

friday Review

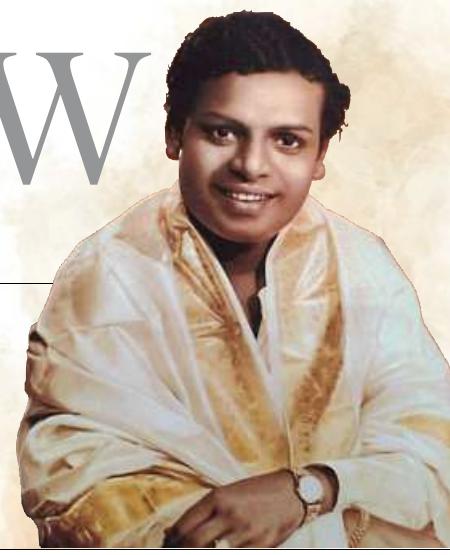
THE HINDU

Old-world style

Vijay Siva's Sampradaya Kutchery captured the essence of tradition **p2**

Royal showcase

A day at the month-long and colourful Ramlila of Ramnagar in Varanasi **p3**



DOWN MELODY LANE

Tiruchi Loganathan and his timeless songs **p4**

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The travel through narrow, rickety roads to Begum Akhtar's mazaar (grave) at Pasand Bagh in Lucknow seems to symbolise her life's journey. The singer fought several physical and emotional battles before being crowned *Mallika-e-Ghazal* (queen of ghazal). Begum Akhtar possessed an unmistakable voice. It was the voice of a woman who knew pain. But she also developed early-on the strength to endure it and it came through in the way she owned the stage. Her music was so raw that she moved listeners with her honest expressions. Whether she sang a ghazal, dadra or thumri, it was all about *dard, dua and dil*.

When you finally arrive at the mazaar located at the corner of a squalid, congested street, you instantly get cut off from the din and experience quietude. It's a small enclosure with brick walls, where the Begum and her courtesan-mother Mushtari are buried – a *harsinghar* tree towers over their marble resting place, which has their names engraved in Urdu. Graves are often seen as sombre places but sitting by Begum Akhtar's tombstone you feel she is calling out with her sensuous 'Hamri atariya pe aao'.

New stage

It's been 50 years since Begum's passing. She died on October 31, 1974. The icon's fans across the globe will be delighted to know that an open-air theatre has been built near the grave. It was launched on her death anniversary this year with a performance by ghazal singer Radhika Chopra. Striking photographs of Begum Akhtar have been put up on the walls around the space and they take you through her triumphs, heartbreaks and comebacks.

A few years ago, Begum Akhtar's grave was rescued from obscurity by her admirer and historian Saleem Kidwai, her foremost disciple Shanti Hirananand, and social activist Madhvi Kukreja, whose NGO Sanatkada worked on the renovation. The open-air theatre, again a Sanatkada initiative, has been funded by Sanjiv Kumar (his father was an Akhtar fan) of the Patna-based Takshila Foundation. A museum and a listening room too will come up soon at the premises.

Madhvi is the woman behind the Sanatkada Festival, which celebrates the art and ethos of Awadh, a region known for its Ganga-Jamuni *tehzeeb* that seamlessly drew from both Hindu and Islamic influences. Begum Akhtar was the foremost representative of this syncretic culture. She was a Krishna devotee, and used to sing about the agony of separation from Krishna in the bhajan 'Jab se Shyam sidhna'.

From Bibbi Sayyed and Akhtar Bai to Begum Akhtar, the name kept

An open-air theatre has been built near Begum Akhtar's grave in Lucknow to mark her 50th death anniversary

Eternal bond with the Begum

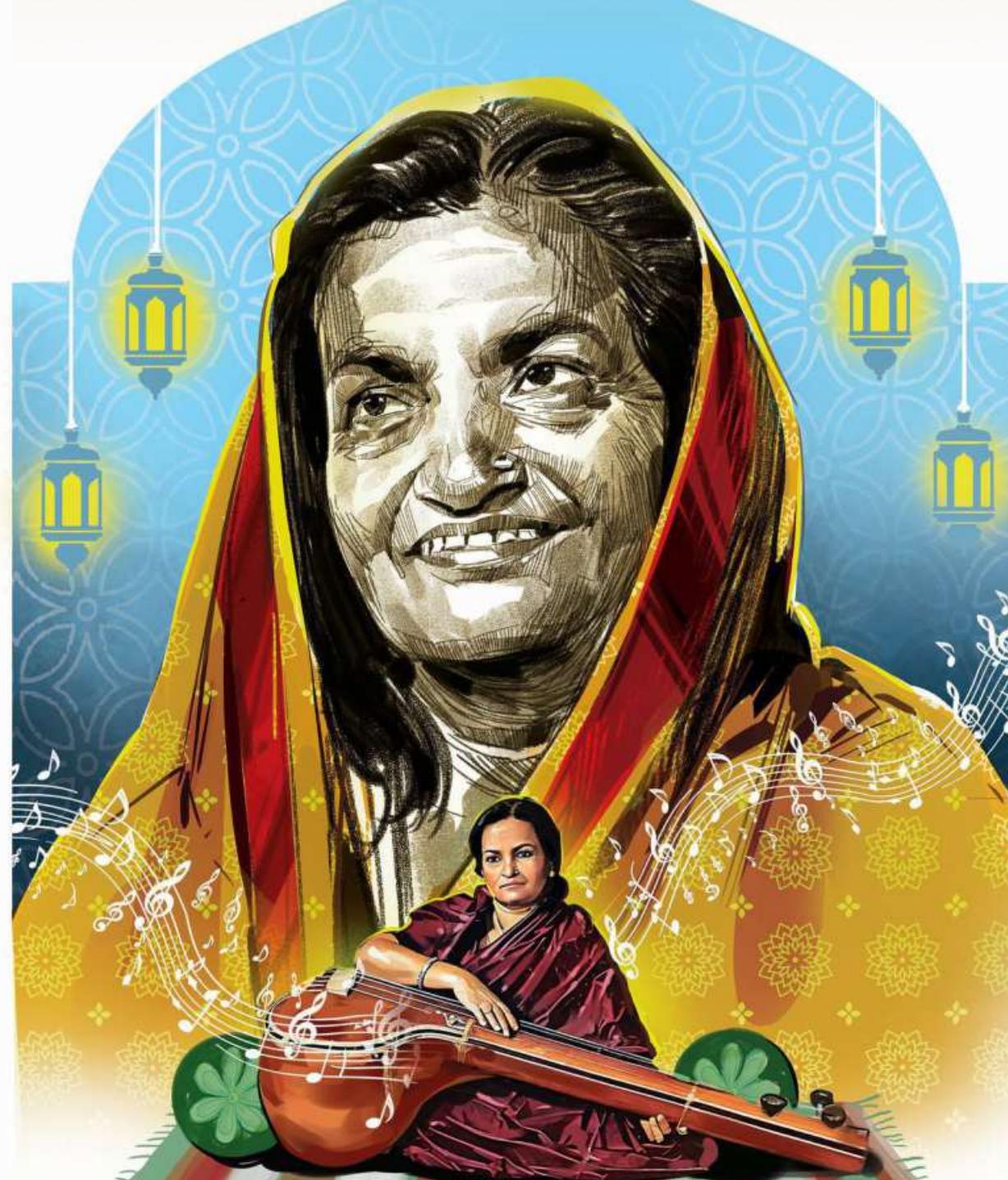


ILLUSTRATION: SAI



Musical ode Ghazal singer Radhika Chopra performing at the new space.

PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

changing as the singer struggled to find her identity in a feudalistic society and the misogynistic world of music. She also moved cities in pursuit of her art. Though born in Faizabad, where her formal training began under sarangi exponent Ustad Imdad Khan, she moved to Gaya with her mother after being abandoned by her lawyer-father. She continued her lessons under Ustad Ghulam Mohammed Khan. She came back to Faizabad to be formally inducted into the Patiala gharana gayaki by Ustad Ata Mohammed Khan. Shifting base to Calcutta in 1927 proved to be a crucial moment in Begum Akhtar's career. It redefined her music and personality. Her first recording happened here. She also went on to act in films, including Satyajit Ray's 1958 *Jalsaghar* (it had music by Ustad Vilayat Khan) and plays. Her first concert was organised at Calcutta's Alfred theatre in 1934 by Sarojini Naidu to raise funds for the victims of Bihar earthquake.

Despite her solid grounding in classical music, Begum Akhtar chose to sing light forms such as thumri, dadra, chaiti and ghazal. Her greatest asset was her adaptability. "She could fit into any musical setting," says Satish Tanksale, a Pune-based businessman, who calls himself a devotee of the Begum. He never misses the annual ritual of visiting Lucknow on her death anniversary to offer *ibadat* at her mazaar.

It was in 1968 that Satish, then 20, first heard Begum Akhtar at the Sawai Gandharva festival in Pune. Recalling the moment, Satish says, "Her pure *sur* and childlike smile instantly drew me to her music. I even did a course in Urdu to understand her ghazals better. All this may sound bizarre, but Begum Akhtar had many crazy followers like me. Babubhai Raja of Mumbai would often go wherever she performed to record her singing on his imported phonograph. He had a huge collection of live recordings, which he later donated to the National Centre for the Performing Arts. Then, there was the Indore-based Ramu Bhaiya Dattey, who once went all the way to Lucknow to hear her play the *shadaj* ('sa') on her harmonium. She too reciprocated the love of her fans. During a visit to Indore for a concert, Begum Akhtar asked for Ramu Bhaiya. When she came to know he was hospitalised, she went to meet him and sang for him there. It's hard to find an artiste like her."

A reason why even five decades after her death, Begum Akhtar remains alive in music-lovers' hearts. As I leave the mazaar, an elderly man walks in. After enquiring where I am from, he says, "I have come for my daily *haazri* (visit). *Mere paas na daulat hai, na shohrat, par Begum ki awaz mein maine sukoon paya* (I have no wealth or fame but have found comfort in Begum's voice) and begins to sing her iconic ghazal 'Deewana banana hai toh deewana bana de'.

Rise to stardom

The next stop was Lucknow in 1942. Here, Kirana gharana exponent Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan transformed Bibbi into Akhtarbai Faizabadi, a competent khayal artiste. The rise to stardom brought in the much-needed money and social status. The singer married barrister Ishaq Ahmed Abbasi, who put an end to her performing career. Leading a life without her passion pushed her into depression. Finally, on the advice of doctors, she decided to return to music. After a seven-year hiatus, Begum performed at the Shankarlal Festival in Delhi in 1951. It was here that she was referred to as Begum Akhtar for the first time. Her raspy and dynamic voice had now gained a soft and poignant tone.

CULTURE BRIEFS**Triumphant strings**

Guruvayoor Devaswom will honour veteran violinist A. Kanyakumari with the Sree Guruvayurappan Chembai award on the inaugural day (November 26) of the Chembai Music Festival. In her illustrious 60-year career as a performing violinist, Kanyakumari has received many awards and titles. This award in the name of Chembai is the latest. Born in Vijayanagar, she relocated to Chennai to pursue music. Kanyakumari has accompanied many stalwarts, including the legendary M.L. Vasantha Kumari, who was also her guru, and Kadri Gopalnath (saxophone). As a guru, she has trained several youngsters.

Parallel event

The 20th edition of the Parallel Music Festival, organised by the Rotary Club of Madras Coromandel, will be held on December 2, 4 p.m. at Kasturi Srinivasan Hall, The Music Academy.

N. Murali, president, The Music Academy, will be the chief guest. Vocalist T.M. Krishna will be the special guest of honour while Vikram Lalwani, managing director and CEO, Sterling Holiday Resorts, the guest of honour. It is customary for the Sangita Kalanidhi designee to inaugurate the annual Parallel Music festival. The evening will feature two vocal concerts: 4 p.m.: Karaikal Jaishankar with Akshaya Parthasarathy (violin) and Thirumurugan (mridangam) and 7 p.m.: S. Mathangi. The accompanists are Coimbatore S. Usha (violin), Valangaiman Thiagarajan (mridangam) and Thirumurugan (morsing).

Differently-abled musicians will be honoured at this festival. Following is the list of awardees: Life Time Achievement awards to Carnatic vocalist S.R. Krishnamurthy; senior mridangist Guruvayor Dora; and musician-musicologist P.P. Ramakrishnan.

The Distinguished Musicians awards will be presented to Valangaiman Thiagarajan, a mridangist, who belongs to the Pudukkottai School of mridangam, and Coimbatore Usha (violinist), who is the disciple of veteran violinist M. Chandrasekaran. The Promising Musician awards (2023-24) will be given to Carnatic vocalist and violinist Akshaya Parthasarathy, and vocalist, violinist and pianist Jyothi Kalai.

Anniversary special

T.V. Gopalakrishnan



D. Balasubramani

A series of concerts will mark the 14th anniversary celebrations of Arkay Convention Centre and Madhuradhwani's annual music festival, to be held at the Centre, from November 22 to December 6.

The series begins today with Mangala Isai by Adyar D. Balasubramani and Koleri G. Vinothkumar at 3.45 p.m. followed by Palghat Ramprasad's concert.

Artistes to perform this week are: November 23, 4.15 p.m.: Veena Venkatramani (veena); 6.30 p.m.: Amrutha Venkatesh. November 24, 4.15 p.m.: Bhavya Hari and 6.30 p.m.: Neyveli Santhanagopalan. November 25, 4.15 p.m.: Hamzini Vytheeshwaran and 6.30 p.m.: Rama Varma. November 26, 4.15 p.m.: Shruthi Shankar Kumar and 6.30 p.m.: T.V. Gopalakrishnan. November 27, 4.15 p.m.: Amrit Narayan and 6.30 p.m.: Nisha Rajgopalan. November 28, 4.15 p.m.: Lakshmi Priya and 6.30 p.m.: Shertalai K.N. Renganatha Sharma.

New series

Sri Sankara TV is all set to launch a new series 'Maharishi' in December, focusing on the profound teachings of two spiritual gurus, Kanchi Mahaperiyava and Ramana Maharishi. Chanakya has directed both the series, which will be aired on the channel at 7.30 p.m.

'Periyava - Season 2', a continuation of the series focused on the Kanchi seer that was aired on the channel in January last year, is set to premiere on December 7. It will be aired on Saturdays. And 'Maharishi', which depicts the life of Ramana, will be aired on Sundays starting December 8.



The essence of tradition

Vijay Siva displayed the time-tested approach to Carnatic music at his 'Sampradaya Kutchery'

P. Srihari

Restrain is the hallmark of refinement, it is said. N. Vijay Siva's recent concert for Bharat Sangeet Utsav 2024, presented by Carnatica and Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha, stood as a testament to this. There were no frills and fancies as the seasoned vocalist treaded the time-tested fairway in his 'Sampradaya Kutchery' at Narada Gana Sabha Main Hall, in the company of L. Ramakrishnan (violin), N.C. Bharadwaj (mridangam) and S. Sunil Kumar (kanjira), with his disciple Sanjay Swaminathan lending vocal support.

Vijay Siva's natural style, embodying the very essence of tradition, was ideally suited to the theme of the evening, and he might not have needed to strain a sinew for this assignment.

His opening piece, Syama Sastri's 'Neelayadakshi' in Paras

(Tisra Triputa), provided a solemn and reverential tone to the proceedings. Vijay Siva then took up the sangati-laden 'Saketha nagaranatha' by Mysore Sadasiva Rao in Harikamboji, set to Rupakam. The opening phrase of the charanam, 'Raajita amara pala', is a catchy option for niraval and kalpanaswaras, which Vijay Siva explored to the hilt.

The concert gained further momentum with a vibrant Lathangi alapana preceding Patnam Subramania Iyer's 'Aparadhamulaniyu', enriched with a niraval at the charanam line, 'Vega nannubrovumani'. Here, Vijay Siva's rendition, shimmering with intensity, yet tempered with just the right pace, was thoroughly enchanting.

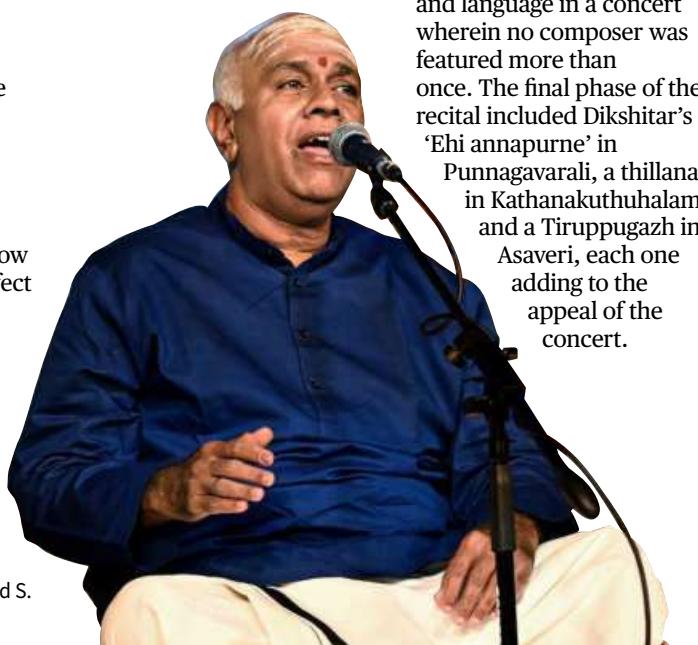
Evocative rendition
Bhairavi and Sankarabharanam, unfurled as the main flavours of the recital, were explored through Narayana Tirtha's Tarangam 'Govinda

ghataya' and Tyagaraja's 'Manasu swaadheenamaina', respectively. In between, an evocative rendition of the virutham 'Panippagai mayillum' from Thiruchendhil Kalambagam in Vasantha, followed by Papanasam Sivan's composition on Muruga 'Maa dayai nichiyenum' in the same raga, and the chittaswaram, added splendour aplenty.

Vijay Siva was at his characterist best as he conjured the aura of Bhairavi, meticulously unravelling the raga's old-world charm. Ramakrishnan, in his response, coaxed the bow and strings to telling effect to create a delightful melody. The Tarangam then swayed to the gait of Khanda Chapu before arriving at

Pristine music (Right)
Vijay Siva; and (top) with L. Ramakrishnan (violin), N.C. Bharadwaj (mridangam) and S. Sunil Kumar (kanjira).
PHOTOS: M. SRINATH

There was an ideal balance and variety in song selection in terms of tala and language in a concert wherein no composer was featured more than once



Visualising verses

Bharatanatyam dancer Indira Kadambi and Carnatic vocalist T.V. Ramprasad struck a fine balance between music and movement



Romance in ragas

K.S. Vishnudev and N.J. Nandini explored the nuances of Sringara rasa

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Thematic presentations on one rasa are quite uncommon on the Carnatic stage. But, K.S. Vishnudev and N.J. Nandini's joint artistic effort for Bharat Sangeet Utsav 2024 explored the queen of all rasas – Sringara. Their concert on 'Romance in Carnatic Compositions' consisted of an intriguing set of songs often not heard. The presentation was wholesome in terms of the variety of compositions, which the two singers shared efficiently. Vittal Rangan, Vijay Natesan and N. Guru Prasad handled the violin, mridangam and the ghatam, respectively.

Distinct style

Not giving much importance to the standard concert format, the artistes explored the theme in their own distinct way. They began with Dharmapuri Subbaraya Iyer's 'Smara sundaranguni'. This Javali, even though tuned in Paras, is usually presented with a characteristic pratinidhiyamam alien note that is used sparingly to create a graceful melodic deviation. The duo quite intelligently centred some of their kalpanaswaras around the pratinidhiyamam.

Jayadeva's Ashtapadis are perfect examples of Sringara and are known for their tasteful exploration of this rasa. Nandini and Vishnudev presented an Ashtapadi each – 'Yahi madhava yahi keshava' in Hindola and 'Vadas yadi kinchidapi' in Mukhari. The first Ashtapadi explores the mood of Radha as a Khandita nayika, who chastises her lover Krishna for his disloyalty. The second describes Krishna trying to pacify an angry

Radha since he is unable to bear the separation. The preceding shlokas for the compositions were sung as viruthams.

Perfect coordination

'Shringarinchukoni' from Tyagaraja's 'Naauka Charitram' talks about the gopis dressing up to go to the Yamuna with Krishna. Nandini and Vishnudev sang this together before rendering an expansive Khamas alapana. Instead of taking turns to sing the alapana, they presented the phrases alternately, exploring the raga in a well-coordinated and eloquent way. Vittal also presented some interesting ideas in his responses. The Javali 'Marulu konnadai' by Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar was taken up as the main piece with engaging niraval and kalpanaswaras at the charanam line 'Vanaja netrudau shrinivasa nayaka'. The percussionists provided pleasant and appropriate support throughout the concert. Particularly impressive was their enthusiastic participation in the improvisatory section of the main piece.

Annamacharya's composition 'Paluku tenela talli', which depicts the union of the celestial couple Venkatesa and Alamelu Manga, was sung by Vishnudev. Set in Abheri, it is often performed in Kuchipudi recitals. 'Chentar sayaka roopa', a poem composed by Iraiyanam Thampi and tuned by Chertala R. Gopal Nair, was sung by Nandini. The recital concluded with the javali 'Sakhi prana' in Chenchurutti. The short concert was enjoyable for the way it unravelled the nuances of Sringara through songs in different languages and ragas.



New format Vishnudev and Nandini at Bharat Sangeet Utsav.
PHOTO: M. SRINATH

One of the them was the alarippu (composed by mridangist Nagaraj), which stood out for footwork and coordination between Indira and her six disciples. The two ninda stutis – Kalamegam in Tamil and Purandaradasa in Kannada – lent a touch of humour, with the dancers enacting a debate between Parvati and Lakshmi on the virtues of their husbands.

The performance concluded with an English Note, Muthiah Bhagavat's Sankarabharanam composition. The choreography combined elements of ballroom dancing with adavus. The ensemble's exuberance

conveyed the rhythmic beauty of this piece. The harmonies for the English Note was arranged by Vishnu Ramprasad, who added a fine touch to all the songs with his navtaar. G.S. Nagaraj's powerful percussion support, Nitish Ammannaya's melodious flourishes on the flute and Ramya Suresh's confident wielding of the cymbals enhanced the musical experience.



Well-curated (From left) Indira Kadambi; T.V. Ramprasad; and artistes from Ambalam dance school. PHOTOS: M. SRINATH AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to convey varied shades of emotions effortlessly sustained interest throughout the Anandabhairavi pada varnam by Melattur Veerabhadraya. It speaks of the anguish of a nayika who is disturbed by the indifference of her nayaka towards her. Indira delineated each sanchari twice to highlight the differential treatment meted out to the two women. Her portrayal was as intense as it was joyful.

The highpoint of the show was the Tyagaraja kriti 'Eti janmamidi', where Ramprasad's soulful exposition of Varali raga and Indira's bhava captured the poignancy of the song. The momentum did get a bit diluted with an extensive depiction of important sequences from the Ramayana.

Dancers from Indira's institution Ambalam were featured in select compositions.

CALENDAR



Memorial concert

Sarvani Sangeetha Sabha Trust has organised Krithika Anagha's tribute concert on the occasion of the eighth Vardhanthi of the legendary M. Balamuralikrishna. She will be accompanied by Saketh Pantula on the violin and Kundurthi Aravind on the mridangam. To be held at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore, the concert will take place on November 25, 6 p.m.



Jayanthi celebrations

Anitha Guha's Bharathanjali Trust and trustees celebrate Sathy Sai Baba's Jayanthi on November 23, 6.30 p.m., at Sundareswarar Hall, Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Mylapore. Cultural programmes and distribution of awards to those in the field of Performing arts will be held on the occasion. The evening begins with a performance by the students of Bharathanjali, followed by presentation of Sathy Sundaram awards. Some of the senior artistes who will be honoured with the award are: PC Ramakrishna (Sathy Nataka Sundaram); Rajeswari Sainath (Sathy Layajaala Sundaram); Rama Bharadwaj (Sathy Kalaakaara Sundaram); Shijith Nambiar (Sathy Nrithya Sundaram) and Parvathy Menon (Sathy Lasya Sundaram).



Colourful Glimpses from the 200-year-old performance tradition; and (below) entrance to the Ramnagar fort. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Parshathy J Nath

Follow the elephant, we are told. Anant Narayan Singh, the titular Maharaja of Ramnagar, seated atop a caparisoned elephant, and other members of his family, move to a site on the Ramlila maidan where Meghnad's (Ravana's son) death is to be staged.

At the maidan, the entire community of Ramlila enthusiasts is present with the *Ramcharitmanas* and a torch in their hands. In one corner of the audience is a group of turbanded singers with pakhawaj, reciting verses from the *Ramcharitmanas*.

As the singers sing, the samvad (dialogue) begins. "Chup raho...saavdaan", says the conductor of the event, who is also the official prompter of the spectacle.

It is that time of the year in Varanasi when the entire place turns into a stage with multiple

A show fit for a king

The Ramnagar Ramlila is a performance tradition dedicated to the erstwhile royal family

venues. It is the third week of Ramlila, and around 12 of us, theatre practitioners from different parts of India, have come here to experience the visual feast.

A huge effigy of a smiling Meghnad, who is also a major disposer (behrupiya), is being brought to the central space. There are four more behrupiya

rakshasas in effigy blocking Meghnad. A young boy who dons the role of Lakshman comes to duel with the huge effigy. He keeps going back and forth, shooting arrows at each disguised form in front of Meghnad, who is hiding behind them. Finally, Lakshman strikes down Meghnad, and he is burnt.

Mourning follows, and women congregate to cry for Meghnad. That happens in the section reserved for Lanka, and the entire crowd walks to that point.

There are three elements to this performance tradition that is held for a month in Varanasi. The collective reading, the dialogue and the rest of the spectacle. "You either focus on the music or the dialogue. You can't be here or there. Then, you won't understand anything," a singer tells us. While a Pakhawaj player shares: "This has been happening for over 200 years. The cast is chosen by the Maharaja, and they rehearse for at least two months."

Larger-than-life figures assume the role of demons while Ram, Lakshman and Hanuman are played by people. Thousands congregate around the maidan to witness the

final aarti.
On our way back, at a juice shop, the owner of the shop tells us that around midnight, Naak Katna (nose cutting of Shoornanaka) would take place in the area called Lanka. "Do you think Shoornanaka's mutilation was fair?" I ask a woman. "She was the reason for war. She is important. If not, how will Ravana get killed by Rama, how will he get moksha?"

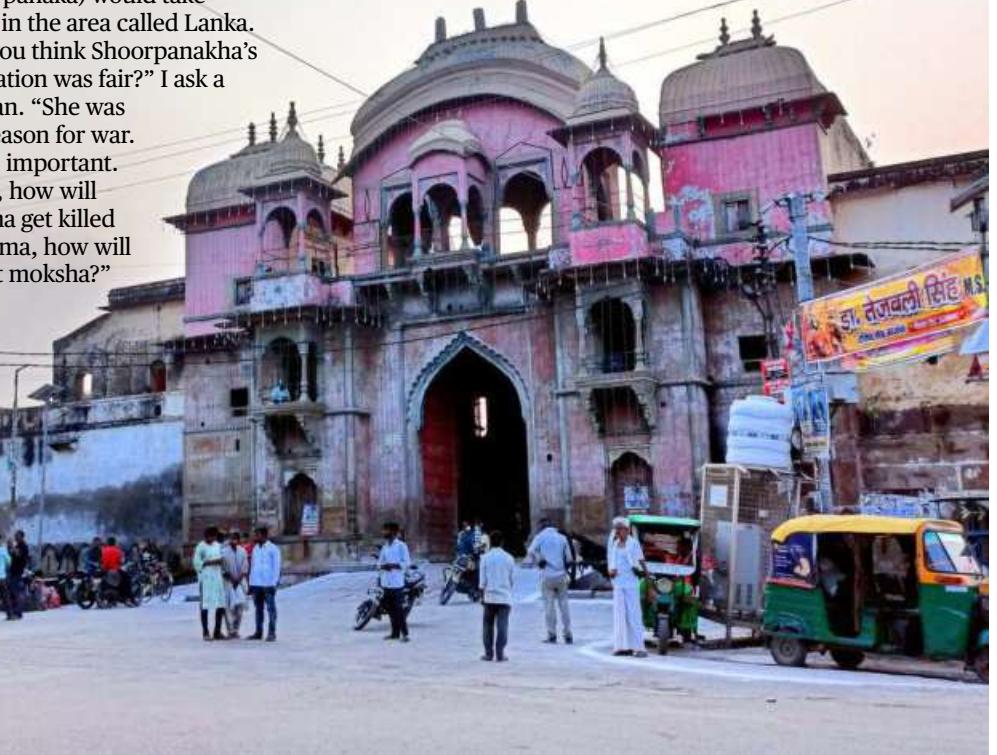
she justifies.

Elsewhere, veteran actor Manoj Pandey charms the audience around him. Around him are the small rakshasas, a noisy bunch of kids who are just happy running from one end of the street to another. The scene to be staged is a duel between Shoornanaka's cousins Khara-Dushan (played by Pandey), and Ram. Pandey has been a Ramlila thespian for the past four decades. He switches off from his act with finesse and tells us that this is sadhana (devotion) for him. "I belong to the Aghori tradition. The rigour of that practice feeds my acting too," he says.

On the last day of our Ramlila journey, we come early, like thousands of others, to watch the Ravan Dahan. The

10-headed king of Lanka towers over all of us. There is something so regal about him one cannot quite describe in words. Here is a man who lived a life rich in music, war and desire.

After what felt like many hours of waiting, the crowd moves towards the corner of the maidan we now know as Lanka. And there he is, bursting into flames, as Vibhishana sets fire to him. The smile in his eyes is replaced by the glow of fire. Soon, the entire figurine lights up, and a hot air balloon carrying a flame takes off. "That's Ravan's spirit, attaining salvation, after being killed by Ram," a spectator remarks. The vivacious king is now a burning memory.



Keeping the legacy alive
Prashant and Nishant Mallick. (Below) The Swami Haridas pada book cover. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Dhrupad for the new age

Brothers Prashant and Nishant Mallick are on a mission to popularise this classical style

Shailaja Khanna

The beautiful darbar hall in the erstwhile palace of Darbhanga, now the Kameshwari Singh Sanskrit University, has been the venue of many music concerts. The richly carved wooden peacocks connecting the walls with the roof are reminders of a bygone era. Likewise, the music that originated in Darbhanga, a city of great historical significance in North Bihar, has become a misty memory. But for the Mallicks, the dhrupad exponents, Darbhanga would have lost its presence on the country's culture map. The family began its journey as court musicians. The later generations including Pt. Ram Chatur Mallick, Pt. Abhay Narayan Mallick and Pt. Vidur Mallick kept the legacy alive.

Now, a new generation of singers from the renowned lineage is making efforts to reach out to a wider audience.

Prashant and Nishant Mallick (grandsons of Pt. Vidur Mallick) have crafted a gayaki that has a contemporary feel to it even while being rooted in the authentic dhrupad style. Well trained, with a voice range of two-and-a-half octaves, the brothers impress with their sweeping meends.

With a probing mind (both have earned their doctorates), they have looked at ways to widen the repertoire, change the presentation style and revive elements lost to time. "Dhrupad is not as popular as khayal gayaki, and we wanted to change the perception. For instance, many find dhrupad's alap

long-drawn-out and repetitive. It is one thing to hold on to tradition, but it is also important to help it reach new audiences. After all, an artiste wants to be heard," says Prashant.

Importance of sahitya
Also, when they started singing around 25 years ago, dhrupad was dominated by the Dagar gayaki. A softer and more meditative style, Dagarvani had found an audience worldwide, with several of its practitioners dominating the world of dhrupad. Other styles of dhrupad were seldom heard. Hence, audiences were not familiar with the open-throated ('mukth kant gayaki', where the voice production is from the navel) dhrupad singing of the Mallicks.

Prashant and Nishant share that this type of singing can invoke the 'naad Brahma', a reason why in the past dhrupad gayaks were referred to as 'Naad Yogis'. "The emphatic laya and robust gamakas (they sing 15 types of gamakas) are unique too. Though the greats of our gharana are no more, we decided to popularise our style," says Prashant.

The brothers also realised that the lack of sahitya in dhrupad was another significant reason for it to lose out on popularity to khayal and thumri. "I feel sahitya is important in vocal music," says Nishant.

For the past 50 to 60 years, dhrupadiyas have been singing the same set of popular compositions. This was not because there were just a few compositions; but because the approach to concert presentation was jaded. Around

the year 2,000, when the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) was documenting bandishes in the same raag, Prashant recalled his father Pt. Prem Mallick recording more than 20 compositions in raag Aiman.

Prashant shared, "We have tried to introduce sahitya in our concerts. Apart from the works of Tulsiadas and the 'Ashtachaap' saints, we like poet Ashok Jammani's writing. We dug out some beautiful 'kelima' padas of Swami Haridas and set some of them to tune. Currently, we are recording verses from the Guru Granth Sahib. Of course, it's a challenge to understand the lyrics, which are in archaic Punjabi, and then compose the music in selected rare ragas mentioned in the holy scripture."

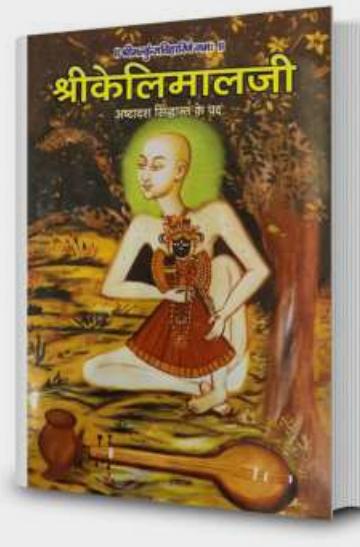
The brothers are also setting to tune verses of Swami Muktananda (of the Swaminarayan tradition). It's exciting to take up such

challenges. Specially curated concerts are the future, says the duo.

Another area they brought about change in were the ragas. Since recorded history, dhrupad has always been sung in traditional ragas such as Bhairav, Todi, Aiman, Darbari and Malkaus (referred to as 'shuddha' ragas). "I felt, why not try singing in ragas such as Charukeshi, Hemant, Gaot and Patdeep," says Prashant. "My grandfather Pt. Vidur Mallick had started this in a small way, way back in the 1970s. We are doing this in a sustained manner. The audience should not feel that every time they have to hear the same ragas in dhrupad. I feel even ragas such as Bhairavi and Khamach Kafi used in thumris should be rendered in dhrupad style," he adds.

Popular taals
Dhamar (14 beat cycle) is one of the most popular taals in the dhrupad repertoire but most compositions based on it are centred around the theme of Holi, and so, are not sung throughout the year. During a recent concert on Chaitra Purnima in Delhi, Prashant sang a beautiful composition on raas, which describes the joyful dance of Krishna and gopis. The raga too, appropriately was Sham Kalyan.

Prashant and Nishant have been experimenting with the enunciation of swaras, not merely singing akar. "We don't intend to dilute the essence and spirit of dhrupad, we just want to get more listeners to discover this beautiful style of music," says Prashant.



CALENDAR



Vocal concert

Narada Gana Sabha will feature Baby Sreeram's vocal concert on November 24, 6.30 p.m., at its mini hall. She will be accompanied by B.Ananthakrishnan (violinist), A.S. Ranganathan (mridangam), and Trichy Murali (ghatam).



Thematic production

Trinity Arts Festival of India will feature Krithika Shurajit's thematic production 'Krishna Premee' today, 5 p.m., at R.R. Sabha mini hall. She will be supported by Radhika Shurajit (nattuvangam), Archana-Aarthi (vocals), Nellai D Kannan (mridangam), Nandini Sai Giridhar (violin) and B. Muthukumar (flute).

Lecture

'Ancient Temples of Tamil Nadu', an illustrated lecture by historian Chithra Madhavan, will take place on November 23, 6 p.m., at 76, Eldams Road, Teynampet. Tattvaloka has organised the event.

Tamil play

Narada Gana Sabha presents Prayatna's Tamil play *Oru Kadhai Oru Kolai* by K. Vivekshankar, today, 6.45 p.m. at Sathguru Gnanananda Hall.

A musical confluence

Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, Chennai, presents an evening of choral and orchestral music on November 25, 6 p.m., at the Goethe-Institut auditorium, Chennai. Organised in collaboration with the AR Rahman Foundation, The Indian Choral Ensemble, KM Music Conservatory, and the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany, the evening brings together the best of choral and orchestral music.

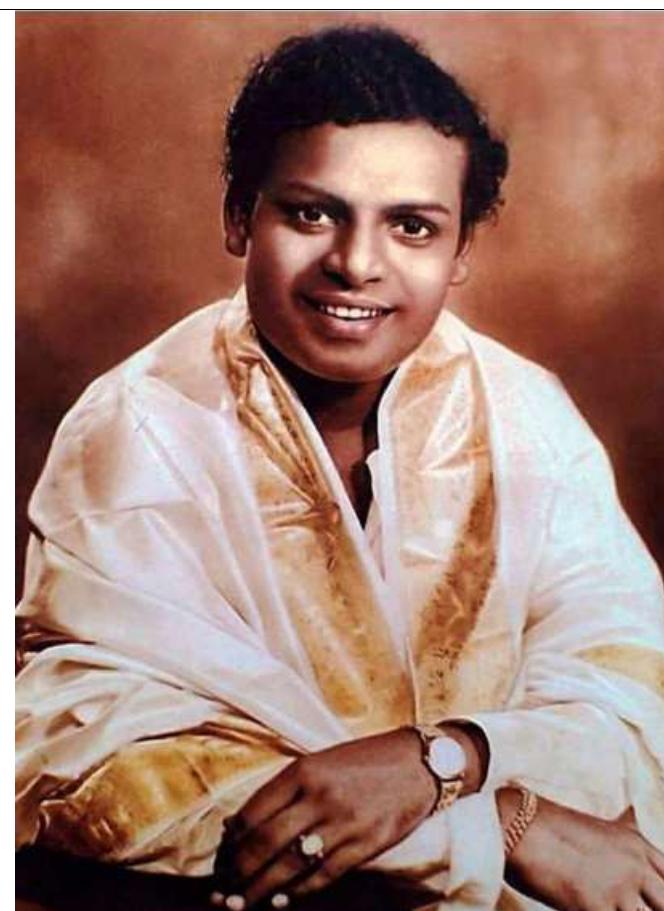
Kamba Ramayanam
Poetry & Song
The essence of Kamban explained in English and experienced with music
Dr Priya Ramachandran | Dr Mohamed Rela
Sikkil Gurucharan
All are welcome
23rd November 6 pm onwards
Narada Gana Sabha Main Hall
314 TTK Road Alwarpet Chennai

Suganthy Krishnamachari

Tiruchi Loganathan's father Subramania Achari was a goldsmith, but Loganathan was not interested in his father's profession. Music was his passion. With encouragement from his relative M.M. Mariappa, who was a singer, Loganathan donned the greasepaint and became a 'singing' stage actor. He learnt Carnatic music from Tiruchi Nataraja Pillai. "He perfected the art of playback singing long before others arrived on the scene," points out Loganathan's son T.L. Maharajan. Loganathan's first break in films came when he sang 'Kasiniyil naangal vaazhvade' for Nambiar in Jupiter Pictures' *Rajakumari*, released in April 1947.

"Music director Subbiah Naidu overheard the tune given by his assistant M.S. Viswanathan for the song 'Pudhu Vasanthamane' (film *Abhimanyu*, 1948). Subbiah Naidu was so impressed that he decided to use MSV's tune. The credits for *Abhimanyu* do not mention MSV, but later Subbiah Naidu revealed who had composed it. And my father and U.R. Jeevarathnam sang the song, which was MSV's first composition," says Maharajan. But it was 'Vaarai' in *Manthiri Kumari* (1950) which got him recognition.

'Vaarai nee vaarai, pogumidam vegu dooram illai' (come on, the destination is not far) sings the villain, as he leads the heroine up a cliff, promising a land of bliss. T.R. Sundaram of Modern Theatres felt that the tune was too mellow for a scene that was going to end in murder. But music director G. Ramanathan was confident that it would be a

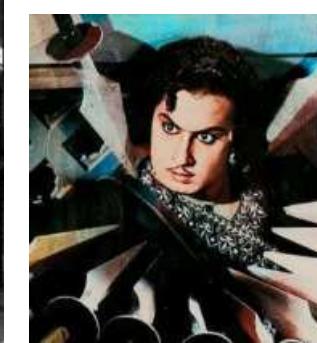


The voice of the hero

In his birth centenary year, we look at the timeless songs of Tiruchi Loganathan and how he perfected the art of playback singing



Flashback (From left) Scenes from *Kappalottiya Tamizhan*; *Marmayogi*; and *Manthiri Kumari*; and Tiruchi Loganathan. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



hit. And he was right. When the audience filed out of the theatre after the first show, everyone was humming the song.

Manthiri Kumari also has the romantic duet 'Ulavum thendral kaatrinal' by Jikki and Loganathan. The music with its ups and downs, suggests the undulating waves of a river, and you can visualise a young couple on a pleasant boat ride. If 'Vaarai' reveals treachery thinly veiled by sweet words, 'Ulavum' calms you with its gentleness. 'Kalyana samayal sadam' (*Maya Bazaar*) is a fun

number, with Loganathan singing for S.V. Ranga Rao, who wolfs down plate after plate of goodies as Ghatothkacha. The song 'Adikkira kaidaan'

captures a moment of epiphany in the life of an alcoholic, who perceives life for what it is – a curious mix of turmoil and calmness, sorrow and joy. Loganathan hiccups between lines, yet each word is clear. This song is one of his

Loganathan refused to accept payment for singing the songs of *Kappalottiya Tamizhan*

masterpieces. 'Aasaive alaipole' with its philosophical message and 'Chinna kutti naathanar', which charmed the listeners with its rustic tune, are among his other popular songs.

Loganathan sang three songs for *Kappalottiya Tamizhan*. He told director Pantulu that he had sung in many Congress meetings, in the pre-Independence days. It was Kamaraj who gave Loganathan the title 'Isai Thendral', when he sang at a conference organised by the Muslims of Kayalpattinam. Loganathan refused to accept payment for singing the songs of

Kappalottiya Tamizhan. As a kind of penance, he went for the recording without having breakfast. "Thanneer vittom valarthom" was okayed in one take. But when he finished, Loganathan fainted.

Loganathan sang 'Kannin Karumaniyi' for MGR (*Marmayogi*, 1951), 'Inbam yengum inge' for A.P. Nagarajan (*Pennarasi*, 1955), 'Nilave needaan' for Kalyankumar (*Manoratham*, 1954), 'Thekkathi kallanada' for Sivaji (*Kalvanin Kadhal*, 1955). He sang many songs for M.R. Radha, one of which was the popular lullaby 'Chinna arumbu malarum'. In the *Karnan* song 'Mazhai kodukkum', Loganathan sang the stanza 'Naani chivandana'. He even sang a rock song 'Kanni paruvam' (*Saraswati B.A.*), 'Koovaamal koovum kokilam' with MLV is one of his memorable songs.

"When my father was asked to sing for the hero in *Paanai Pidithaval Bhagyasali*, he suggested that Sirkazhi Govindarajan should sing instead. Sirkazhi sir often visited our house to listen to my father singing ragas. Kunnakudi Vaidyanathan once told me that my father sang Thodi for an hour without repeating any phrases," recalls Maharajan.

Loganathan was lavish in the gifts he gave to friends. He was so impressed with Madurai Somu's Kalyani alapana at a Navaratri concert organised by actor Thangavelu, that he gifted his silver betel leaf box to him.

After he became a successful playback singer, Loganathan established a drama troupe and staged *Anarkali*, in which he essayed the role of Salim. The play had eight songs, which became so popular that Columbia cut discs of all the songs.

Loganathan is still remembered by his fans, both in India and abroad. Maharajan shared with this writer a video of a Chinese fan of Loganathan singing his songs.

The next act

Shernaz Patel is back as curator for Aadyam Theatre

Narendra Kusnur

When one thinks of Shernaz Patel, her performances in the plays *Love Letters*, *Blackbird* and *The Siddhus Of Upper Juhu* come to mind. She's been prolific on the theatre scene since the mid-1980s, and has even appeared in films and OTT series. Besides acting, she loves to be involved in other activities related to theatre, from curating festivals to children's theatre and voice training.

For the fourth time, Shernaz has taken up the role of programming consultant at Aadyam Theatre, an initiative of the Aditya Birla Group. Now entering its seventh season, this year's schedule kicks off with the play *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time*. Directed by Atul Kumar, it will be staged at Mumbai's St Andrew's Auditorium on November 23 and 24. The play is based on Mark Haddon's popular 2003 novel of the same name.

Even while curating the festival, Shernaz continued doing shows of *The Siddhus Of Upper Juhu*, directed by Rahul daCunha and featuring actor Rajit Kapur. The play is produced by Rage Productions, which was set up in 1992 by Rahul, Rajit and Shernaz.

How does she balance her curation and acting commitments? "I do a lot of other projects related to theatre because it is something I am passionate about. Acting is one side of me. But even for Rage, we did a lot of work to promote and encourage young writing through the project Writers' Bloc. I've myself done a lot of writing projects. I'm now doing a school project with the NCPA called Connections. And I've just trained to be a voice teacher. I was head of acting at Whistling Woods for three years. Sharing the joy of theatre gives me great satisfaction."

Shernaz's involvement with theatre began at an early age. Being the daughter of Gujarati theatre veterans Ruby and Burjor Patel, she attended plays from childhood. She recalls, "I just didn't see myself in any other field. I moved naturally and organically, performing in school, or college, then professionally."

She made her debut with *The Diary Of Anne Frank*, about the German-born Jewish girl who documented her life in hiding amid Nazi persecution. She says, "It was actually produced by Rajit. He was in Sydenham College and I in Elphinstone. It opened a lot of doors for us. For the first time, we got to perform in a space like Prithvi. For the first time, we

toured outside the city. It was a beautiful play that touched a lot of hearts."

One of Shernaz's most memorable theatre roles was in Rahul daCunha's *Love Letters*, along with Rajit. Her performance in Akash Khurana's *Blackbird* fetched her the Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards (Meta) besides other accolades. "We opened *Love Letters* in 1992 and performed it till 2019, so was a long run. It struck a chord with so many people. There was a certain beauty as we actually started writing letters. For the young generation today, it's a whole different thing. But because it's a love story, it resonated with everyone."

Blackbird was about the uneasy reunion of a woman and a man, played by Akash Khurana. "It was a tough play to do, and really challenging. But you just sink your teeth into these roles and give 110 per cent," she explains. Shernaz's other plays include *Antigone*, *Arms And The Man*, *Class Of 84*, *Six Degrees Of Separation* and *The Glass Menagerie*.

Asked about the challenges faced by the medium today, Shernaz says, "The challenges remain the same. The financial struggle is huge. In fact, in today's times, it's nearly impossible for an actor, or even a writer or director to do only theatre. Producers may make a bit of money, but it's not enough."

On the positive side, Shernaz finds it heartening to see today's youngsters keep all doors open, whether it is theatre or cinema or OTT or voice work. She explains, "When we began, many used theatre as a stepping stone to get into films. Today's youngsters are realising the joy of each medium, as each medium brings something new."

Another problem is of spaces. Says Shernaz, "We still have only one Prithvi and one Experimental Theatre in Mumbai. Yes, many new places have sprung up in Aram Nagar in Andheri, but they are not infrastructurally sound. So your production is really basic. We don't get government funding. There's no real support for theatre to become an industry."

Shernaz also points out that things become harder when one is trying to do anything off-mainstream or experimental. "There are various other challenges. When newcomers want to do theatre, they don't know where to go or what to do as there is no constructive process," she adds.

Asked whether many young writers are entering the field with original scripts, she says, "Again, it comes to finances. If you have written a good play in college, and you see that OTT is a fantastic way, you'll naturally veer towards it. Having said that, there are young writers such as Abhishek Majumdar, Purva Naresh and Sapan Saran, who are doing solid work in theatre. But we need more of them."

On how she wants to guide the younger generation, Shernaz says she plans to focus more on her role as a voice teacher.

"The teaching I do is not only for actors. It is for anyone who uses their voice. I want to explore more of that because I think it can help a lot of people," says Shernaz.



SATHYAM | ESCAPE | INOX | DEVI | SANGAM | CASINO | WOODLANDS | ANNA | EGA | PVR - AMPA | PALAZZO KAMALA | S2- PERAMBUR | UDHYAM | TNAGAR AGS | BHARATH | DREAM | KRISHNAVENI | MAHALAKSHMI | MM THEATRE KK NAGAR KASI | ASHOK NAGAR KASI TALKIES | INOX LUX | PVR - VELACHERY | PVR - PALAVARAM | REDHILLS - PVR VR MALL - PVR - ANNANAGAR | ECR - PVR | AIRPORT - PVR AERO HUB | INOX NATIONAL | INOX MARINA MAYAJAAL | ECR - VIJAY PARK | VILLIVAKAM - AGS | OMR AGS | MADURAVAYAL - AGS | MAMANDUR - C3 CINEMAS OMR- CINEPOLIS | EVP CINEMAS | S2- THIYAGARAJA | AMBATHUR - RAKI & MURUGAN | KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI PORUR - GK CINEMAS | CHORMPET - VETRI | KOLATHUR - GANGA CINEMAS | THIRUVALUUR - RAKI & ROJA & THULASI KANCHIPURAM - BABU & ARUNA & KARTHIKEYAN & BALAJI | THAMBARAM - VIDHYA & MR & NATIONAL

