suriya Nambisan on the mridangam PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

P. Srihari

An exclusive Oothukkadu Venkata Kavi concert could well be a dare for the artistes as much as it is a divine treat for the rasikas, thanks to the lyrical profundity, melodic richness and rhythmic wizardry of his compositions. Pathangi Brothers – Dathre and Dhruv – rose to the challenge admirably. The mere mention of the composer’s name instinctively connects the mind to Krishna gaanam. The brothers explored that and much more in their concert as Narada Gana Sabha and the International Foundation of Carnatic Music celebrated the Venkata Kavi Day at the sabha’s mini hall recently. V.S.P. Gayatri Sivani on the violin and Suriya Nambisan on the mridangam aptly complemented the duo. It was a compelling recital by the young siblings who displayed confidence and competence in equal measure. ‘Sindhithavar nenjil iruppadhu’, a lilting number on Ganapathi in Nattai, set the tone for an energetic performance, and the swara interplay at ‘Kaatchiyena thagum’ was vibrant, with both Gayatri and Suriya contributing handsomely.

Unique feature

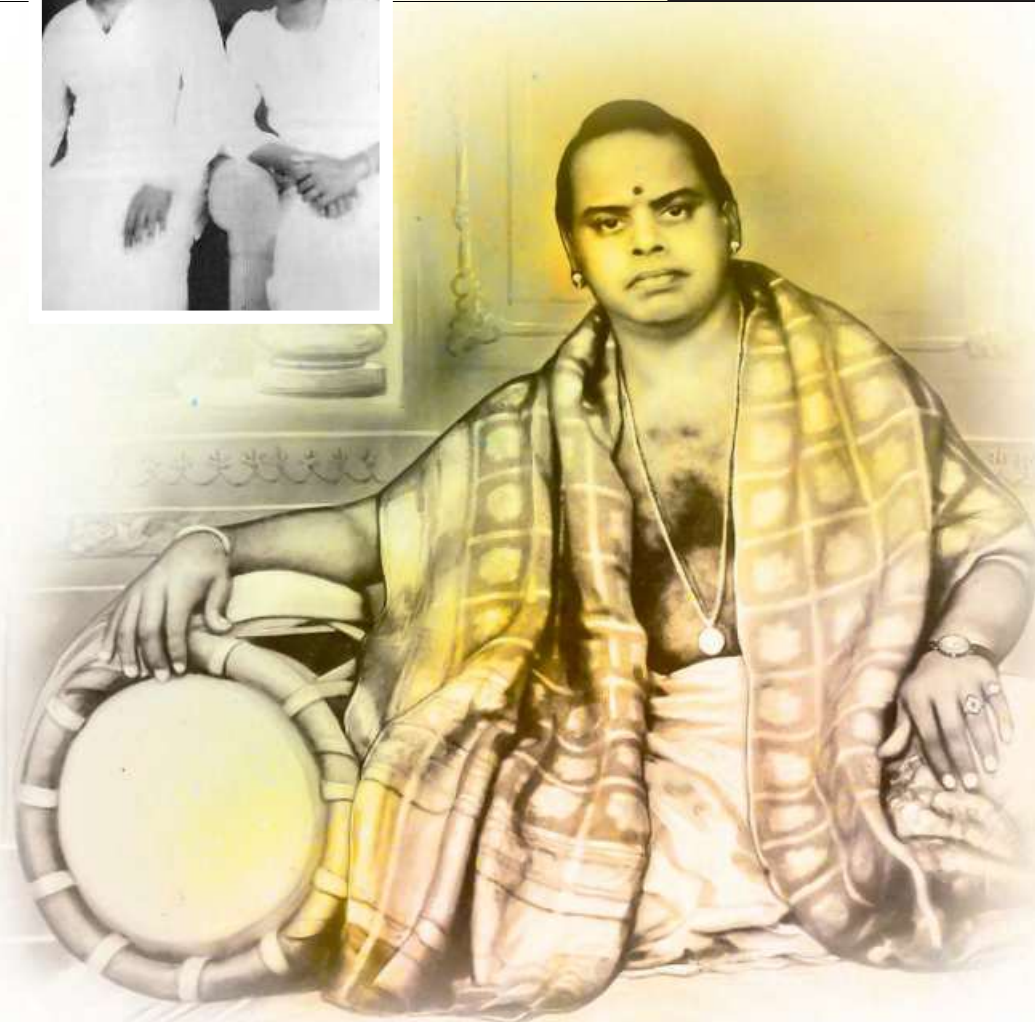
‘Vijayate govinda’ in Asaveri unfolded next with the gait of Misra Chapu lending an air of repose. The madhyama kala segment comprising three stanzas in succession to cap off the charanam – an uncommon feature – was the icing on the cake, and the vocalists rendered it with verve. ‘Guru padaaravinda komalam’ in Abhogi set to Rupakam, one of the many guru keertanams by Venkata Kavi (wherein he reveres none other than Krishna as the supreme preceptor, though he refers to the Lord only as gurunatha, sadgurunatha, gurudeva, etc.), provided the most sublime flavour of the evening. After Dathre and Dhruv traversed the contours of the raga aesthetically, Sivani’s brushes with the bow added an exquisite resonance. The anupallavi line ‘Parama yoga yaga vedam padithilen, padithadhu pol nadithilen’, which was taken up for niraval, offered a nice blend of the composer’s humility and pride at the same time (“I have not learnt or practised penance, sacrifice or the vedas, nor have I ever feigned to have learnt them”). It was an inspired niraval with the singers vying with each other to bring out the composer’s sentiment with delicate modulation and expressive phrasing. The slight mispronunciation by Dathre at ‘nadithilen’ a couple of times in the faster tempo was but a minor slip. The duo proceeded to complete the song with sparkling swara passages in two speeds at the beginning of the pallavi, with the accompanists supporting seamlessly to enhance the appeal. The siblings’ willingness to do the hard yards was evident as they ventured into two kritis in rare ragas. The first one was Lalithagandharvam, derived by combining the arohanam of Sankarabharanam and the avarohanam of Hamsadhwani. Dathre and Dhruv rendered the Sanskrit composition ‘Sri Sivanayike’ on Madurai Meenakshi with clear diction. Then they ascended a notch with the delineation of Hamsageervani (the scale of Simhendramadhyamam sans ‘ni’). The brothers navigated the tightrope with ease, ahead of presenting another composition in Sanskrit ‘Raga rasananda nartana’ on Krishna. The two-speed swara essay at the pallavi opening culminated in a nuanced korvai with the accompanists playing ideal allies before Nambisan’s smooth and clear strokes highlighted the tani avartanam in Adi talam. By the time the Pathangi Brothers concluded their recital with ‘Vaiyam alandhu vaan alandha’ in Nadanamakriya and Misra Chapu – wherein the last phrase after the characteristic madhyama kala features a delightful medley of jathi, swara and sahityam – they left a lasting impression on the audience.

Suganthy Krishnamachari

When he heard his student Nachiarkovil Raghava Pillai play korvais, thavil vidwan Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai had a sense of deja vu – they were rhythm patterns he had heard from the stalwarts of his time. Raghava’s father Pakkiriya Pillai was a well-known nattuvanar. Raghava trained for two years under Thiruvallaputhur Pasupathiya Pillai, and for 11 years under the Needamangalam wizard. He also became his son-in-law. Raghava soon evolved into a ‘special’ thavil player who was brought in apart from the thavil vidwans who were part of a set.

Distinct style
The four important sollus in percussion are *tha dhi thom nam*. “While my guru was outstanding in his rendition of all the sollus, his rendition of ‘tha’ was unique,” says Thanjavur Govindaraja Pillai, who did gurukulavasam under Raghava Pillai. “Perumpallam Venkatesan, another sishya, used to say his guru’s speciality was the uniformity in his expression of *tha*, which throbbed with life, regardless of the sollukattu he played and no matter what the kala pramanam was.” Praising his dexterity in handling the thavil, the magazine Sudesamitran said that he should be renamed Laaghava Pillai (Laaghava – ease or skill in Sanskrit).

“These days we have thavils with metal rings instead of bamboo rings, and steel in place of leather straps. After three or four concerts, the leather straps in the traditional thavils would loosen up and had to be tightened, and this was a laborious process requiring expertise. Raghava Pillai’s go-to man for adjusting the straps was Nachiarkovil Rajagopala Pillai,” says Govindaraja Pillai. Govindaraja Pillai says his guru was magnanimous towards his disciples. During the janavasam in the family of an industrialist, Karukurichi Arunachalam suggested that Govindaraja Pillai accompany him for some time, and his guru gladly made way for the pupil. He encouraged his students, but was not lavish with his praise, for he did not want them to become complacent.



Echoes of rhythm

Vidwan Raghava Pillai created a special place for thavil on the concert stage

“My father always upheld the dignity of thavil vidwans,” says Raghava Pillai’s son Vasudevan. Actor S.S. Rajendran wanted Raghava Pillai to play at his house-warming ceremony, and sent him an advance of Rs 1,000. This was a few months before Raghava’s Pillai death, when his medical expenses were mounting. But, while the invitation mentioned nagaswaram maestro Karukuruchi Arunachalam, the names of the thavil players had been inadvertently left out. Raghava Pillai returned the cheque, and refused to play. After a concert during a temple festival in Thiruveezhimizhalai, the pontiff of Dharmapuram



A Legend’s life (Clockwise for top) Raghava Pillai with Karukurichi Arunachalam; a portrait of the thavil maestro; and his house. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Adheenam honoured the Thiruveezhimizhalai brothers – Subramania Pillai and Nataraja Sundaram Pillai – and Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai with shawls. Unfortunately, the official of the Adheenam had forgotten to arrange a similar honour for Raghava Pillai. However, NRP continued to play, despite the Thiruveezhimizhalai brothers telling him to step down, for the mangalam had been played. When the pontiff was apprised of the omission, he honoured Raghava Pillai too, and only then did the latter stop playing. Many Sri Lankan thavil players trained under the giants of Chola Nadu. In Sri Lanka, during temple performances, Indian and Lankan thavil vidwans vied with each other in displaying their percussive skills, with the whole thing acquiring the contours of a contest. These friendly contests drew crowds like a modern-day India vs Sri Lanka cricket match. Invariably, the knowledgeable audience was bowled over by Raghava Pillai’s performance and they would shout jubilantly, “India has won!”

Legendary actor Sivaji Ganesan once arranged a Karukurichi concert with five thavil vidwans including Raghava Pillai for a family function. Vasudevan recalls that the audience clamoured for a tani avartanam even before Karukurichi could play. Karukurichi told the thavil vidwans to go ahead. Raghava Pillai began the thani, which went on for two hours, after which he asked Karukurichi to begin. But once again the audience wanted a thani. So the thani continued for another hour, before Karukurichi finally took over. An enthralled Sivaji showered Raghava Pillai with a basketful of currency notes. Raghava Pillai’s first outing had been in the Nachiarkovil temple, where he had played for the Thiruveezhimizhalai brothers. His last concert was during the Nachiarkovil Kal Garudan festival, for the junior Thiruveezhimizhalai brothers – Govindaraja Pillai and Dakshinamurthy Pillai. Although Raghava Pillai played for all the nagaswaram artistes, he had a special bond with Karukurichi Arunachalam, who died on April 6, 1964. Raghava Pillai followed him four days later! *Ananda Vikatan’s* obituary for the two vidwans was about an imaginary concert in *devaloka*.

CALENDAR



Violin duet

The Music Academy features a violin duet by S.R. Mahadeva Sarma and S.R. Rajsree today, 6 p.m. at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Melakaveri K. Balaji (mridangam) and Adambakkam K. Sankar (ghatam). The programme is organised under the endowment instituted by Lalgudi GJR Krishnan and Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi in memory of their father vidwan Lalgudi G. Jayaraman.

Showcase of talent

Nadasangamam, the music wing of Narada Gana Sabha, will conduct its talent promotion concerts on November 13 at its mini Hall. The evening will feature the performances by Ragasudha Balasubramanian (5 p.m.) and Sreya Sundararaman (7 p.m.).

Song and dance

Nrityopasana Trust will present the Vaggeyakara programme which will feature musician T.V. Ramprasadh and his dancer-wife Indira Kadambi. The programme will be held under the auspices of Narada Gana Sabha on November 18 at 6.30 p.m. Venue: Sathguru Gnanananda Hall.



Debut

Zuzanna Kostrzewska from Poland, a disciple of guru Sailaja, is presenting her Bharatanatyam arangetram at R.R. Sabha Mini Hall, Mylapore on November 9, 6.30 p.m.

Centenary celebrations

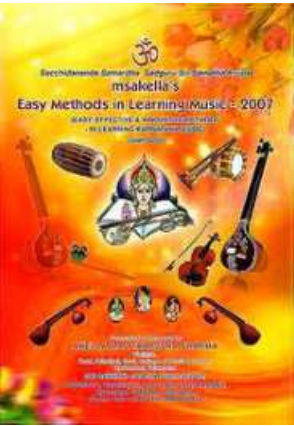
A special event to commemorate the birth centenary of M.B. Srinivasan, a doyen of Indian choral music, 20 years of Akshayam and 15 years of Sargam, (two choirs trained by Sudha Raja) will be held on November 10, 11 a.m. at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore. Chief guest Prabha Sridevan, former Madras High Court judge, will release the choral music song book. It will be followed by a short choral music performance by both choirs as a tribute to M.B. Srinivasan.

Discourse

Under the auspices of Madhuradhvani, Sri Ranga Academy Of Fine Arts has organised Embar Kasturi’s musical discourse ‘Aranga Nagar Vaazha Thyagaraja Swamy’s Sriranga Vijayam’ on November 9, 9.30 a.m., at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. He will be accompanied by Anayampatti G. Venkatasubramaniam on the violin and V. Ganapathyraman on the mridangam. This will be followed by Padinmar Paadum Perumal Devaganam by Srirama Bharathi and her students at 11.30 a.m.

Endless quest

Musician Akella Mallikarjuna Sharma, who passed away recently, constantly researched to unravel rare facets of Carnatic music



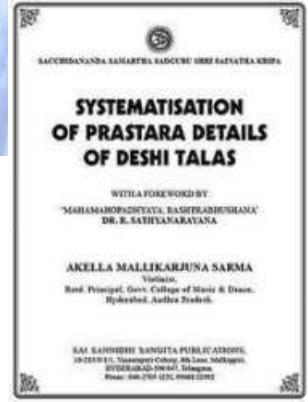
Erudite Akella Mallikarjuna Sharma; and some of his books. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

S. B. Vijaya Mary

Aspiring Carnatic music vocalists typically begin their training by singing the Purandaradasa composition *Sri Gananatha*, following their initial lessons in swaras. Akella Mallikarjuna Sharma opposed the selection of this song as the first *geetam*, arguing that it requires a solid understanding of raga and swara, making it unsuitable for learners. Mallikarjuna Sharma was extremely forthright when it came to expressing his views on different aspects of Carnatic music. The distinguished violinist, revered guru and accomplished author passed away recently. At a time when All India Radio and Doordarshan dominated the airwaves,



Mallikarjuna Sharma was known as a skilful accompanist to renowned vocalists. The Music Academy, where he had performed on several occasions, honoured him with the annual TTK Award in 2009. Born in 1938 in Mummidivaram, East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, Mallikarjuna Sharma’s musical journey began under the guidance of his father, Ashwatthanarayana Murthy, and further blossomed under the mentorship of P. P. Somayajulu. An admirer of violin virtuoso M.S. Gopalakrishnan, he developed a unique style that fused traditional technique with his own artistic flair. Mallikarjuna Sharma’s close



association with Nedunuri Krishnamurthy opened new avenues for him. Following a brief tenure as a staff artiste at All India Radio, Hyderabad, he joined the Government College of Music and Dance, Hyderabad, in 1961, as a lecturer. He became the principal in 1984. He significantly shaped the musical careers of several students until his retirement in 1996. Sharma’s major contribution to Carnatic music lies in his

revival of Prastara Tala (one of the Tala Dasha Pranas), a complex and often overlooked rhythmic structure in traditional renditions. Over four decades of research, he brought to light several unknown aspects of Prastara, greatly enriching the field of Carnatic music with new insights. An unparalleled exponent and sole authority on Talaprastara, he authored several books, including *Talaprastara Sagara*, which received accolades from Telugu University and revised editions like *Talaprastara Ratnakara* and *Indian Genius in Talaprastara*. His scholarly work also includes *Talaprastara of Nishanka Sharnagadeva’s Sangeeta Rathnakara: A Critical Interpretation and Systematisation of Prastara Details of Deshi Talas*. Another notable work *Sangeetha Swararaga Sudha* delves into the intricacies of raga alapana and swarakalpana. Voruganti Ananda Mohan, the founder of Sangeetha Ksheerasagaram and a music connoisseur, reflecting on his association with Mallikarjuna Sharma says, “Mallikarjuna Sharma and my guru, Uppalapati Ankaiah, worked together at the Government College of Music in Ramkote and performed at the inaugural concert of Thyagaraya Gana Sabha on June 4, 1966. They would often walk to Kachiguda Crossroads, find a quiet corner, and have deep conversations on Prastara Tala.” “He was a tough taskmaster; most artistes and students felt a bit apprehensive to approach him,” laughs Voruganti. “His teaching method emphasised precision and authentic presentation. His commitment and scholarly approach to the art form is hard to find in today’s music world.”

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Back to the Valley

Muzaffar Ali plans to revive his shelved film *Zooni*, which is based on Habba Khatoon, the peasant-poetess, who became the last Chak empress of Kashmir

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One of the most anticipated films of its time shelved due to the insurgency in Kashmir, *Zooni* is expected to be revived in January, 2025. Director Muzaffar Ali says he and his filmmaker-son Shaad Ali have found a creative way to bring his passion project to life.

“Shaad is closely associated with the film. He was around 15 years of age when shooting came to a halt in 1989 after I received a letter from the insurgents that the film was ‘un-Islamic’. While studying in Kanpur, Shaad had come to join the crew during his holidays but insisted on staying back, as the cinema bug had bitten him. In a way, he is caught in the film’s continuity. The incompletion of *Zooni* has troubled him as much as it has made my existence

miserable,” says the veteran filmmaker.

Based on the 16th century legend of Habba Khatoon, the peasant poetess who went on to become the last Chak empress of Kashmir, Muzaffar, who recently turned 80, says he has around 90 minutes of footage that is being restored.

Fresh narrative

“Shaad will shoot the Kashmir of today with a dialogue between Dimple (Kapadia) and me to create a different kind of narrative that will hopefully bring out the essence of my work. While I am being cautious, Dimple is very excited about the development,” says the *Umrao Jaan* director as he shows his portraits of the Kashmiri muse at Farasnama, an exhibition of his artworks in Delhi.

“When the film went out of my control, I returned to painting; no commercial constraint can come in between my imagination and



Retake From *Zooni*, the unfinished project starring Dimple Kapadia and Vinod Khanna; and (left) Muzaffar Ali.
PHOTOS: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

expression,” he adds.

An important feature of the portraits is the presence of a horse in each one of them. Most of his landscapes, abstracts, and sculptures, express the gentle and compassionate side of the animal that has been a constant companion of man in the march of civilisation. Muzaffar talks of painting Duldul, the white mule in Muharram processions. “I feel a horse lives in a state of prayer. That’s why it finds mention in mythical tales of every religion and it is said that a horse prays for those who shelter him.”

The portraits evolved from sketches for the screenplay of *Zooni*, and exude the gentle gradient of his cinematic perspective, capturing the melancholy and mystique of a woman devoted to music and poetry throughout the four seasons that define the Valley.

Inspired by the region

Muzaffar says he hasn’t lost touch with Kashmir in all these years; he recalls how the climate of the region spurred his imagination to attempt the magnum opus.

Towards the end of his stint in the publicity department of Air India in the 1980s, he

conceived the idea of hosting international conferences.

“We wanted to bring international delegates to India, but research showed that most conferences were held from April to October, making Kashmir the most suitable destination.”

Around that time, his film *Anjuman* travelled to the Vancouver Film Festival, where he watched *The Last Emperor*, Bernardo Bertolucci’s showcase of the life of the last king of China’s Qing dynasty that was shot in the Forbidden City. Muzaffar felt a grand film should be made to put Kashmir on the global map. “The idea of a film on the last queen of Kashmir made sense to everybody and the then Kashmir government agreed to support.”

Muzaffar reunited the *Umrao Jaan* team of Khaiyyam, Shahryar, and Asha Bhosle to recreate the essence of Habba Khatoon’s Kashmiri verse in the poetry of Shahryar for the Urdu version. He says seven “truly moving” songs were recorded by Asha Bhosle.

Muzaffar holds that Habba Khatoon is part of Kashmir’s psyche. You can’t finish intangibles like man’s quest for truth and beauty.”



New Act Piyush Mishra at a performance. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

idea was that we perform my songs with a band. When percussionist Jayant Patnaik joined us, we started as a band. When Rahul Gandhi of Tambo started managing us, it took a different shape,” says the singer. Gradually more musicians joined them. He says, “Shirish Malhotra joined on the saxophone, flute and clarinet. Yohann played the bass, Natasha Pinto was on the keys, Varun was on the percussion, Shreyas played drums. Then we worked on lights, sound, and kept developing the band.”

As a young boy drawn to doing theatre, his first role was of the *Arabian Nights* character Abu Hasan. When in college, he enrolled in the National School of Drama, Delhi. He became popular playing Hamlet.

After graduation, Piyush wrote the play *Gagan Damama Baijiyo*, based on the life of Bhagat Singh. He started getting roles in films, beginning with Mani Ratnam’s *Dil Se* (1998) and then acted in Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Maqbool* (2003). He then wrote songs for Anurag Kashyap’s *Black Friday* (2004), which had music by Indian Ocean. The numbers ‘Bandeh’ and ‘Bharam bhap ke’ became popular.

Multitasking

In Anurag Kashyap’s 2009 movie *Gulaal*, Piyush composed the music, wrote all lyrics and sang the songs ‘Aarambh’ and ‘Duniya’, besides playing the role of Prithvi Bana. “But the role that got me noticed as an actor was in Anurag’s *Gangs Of Wasseypur* in 2012,” he says.

Piyush’s appearances in Coke Studio (India) gave him more exposure. “Films, songs and theatre hold the same importance in my life. And I would like to maintain this balance.”

Even after the UdanKhatola tour begins, Piyush has made sure his shooting schedules won’t be affected. “The concerts are over the weekends, so I have plenty of time for other activities,” he says.

Travel notes

Piyush Mishra will tour the country with his band Ballimaaraan for a new music series

Narendra Kusnur

It began with a love for theatre, when Piyush Mishra was in school in Gwalior. “I thought this was the best profession to be in, as people clapped for you, and laughed or cried whenever you wanted them to,” he recalls. Over the years, he entered other fields such as cinema, music and lyric-writing.

Piyush’s latest project involves a 15-city tour of his band Ballimaaraan in a series titled ‘UdanKhatola’.

Beginning on November 9, it will continue till early March 2025, covering Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Indore, Bhopal, Pune, Thane, Raipur, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Gurugram, Chandigarh, Lucknow and Kanpur. Besides a few more Indian cities, there are plans to visit three countries

next year. “While I am writing a couple of new songs and releasing an album, the tour will feature all my popular songs such as ‘Aarambh’, ‘Husna’, ‘Ghar’ and ‘Ik Bagal’, among others. There will be a mix of retro and modern influences. One of our objectives is to promote the richness of our literature,” says Piyush.

Ballimaaraan was conceived in 2016 when guitarist Nishant Agarwal saw Piyush perform in Chandigarh. “He followed me from there to Delhi right up to my doorstep in Mumbai. His

There will be a mix of retro and modern influences. One of our objectives is to promote the richness of our literature.

PIYUSH MISHRA

