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THE HINDU

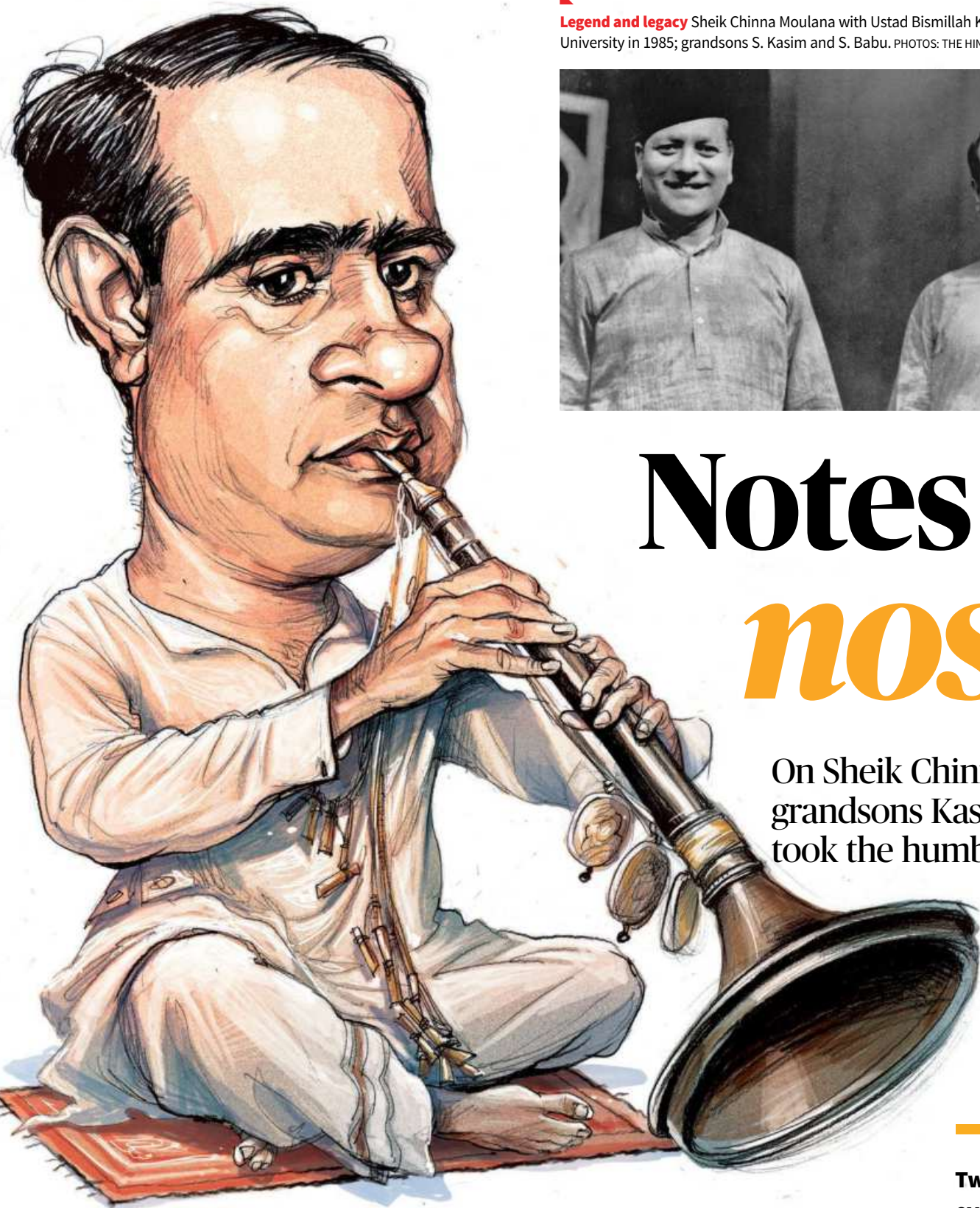
Landmark celebration for QFR
Subhasree Thanikachalam on the making of the popular music show **p2**

Kapila Venu's novel attempt
The dancer presented Madurai Veeran's story in Nangiarkoothu style **p3**



MANGAI IS BACK WITH ANOTHER PLAY ON WAR

‘Stree Parvam’ looks at battles from the perspective of women **p4**



Legend and legacy Sheik Chinna Moulana with Ustad Bismillah Khan; photographed after receiving an honorary doctorate from Andhra University in 1985; grandsons S. Kasim and S. Babu. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES & M. MOORTHY



Notes of nostalgia

On Sheik Chinna Moulana's birth centenary, his grandsons Kasim and Babu talk about how he took the humble nagaswaram to the world stage

ILLUSTRATION:
SOUMYADIP SINHA

was in the 1950s, which was telecast when Doordarshan was launched. Even here, both artistes chose ragas that sounded similar; *thatha* played Kalyani, while Khan sahib chose Yaman,” says Kasim.

Sheik Chinna Moulana was the first nagaswaram artiste to perform in the United States and Canada, under the East-West Exchange Programme, in 1973. “His tour was not for Indians, but for Westerners. Professor William Skelton of Colgate University, who was a nagaswaram exponent himself, hosted and accompanied him during the tour, besides NASA scientist V. K. Viswanathan. The tour planted the seed that has blossomed into this huge banyan tree of performances and musical collaborations,” says Kasim.

Among their recent efforts to document the maestro's work, is the creation of a digital audio archive of

over 250 hours of Chinna Moulana's recitals. “We have also started a YouTube channel through which we will periodically release video recordings of our grandfather's concerts,” says Kasim.

Story of the instrument

For the centenary, the nagaswaram instrument used by Sheik Chinna Moulana will be put on public display.

Not many know that the instrument, which made the maestro popular across the globe, was purchased from a destitute artiste. “According to my father, a nagaswaram artiste who had fallen on hard times, had got off the train at Karavadi, and was advised by the station master to visit Sheik Chinna Moulana. He came home and showed *thatha* his nagaswaram. He said that he had to sell it in order to make ends meet. Moved by his plight, *thatha* bought it for Rs. 20, and told him to stay back for dinner. This nagaswaram, possibly already used for a few years, was to become our grandfather's preferred instrument for over four decades, shaping his career and style of playing. Till date, we have not been able to trace the artiste who sold it to him,” says Kasim, as his brother brings out the nagaswaram.

Kasim and Babu are the special nagaswaram artistes of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, and like their grandfather, share a unique stature in Hindu sacred music. The success of Muslims such as Sheik Chinna Moulana in the Hindu cultural sphere is perhaps the greatest example of India's syncretism. “*Thatha* often used to say ‘music is my religion’,” says Kasim.

Nahla Nainar

It is a special time of the year for the family of nagaswaram exponent Sheik Chinna Moulana, as his Srirangam-based grandsons S. Kasim and S. Babu prepare for a dual celebration of their maternal grandfather's birth centenary and the 25th edition of the annual ‘shraddhanjali’ (homage) programme in Tiruchi on April 6 and 7.

“Our grandfather's contribution to the field of classical music, through the nagaswaram has endured and taken this humble instrument to the world stage. My brother and I are fortunate to be able to carry forward his legacy,” says Kasim.

Apart from running the music school Saradha Nadhaswara Sangeetha Ashram in Srirangam, the brothers conduct various programmes through the Dr. Chinnamoulana Memorial Trust.

Kasim and Babu meet visitors at ‘Alapana’, the 1950s-era house in Srirangam that was formerly Sheik Chinna Moulana's residence and is now Kasim's home. “Our relationship with *thatha* was more formal since we were his disciples first. Like most gurus of the time, he was reticent with his praise, because he did not want us to rest on our laurels. I feel this made us more serious about developing our craft,” says Kasim.

The brothers clearly remember the sole occasion when they were lauded by their grandfather. It was during their recital in

Hyderabad where Sheik Chinna Moulana was honoured for receiving the Sangita Kalanidhi in 1998. “Later that evening he said, ‘you presented the Sankarabharanam raga properly, because I saw the audience listening to it in rapt attention’. It was not effusive praise, but this was his way of complimenting us,” says Kasim.

Family treasure
Originally from Karavadi in Andhra Pradesh, the family has been playing the nagaswaram for over three centuries. “Our grandfather belonged to the Chilakaluripet (a town in Guntur district) school of music,” says Kasim. “Among his gurus was his own father, Sheik Kasim Sahib, and later, Sheik Adam Sahib.”

As he emerged as a noted performer, Sheik Chinna

Moulana decided to explore the Thanjavur bani, which allows for greater variations in presenting ragas. “From an early age, *thatha* was influenced by the recordings of T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai. He migrated to Tamil Nadu to get trained in the Thanjavur style under Rajam-Duraikannu Brothers of Nachiarkovil,” says Kasim.

Sheik Chinna Moulana's career took off in the early 1960s, and Kasim believes the exposure to the Thanjavur bani helped immensely. The maestro decided to make the temple town of Srirangam his home. Kasim, who accompanied his grandfather to Tamil Nadu early on, got his music education at home from the age of three.

Babu joined the in-house gurukul in his teenage years. “Our proximity to our guru was an added advantage,” says Babu. “I would spend all my waking hours with *thatha*, trying to distil the essence of his musical experience into my performance.”

“From 1982, after I graduated from college, until his last concert in 1999 at the Music Academy I was performing with him,” recalls Kasim. “Our grandfather never had a retirement phase, he just kept performing or teaching.”

Purity of form
Often referred to as the ‘Bismillah Khan of the South’, Sheik Chinna Moulana shared a deep relationship with the shehnai maestro. “We have a video recording of the two exchanging ideas on the playing techniques of the nagaswaram and shehnai. The duo did just three jugalbandis, and kept away from fusion. Their most notable jugalbandi

Two-day event

Sheik Chinna Moulana's birth centenary celebration will be held on April 6 (6 p.m.) and 7 at Courtyard By Marriott in Tiruchi. M. Venkaiah Naidu, former Vice President of India, will inaugurate and preside. K.N. Nehru, Minister for Municipal Administration, Government of Tamil Nadu, will be the guest of honour.

A documentary on the maestro will be screened on the inaugural day followed by the presentation of Lifetime Achievement award to thavil vidwan Udumalaipettai M. Angusamy. Senior nagaswaram artiste Palani M. Sakthivel and thavil artiste Thirukattupalli T.R. Ramadass will also be honoured. Young nagaswaram artiste B. Selvam and M.Muthukumar (thavil) will be given the best upcoming artiste awards. At 7.30 p.m., Abhishek Raghuram will present a concert. On April 7 (4.15 p.m.), nagaswaram recital by Adyar Brothers and at 6.30 p.m. by DSD Selvarathinam, S. Shanmugasundaram and S. Sethuraman



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Get Ready to Laugh Your Hearts Out With The Defective Detectives

turning their world upside down in the process. Now, the makers are all set to bring the same excitement and thrill with The Defective Detectives, which is currently running in theaters in English. Speaking about releasing the film in English, director and writer Paritosh Painter expressed, 'We truly believe that entertainment has no barriers. One can watch and enjoy content in every language, especially after Covid. Our film, The Defective Detective, offers a unique take on life and comedy. Having received huge accolades for my original play, we decided to turn it into a film to reach out to more audiences. He further added, “With the film already making waves at international film festivals, I am super positive that audiences across India will also enjoy watching this entertaining tale.”The movie has been penned and directed by Paritosh Painter & produced by Rajeev Kuumar Saha under Saha & Sons Studios and Ideas the Entertainment Co presentation is currently running in theaters near you.



The key takeaways

Rich raga contours Sowmya with Neyveli Narayanan (mridangam) and Anirudh Athreya (kanjira). (Below) Embar Kannan accompanied on the violin. PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

‘Koluvaiyunnade’ by Tyagaraja. Another unique kriti was ‘Garudagamana’ in Nagaswaravali by Patnam Subramania Iyer. Papanasam Sivan’s ‘Singaravelavan vandaan’ in Anandabhairavi soothed the soul. ‘Sriramabrahma mahima’ in raga Begada by Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavata came as a filler before Sowmya ventured into the Hemavati treatise.

Enjoyable responses Embar Kannan’s responses on the violin were enjoyable as were his raga expositions, particularly of Abhogi and Hemavati.

In present-day concerts percussionists are given enough time to exhibit their skill. Veteran Neyveli Narayanan on the mridangam and Anirudh Athreya on the kanjira, during both their individual and combined play showcased their best. The recital concluded with ‘Sodanai sumakkum velai’ in Kapi by Sivan and ‘Ninnaye gathi endru’ by Mahakavi Bharati.



There is always enough to imbibe from Sowmya’s well-structured concerts

G. Swaminathan

Call it her commitment to the values of classical music or her musical wisdom, for ardent listeners there is always enough takeaways at Sowmya’s concerts. Her recent performance at Hamsadhwani, dedicated to its founder R. Ramachandran’s centenary, was no exception. Sowmya’s choice of kritis and the style of presentation were the highpoints. Her elegant and elaborate essay of Hemavati brought into focus the various hues of the melodious raga. ‘Sri Kantimatim’, the popular Dikshitar composition, followed. The swara section at ‘Suddha

tamrabarni’ revolving around the dhaivata-centered swaras created an impeccable imagery of the raga with senior violinist Embar Kannan contributing significantly to it.

Reign of melody Sowmya began her recital with ‘Hechariga ra ra’ (Tyagaraja) in Yadhukulakamboji and moved on to the melodic notes of Abhogi. Her phrases traversed across octaves and conveyed the inherent charm of Abhogi. ‘Sabapathikku veru deivam’ by Gopalakrishna Bharati was her selection here. Sowmya framed her swaras in a way that they ended with ‘sa-ma’ dovetailing ‘sa-ma-namaguma’ as swarakshara. Hence, the

swara segment mostly hovered around madhyamam. A well-defined Devagandhari essay, replete with bhava-laden phrases, prefaced

Suganthy Krishnamachari

At the seminar on Minor Deities, organised at the C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar Institute of Indological Research, Sudipa Ray Bandyopadhyay, spoke on Jvaradeva, the deity of fever. An early reference to Jvara, in the Shanti Parva of Mahabharata, says a three-legged, three-headed monster named Jvara, emerged from Siva’s sweat. Harivamsa says that when Krishna attacked Banasura, to rescue his (Krishna’s) grandson Aniruddha, Siva created a Maheshwara jvara to save Bana. Krishna created a Krishna jvara. The two jvaras fought with each other, with Krishna jvara emerging victorious. Medical texts like *Charaka Samhita* also mention Jvaradeva.

Descriptions of Maheshwara jvara given in Harivamsa match those given in Vishnu, Brahma and Skanda puranas. The *Vishnu Dharmottara Purana* gives details about Jvara in sculpture, painting and dance.

The 13th century Thiruvudaimarudur Jvarahreshwara, for example, has four hands. He holds fire and an axe in the back arms. The front left shows gajahasta mudra and the front right shows abhaya mudra.

An exclusive temple for the fever deity is the Jvarahreshwara temple in Kanchi, which has a tank called Jvarateertham. The Jvarahreshwara icon here has many heads mounted one on top of the other, like a pyramid. In a 13th-14th century icon of Nepalese



On a rare temple trail

A shrine for the deity of fever and a sculpture of Yama! A recent seminar threw light on them all

provenance, in the Chicago museum, Jvaradeva wears a tiger skin garment, the tail of the tiger being visible. He wears snakes as ornaments.

One deity, different forms In the Kodavasal temple, Jvarahreshwara’s front left leg is raised in a dancing pose. In Thirutturaiipoondi taluk, we find a Jvarahreshwara image holding trisula, gada (mace) and ankusa (elephant’s goad). In Taramangalam, Salem district, there is a three-headed, three-armed, three-legged image of

Jvarahreshwara. His raised left leg is placed on a stylised lotus. The Jvarahreshwara icon in Bhavani has three heads, three hands, three legs and nine eyes. But it has no mount.

In Eastern India, Jvaradeva was worshipped along with Sitala (goddess of small pox) and Ghentu (god of skin disease), a practice that continues in Hoogly, Howrah, Medinipur, 24 Parganas and Kolkata. Sometimes devotees offer small votive images of Jvaradeva called chhalans, but there is no independent temple for Jvara in Bengal.



Exquisite (Left) Jvarahreshwara temple in Kanchipuram; and Vishnu Janardhana temple, in Sukreswar, Guwahati (below). PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Jvaradeva is propitiated in Bengal with fruits, rice, sweets and sacrificial goats. In one Buddhist depiction, we find the Buddhist goddess of fever – Parnasabari flanked by Hayagriva on the left and Sitala on the right. Hayagriva here is believed to be Jvaradeva. Contemporary unfired clay images of Jvaradeva in West Bengal, are seen sporting three complexions – blue, black and grey. In one, he is shown wearing warrior shoes. From the iconographic viewpoint, images of Jvaradeva reflect both continuity and change.

The god of death Paromita Das, History professor, Gauhati University, spoke on dharma (Yama). Yama is the son of Viswavasru. Yami is his sister. Yama is a judge for the dead, besides being the god of death. Iconography of Yama, as given in the Puranas, says that a Yama icon is dark like a rain-bearing cloud. Yama should have four hands and he should hold a pasa (rope) and a club. He was elevated to one of the dikpalas (guardian deities of the directions). Yama became the guardian of the Southern direction. Chitrakuta is the one who maintains records. A Yama sculpture is seen in the Hayagriva Madhava temple in Hajo, Kamrup district, Assam. Here, he is seated on a buffalo, with legs folded on the back of the buffalo. His two hands hold a club. In the Aswaklanta

temple sculpture, Yama is depicted seated astride a buffalo, resting one hand on his mount and the other holding a club. Yama is portrayed as a dikpala in the Vishnu Janardhana temple, in Sukreswar, Guwahati. Hajo has another sculpture, in which the head is missing. Manasa Devi (the serpent goddess) and Yama are worshipped together in Assam. Manasa’s story is recorded in *Manasa Mangala Kavya*, which is a local purana, not one of the 18 mahapuranas. In the Assamese version of Manasakavya, there are frequent references to Dharma. Sometimes symbolic representations of Yama are worshipped. On a mound in Assam, we find a kalasa, a symbolic representation of Yama. In a shrine in Bengal, we see a number of terracotta horses, flanking a vertical stone, which is worshipped as Dharmathakur. As part of ritual worship, a shaman dances, holding a sword in his hand. At Sualkuchi in Assam, blood of a pigeon is consumed by the shaman during the worship of Manasa Devi. During worship of Dharma or Yama, people take temporary sanyas. When they are possessed by Yama, or Manasa, they perform the duties of a priest and are called sanyasis during that period. They then revert to the status of householders. From April 15 to May 15, or sometimes for an extended period up to June 15th, Dharma is worshipped. A study of local songs of Western Assam and late medieval neo-Vaishnavite literature shows Yama being worshipped as a tortoise.



Rewind Subhasree Thanikachalam and team take listeners down melody lane in their QFR series. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT the younger generation. Apart from authentic recreation of songs, she also shares interesting trivia about them. Asked about the difference between QFR and her other shows, she says, “This show has turned the spotlight on me.”

Four years and counting

Subhasree Thanikachalam, the woman behind QFR, on what made her launch the music show

V.V. Ramani

It began rather quietly on March 23, 2020 when lockdown was announced. The pandemic kept people confined to their homes and most of them didn’t know how to keep themselves occupied and entertained. That is when the idea to go on a nostalgic musical trip occurred to Subhasree Thanikachalam. She launched QFR (Quarantine From Reality), a series that wove together timeless songs of legendary

composers. From a 21-day series on the digital platform it has now become a popular show staged across the globe. Completing more than 625 episodes, the QFR team is celebrating four years of its journey.

Digital foray Subhasree, who has in the past produced and directed several well-known TV shows such as Saptaswarangal, Ragamalika, Margazhi Mahotsavam, Carnatic Idol, and Hariyum Nanum, launched this series to introduce retro songs to

Subhasree is happy that the QFR family is expanding with more musicians eager to be a part of it. “With each episode we add new facets. I have a strong team to back me. I owe it to the passion and commitment of Venkat, Syam Benjamin, Selva and Shivakumar. We identify singers from across the globe, send them tracks to learn the songs, and then comes the orchestral arrangement. Finally, it is edited for presentation. It’s not as easy as it sounds,” says Subhasree. The series is crowdfunded. And according to Subhasree, the best takeaway is seeing the audience relive the past through songs. “I am overwhelmed by their response. This is what has kept us going.” To commemorate four years of QFR’s journey on the digital platform, a four-hour live programme with over 40 musicians, will be held today at Narada Gana Sabha (6 p.m.). Tickets at bookmyshow.com



Modern reality
From *Stree Parvam* by Mangai (far right)



Karunai ila atchi kadugi
ozhiga
Arul nayandha nanmarkkar
alga
Nallor ninaitha nalam
peruga
Ninaindhu ellorum vazhga
isaindhu

(May the unkind rule come to an end. May the compassionate ones rule. May the good ones have their dreams fulfilled. May everyone think good and live in harmony).

Mangai describes the play as a “small gesture of solidarity with the people living in countries that are/have been under siege.” The play begins with Gandhari and Kunti holding hands and finally embracing each other. For Mangai, this represents a form of feminist affective solidarity that recognises deep-seated guilt and endeavours to forgive. “It may not be easy, but worth trying.”

In her work, Mangai employs various elements to dehumanise war. A central symbol is the omnipresent white cloth, representing “life,

earth, and the universe that we hold dear and are duty-bound to protect for the next generation,” says Mangai. The music in the play transitions from the fervent beats of Koothu to a soft Arabic lullaby, and finally to a high-energy rap. Concurrently, a screen displays images of war from around the world, showcasing both the devastation and the resistance against it, emphasising the human cost, which has been reduced to mere numbers.

For the transition from the state of sleep to the realm of dreams, Mangai incorporated a three-minute film by Tara Hakim, a Palestinian artist residing in Jordan. Mangai says she specifically requested Tara’s film to be integrated at this pivotal moment. Upon viewing rehearsal footage, Tara selected a song to accompany her film, ensuring that the shift from the Mahabharata narrative to the dream sequence was not only conveyed visually but also through evocative music.

The play revisits the

Mahabharata before moving to the war in Ukraine. The text for this segment was crafted by Yana Salakhova, a practitioner of Theatre of the Oppressed in Ukraine. This portion poignantly explores the experiences of motherhood amidst conflict. Salakhova’s words give voice to the complex emotions and dilemmas faced by mothers. “She called it the opening up of the space for the wounds to explode,” says Mangai recalling her interaction with Yana.

The play begins with images from Sri Lanka by feminist activist Sarala Emmaneuil. Mangai juxtaposes these visuals with paintings by the renowned artist Trotsky Marudhu.

The theme of war runs deeply in Mangai’s body of work – *Stree Parvam* is not her first play around war.

But what truly resonates is the inclusion of poetry towards the end of the play. Along with the verses of Sri Lankan Tamil poets Nuhman and Puduvali Rathnadurai, the play features the profoundly moving poem ‘If I must die, let it be a tale,’ penned by Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer, who tragically lost his life in an Israeli airstrike last year.

Says Mangai, “There is an element of story in every poem – the stories must survive. It is our way of clinging to hope, even in the face of profound despair.”

The play will be staged at Asian College of Journalism on April 6 and 7.

Kavitha Muralidharan

Perhaps the most difficult question that we are forever left to grapple with,” begins veteran theatre artiste A. Mangai, thoughtfully pausing before continuing, “is how to end a war.” Mangai made this comment just before a preview of her new production, *Stree Parvam*, being presented in collaboration with the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in memory of educationist Mina Swaminathan, who was passionate about theatre. The term ‘stree parvam’ is from the Mahabharata, the 11th of the 18 books on the epic, stree parva is about the grief of women over war and its losses.

Watching the rehearsal of Mangai’s 65-minute production, a gripping and haunting portrayal, it became nearly impossible not to envision war as an large, chilling blanket spanning epochs and tightening around the neck of humanity. From the ancient battlefields of the

Mahabharata to the modern conflicts in Gaza and Eelam, the spectre of war looms large. Yet, when the clamour of battle fades and the dust settles, what endures are the tears of women. These tears, heavy with unspoken grief, add a poignant layer to the fabric of human history.

“*Stree Parvam* is an attempt to look at war through a gendered lens,” says Mangai. The play opens with Gandhari and Kunti stepping onto the battlefield, where they confront the harrowing sight of countless bodies scattered around. As they search for their loved ones among the dead, they are struck by the overwhelming scale of loss and the transient nature of life.

“But this horror was not wrought by natural forces,” the chorus reminds Gandhari, unconvinced by her assertions that she had issued sufficient warnings. Instead, they recount the indiscriminate killings that stained the battlefield: Aravan, Abhimanyu, Drona, Karna, and the infamous midnight massacre by Ashwathama.

In the play, when people

War and women

Mangai’s new play *Stree Parvam* shows how conflicts destroy hopes and dreams of families

drift into sleep at midnight, entering the realm between dreams and hope, they soon wake up to – a land of flowers and smiles, with the gentle flight of birds against the backdrop of a soft Arabic song. This tranquil vision is soon shattered by the realities of war – as the play transitions to the everyday massacre in Gaza.

The narrative then fluidly shifts among the Mahabharata, Gaza, and Ukraine, often touching on Sri Lanka, to portray a gendered perspective on how dreams are killed and hopes massacred. As the two women – Kunti and Gandhari

– finally confess and acknowledge their guilt and grief, a ray of possibility illuminates their path. The chorus then performs the customary rituals, wishing for peace and harmony to prevail.

The play concludes with a haunting poem by Vallalar:



Stree Parvam is an attempt to look at war through a gendered lens

MANGAI



Debut

Kashvi Thangaraj, disciple of Yulaume Thangaraj and R. Thangaraj, will present her maiden Bharatanatyam performance on April 7, 6.30 p.m. at TEACH Auditorium, Taramani.

Veena recital

Musiri Chamber has organised Ramana Balachandran’s veena recital to mark Musiri Day, on April 7. He will be accompanied by Anantha Krishnan on the mridangam. The concert will take place at 48/2, Musiri Subramaniam Road, Mylapore. Time: 4.01 p.m.

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