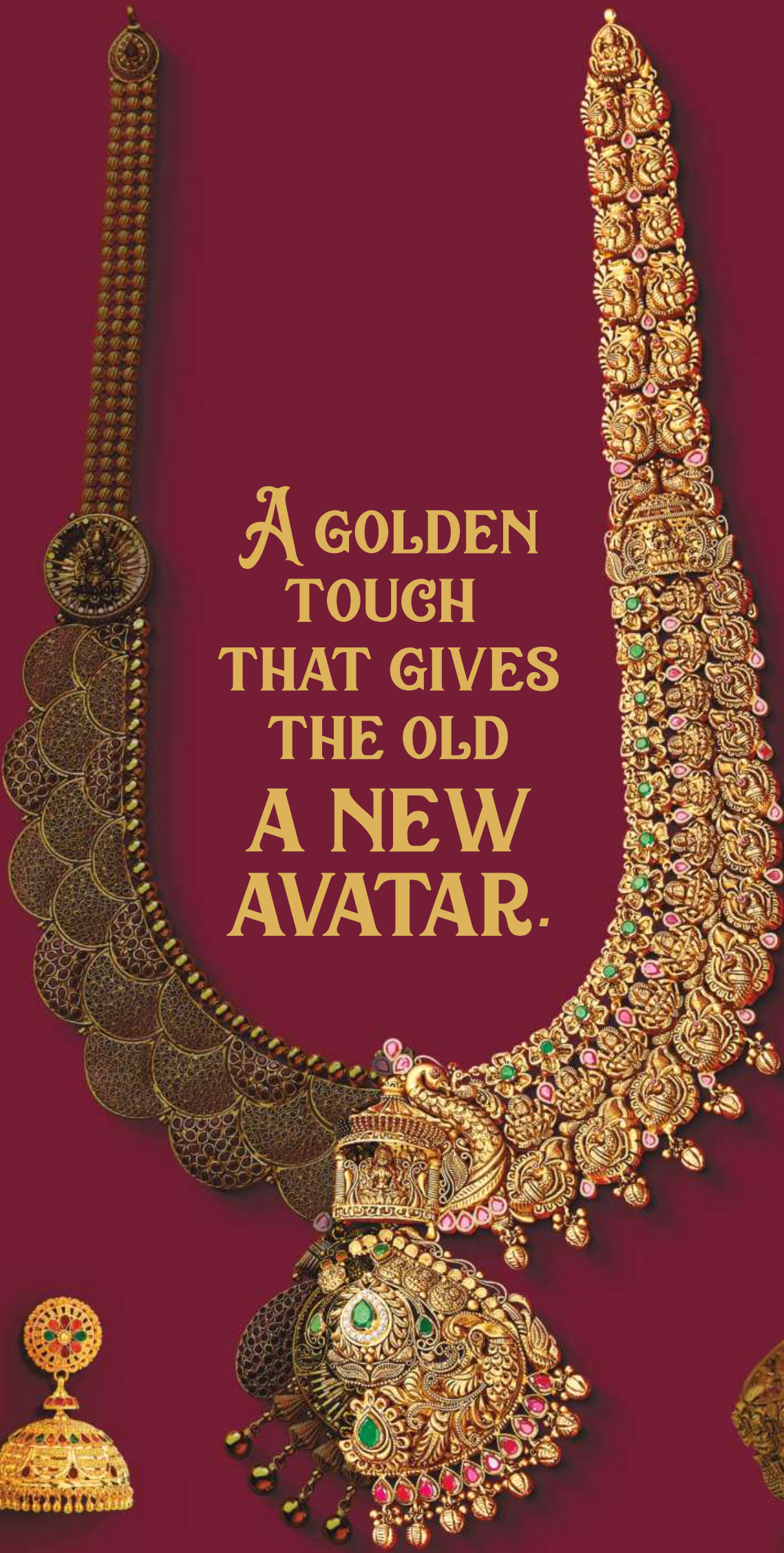


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THE HINDU

## Spotlight on Tamil kritis

Sanjay Subrahmanyan offered a veritable treat of rare songs **p2**

## The beauty of Kuchipudi

Jaikishore Mosalikanti's thematic production was a fine blend of music and dance **p3**



## FROM COMPLEX RHYTHMS TO GRACEFUL ABHINAYA

Neena Prasad loves to reinvent the Mohiniyattam repertoire **p4**

# The art of versatility

Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty, who will perform in Chennai today, engages with music beyond labels

Meena Banerjee

In the early 1980s, a few students, including myself, training under guru Pt. Amarnath at Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra in Delhi were awe-struck when they got to hear a cassette containing six Bangla compositions by guru Jnan Prakash Ghosh. The soulful voice of singer Ajoy Chakrabarty, an unfamiliar name then, captivated us so much that we kept hitting the rewind button on the tape recorder. After a few months, this young singer came to Delhi for his debut concert at Kamani auditorium as the opening artiste of ITC Sangeet Sammelan in 1983. I attended the concert and was amazed to see how the melodious voice I had heard transformed effortlessly to render the robust gayaki of the Patiala gharana. Since then, I have keenly followed Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty's music and his rise as an eminent Hindustani vocalist.

Five years ago, I went to Mumbai to attend a music seminar. I wasn't aware that Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty was in the room adjacent to mine at the hotel till I heard the sound of the

tanpura and the famous voice singing raag Bhimpalasi, followed by Yaman, Bagesree and Darbari. His *riyaz* went on till late in the night. Early next morning I woke up to the soothing notes of raag Lalit. Then came Bhairav and Ahir Bhairav. It was incredible. You then realised what goes into the making of a successful artiste and why it is important to not take one's craft lightly.

Ahead of his concert in Chennai, the veteran vocalist talks about his bond with music and the joy of mentoring.

**Question:** How difficult is it to make your own space as a musician?

**Answer:** I came from a humble, non-gharanedar background. Thanks to Vijay Kichlu *saheb* (an exponent of the Agra gharana, he helped ITC set up the Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata) I could enter the Academy (SRA) as its first scholar. It enabled me to get the feel of what a gharana is. And inspired me to rise on par with peers such as Rashid Khan, who was much younger yet much more appealing. During SRA's famous musical tours in India and abroad under *saheb's* supervision, I saw Hari-ji (Chaurasia) muffle the flute with his handkerchief and play for

hours till we reached our destination. All this led me to immerse myself in *riyaz*.

Eventually, I wanted to share all that I learnt and experienced during my long journey in music with youngsters. The aim behind launching my music institution 'Shrutinandan' was to open up the beautiful world of music for them. I teach them not just to sing or play an instrument but to appreciate good music, whatever be the genre.

**Q:** So, you also teach them film songs, Bengali compositions, ghazals and more?

**A:** As a youngster, I fell in love with the songs sung by Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhonsle and Manna Dey, Ragpradhan gaan, Baul music and Rabindra sangeet. My father was untrained but a gifted singer. He believed that the so-called lighter forms actually help develop the malleability of a singer's voice and also illustrate the new vistas of emotive singing. It is true! My voice



became flexible even before I could understand the rudiments of classical music. The realisation came much later that music thrives on the mastery of technical and emotional aspects.

**Q:** Do you agree that the large number of gifted young musicians today augurs well for the future of Indian music?

**A:** Yes, I agree. Institutions like Shrutinandan have a major role to play in this. So do parents. The way the young combine traditional learning methods with technology has widened the reach of our arts.

**Q:** What about the not-so-talented artistes having easy access to publicity on social media?

**A:** Discerning listeners can easily find out. Such artistes should delve deeper into the art and surrender to the music. It will open up new vistas for them. Zakir (Hussain) *bhai* once spoke about the art of accompaniment and said that he is always conscious about 'Sangat ke dil mein kya chal raha hai'. Keep fine tuning your perception and adding to your repertoire. So, I learnt dhrupad from the grandson of Jadu Bhatta and thumris from guru Jnan Prakash Ghosh. This helped me understand the khayal, my forte, better. Like the survival of any relationship, music also demands love, respect, belief and surrender.

Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty will perform 'Dhrupad to Thumri: A Musical Exploration' today (6.30 p.m.) as part of Citi-NCPA's Aadi Anant series at The Music Academy. Tickets on bookmyshow



S. B. Vijaya Mary

Over the years, many singers and instrumentalists have released their own musical version of 'Jana Gana Mana' on August 15 or January 26. This Republic Day, well-known sitarist Hidayat Khan, son of the legendary Ustad Vilayat Khan, will unveil his rendition of the National Anthem. He will be accompanied on the tabla by Avirodh Sharma.

In an interview, the sitar exponent talks about the emotional and creative urge behind the making of this track.

**Question:** Why did you think of coming up with this track?

**Answer:** For most of us, the National Anthem brings alive memories of our school days. Singing it in the morning assembly was part of the routine. But I began to relate to it differently when I was once invited to perform it at an event in New York. I realised how the values embedded in the anthem have shaped the lives of not just



# Anthem on strings

Hidayat Khan will launch 'Jana Gana Mana' on the sitar this Republic Day

those living in India but also the ones like me living abroad.

**Q:** Releasing this piece on Republic Day is symbolic...

**A:** In my music, I always try to tell a story. Today's world is so different from the one I grew up in, yet India remains a unique blend of cultures, languages and religions. I wanted 'Jana Gana Mana' to capture that spirit – starting with a traditional alaap to ground it in classical music, followed by a rhythmic section reflecting India's vibrant energy and chaos. The piece ends with my solo rendition of the anthem, symbolising that we stand united as one nation despite our differences. That, to me, is the essence of 'Jana Gana Mana' – it is India's voice, a collective identity that transcends boundaries.

**Q:** What is the highlight of your version?

**A:** Most of the earlier versions were a blend of different genres, this one is totally from the perspective of Indian classical music. Once this concept was clear, everything fell into place. I invited Avirodh to the studio, and we worked together without scripting anything. Everything else was improvised – just like a live classical performance. The sitar reflects the emotions in the song

but doesn't mimic the exact melody. It is abstract, yet it gradually builds to the anthem's powerful conclusion.

**Q:** 'Jana Gana Mana' is a simple melody. Was adapting it to a classical instrument like the sitar challenging?

**A:** I had a fantastic team around me, from Hrishi, who helped visualise the video, to Naad, who helped produce the track. We focussed on keeping the sitar and tabla organic, preserving their purity while integrating them into the arrangement.

**Q:** How does your family's musical legacy influence your approach, particularly in projects such as this?

**A:** Everything I am, musically and personally, is shaped by my parents. My father, of course, had a major influence on my musical path, but my mother's sensibilities shaped me in ways I didn't realise until later. My father always emphasised that music should reflect life's experiences – joys and struggles. As a musician, that's how I communicate. My legacy isn't just about the past; it is about continuing that journey with the experiences I've gained.

**Q:** How do you integrate yours skills as a sitarist and vocalist?

**A:** We were taught to sing before playing an instrument, and to this day, when I compose or practice, I do so vocally first. In the gayaki style, the sitar essentially becomes the voice – it must express the same inflections, dynamics and emotions that a vocalist would. When you sing, your voice reflects your mood, which I try to replicate on the sitar.



## Memorial concert

The Music Academy presents a concert by the Malladi brothers, Malladi Sreeramprasad and Malladi Ravikumar, in memory of musician and ardent rasika Vijaya Srinivasan. This endowment has been set up by her niece Mridu Sekhar and nephew Jagdish Dore.

The concert will take place on January 25, 6 p.m., at the TTK auditorium. It is open to all.

Vijaya, who passed away in 2023, was particularly fond of devotional music so the concert will feature a few devotional pieces too. The Malladi brothers, who have a vast repertoire of Annamacharya and Bhadrachala Ramadas compositions, will be accompanied by Embar Kannan on the violin, Trichy Sankaran on the mridangam and Suresh Vaidyanathan on the ghatam.



N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Sanjay Subrahmanyam is, perhaps, the only Carnatic musician who shares the list of songs for each kutcheri beforehand. Though his admirers love this practice of his, some may feel that the element of surprise in a concert is compromised. However, the best part of a Sanjay concert is the rare compositions, especially the Tamil songs, he sings.

Sanjay’s concert at Tamil Isai Sangam featured a mix of popular and less-heard compositions, including a Ragam Tanam Pallavi. He was accompanied by S. Varadharajan on the violin, Neyveli B. Venkatesh on the mridangam and S. Venkataramanan on the kanjira.

One of the few music venues in Chennai where artistes perform only Tamil compositions, the Tamil Isai Sangam welcomes a diverse audience that comes to savour the splendour of the language through the medium of Carnatic music.

Sanjay began his concert with Papanasam Sivan’s varnam ‘Nee indha maayam’. This padavarnam in Dhanyasi is quite elaborate and explains the essence of the raga. ‘Harahara shivashankara’ in Gambhira Nattai is a composition by Gopalakrishna Bharati set in Rupaka tala. Sanjay first presented it at a medium pace to lead up to a high-speed summary of sorts, covering the entirety of the song from the pallavi to the charanam. He retained the fast pace for his kalpanaswaras that had his signature high-octane upper octave touches.

Dharmavathi is a raga that offers ample scope for manodharma, and Sanjay took advantage of this melakarta raga by going in for an extended alapana that contained the characteristic elements he is known for – a long stop at the upper shadjam, and



# An encore from Sanjay

The senior Carnatic vocalist once again showcased his love for Tamil

breathless akarams and phrases that traverse three octaves. Sanjay’s stamina was unmatched as he adventurously covered the entire range of the raga. He kept the audience at the edge of their seats almost throughout the alapana.

A rare song by M.M. Dandapani Desikar ‘Arulvai angayarkanniye’ in Khanda Chapu was taken up with niraval at the line ‘Unmai uyar gunangal’ in the charanam. This song stood out for its novelty. The kalpanaswaras were customary and paved the way for the second half of

TAMIL ISAI SANGAM



the concert where the artistes had much to offer.

The songs leading up to the RTP were chosen to bring some contrast to the kutcheri. ‘Kaalai thooki’ is a classic in Yadukula Kamboji and came at a good place, after covering ragas somewhat serious in nature. Next, Sanjay chose a vivadi mela Shulini to sing Koteeswara Iyer’s ‘Paaramukhamadeno’. This raga can be tricky to

sing, but Sanjay is known to take on challenges.

With a spirit that never dwindled and a confidence derived through a solid song list, Sanjay then moved on to the RTP in Sriranjani. The raga alapana was in the form of a musical conversation that Sanjay sometimes had with himself, and at others with Varadharajan and the audience. If Sanjay inserted a bit of ‘Maarubalka’ at the end of the alapana, Varadharajan went in for ‘Kaana vendamo’. He and Sanjay are a delightful duo onstage and they

Rich repertoire Sanjay Subrahmanyam. PHOTO: AKHILA EASWARAN

complement each other. Varadharajan’s approach to manodharma carefully mirrored Sanjay’s methods but he also added value with his inputs.

The pallavi was an ode to femininity – ‘Penmaiye shaktiyadaa adhai vanangum perumaiye buddhiyada’ and instantly made many women in the audience sing along as Sanjay explored the sahitya in detail, including a ragamalika suite at the end before the tani avarthanam.

Venkatesh and Venkataramanan utilised this time well to showcase their percussion skills. The post-main section was full of audience favourites – ‘Angai kodu malar’ in Ragamalika, ‘Ramaswamy dhoodhan naanada’ in Bahudari, a virutham followed by ‘Va va vel muruga’ in Sindhubhairavi and ‘Thunbam nergayil’ in Desh.

Well-structured Rithvik Raja with H.N. Bhaskar, J. Vaidyanathan and B.S. Purushottam PHOTO: M. SRINATH



# The highs and lows

Rithvik Raja’s concert swayed between excellent alapana and niraval moments and placid meander

Bala Shankar

A concert structure has no written rules. Yet, some cardinal principles have been in vogue, especially on how to structure a concert of about two hours. Rithvik Raja’s concert swayed between excellent alapana and niraval moments and placid meander.

The last 70 minutes of the concert was something Rithvik will relish as it reinforced his strengths as a vocalist with a nuanced understanding of tradition and the ability to introduce modern flair. His Bhairavi alapana began sedately but the journey from the panchamam had a bright, well-knit course with short and longer flights. The raga essence was the underlying mood. Violinist H.N. Bhaskar’s sweet bowing, coupled

with some impressive landings in ‘ni’ and ‘ri’, lifted the proceedings.

After a good tanam, Rithvik sang the magnum opus, ‘Koluvaivunnade’ (Tyagaraja, Adi) in a purposeful kalapramanam. ‘Manasu ranjilla’, the spot for niraval, was almost Biblical. Rithvik and Bhaskar’s rendition had both raga charm and laya variations. This was clearly the point at which the concert attained its heights.

The evening commenced with the popular Nattakurunji varnam (‘Chalamela’), setting classical expectations. However, the Sriranjani raga alapana that was unremarkable was followed by ‘Kaanavendamo’ in Rupakam (Papanasam Sivan) that tested the metronome. That is when the concert stuttered. The kriti is often reserved for the back-end

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round-up, and so one was not clear about Rithvik’s endeavour.

There was more impasse on the anvil. The Mayamalavagowla raga alapana was good but stayed below the impressive threshold. ‘Srinathadi guruguho’ (Dikshitar, Adi) did not sparkle either. The slow tempo highlighted the raga’s gravitas, but the sizzle was absent even after 40 minutes of the concert. The swarakalpana speed was reset midway at the 52nd minute of the concert, as Rithvik’s boat accelerated to its due speed. Until this point, the sails were held aloft by Bhaskar and mridangist J. Vaidyanathan.

Khamas (‘Seethapathe’, Tyagaraja) brought some lively

energy with a brief niraval at ‘Premajuchi naapai’. Crisp swaras accentuated the ornamental value of this kriti. The Bhairavi alapana that followed was a highlight of the evening. Rithvik displayed fluency and control, painting a vivid picture of the raga. That fluency was elusive prior to this. ‘Koluvaivunnade’ by Tyagaraja in Adi tala had some high points. Lack of time slightly robbed the grand kriti of swaras and its saliency.

Bhaskar was a seamless accompanist throughout, as always, enriching the music with his melodies. Vaidyanathan is adept at playing for a range of speeds, and is particularly impressive when playing for kritis such as ‘Koluvaivunnade’, with good madhyama kala grandeur. B.S. Purushottam supported well in the second half of the concert.

# Audience choice

In a bid to make his concert interactive, Shashank let the audience pick the main raga

P. Srihari

It is not often that the audience gets to choose the main raga of a concert. S. Shashank’s flute recital saw that happen. From a shortlist of Madhyamavati, Surutti, Vagadeeswari and Karaharapriya, the first one emerged as the unequivocal favourite. The flautist, however, reserved the song choice to himself, presenting ‘Rama katha sudha’.

Rich tonal quality and fluid playing style marked the presentation, which was embellished by Srikanth Venkataraman on the violin, Delhi Sairam on the mridangam, and Anirudh Athreya on the kanjira. Shashank began on a meditative note with Tyagaraja’s ‘Atukaaraadani

it also discounted the aesthetics. He finished the alapana without harnessing the top octave. Srikanth filled the void, hitting the higher notes consistently in his response.

Shashank’s rendition of Patnam Subramanya Iyer’s ‘Marivere dikkevvaru’ in Khanda Chapu was serene. Another lengthy swara section of instrumental dexterity followed, but it also emphasised the challenge in making high-speed creativity fully meet the demands of musical subtleties.

The frenzy gave way to a refreshing Madhyamavati. Shashank infused the raga with long-drawn, ultra-slow phrases brimming with gamakas. Exquisite glides, articulated on the strength of perfect sruti alignment, segued into a short and rapid round towards the end. Srikanth came into his own in his turn, delivering a tuneful version.

Shashank struck the right kalapramanam in ‘Rama katha sudha’. The swarakalpana at ‘Bhamamani’ in the anupallavi turned out to be the high point of the recital. The flautist explored the gamaka-laden pentatonic structure to the hilt in the first speed before weaving in swara sequences in circles in the faster tempo. Srikanth negotiated the express phrases with aplomb, while percussionists Sairam and Anirudh displayed exemplary teamwork.

The ensuing tani had its share of vibrant rhythmic forays and interesting exchanges.

The post-tani section comprised Purandaradasa’s ‘Kaliyugadalli’ in Chenchurutti, Subramania Bharati’s ‘Chinnanchiru kiliy’ in ragamalika, Vyasarama’s ‘Krishna nee begane baaro’ in Yamuna Kalyani, and the lively Purvi thillana composed by T. Vaidyanatha Bhagavata.



Engaging Shashank with Srikanth Venkataraman (violin); Delhi Sairam (mridangam) and Anirudh Athreya (kanjira). PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

# Nuanced Nayaki

Nisha Rajagopalan’s raga essays were well-crafted

H. Ramakrishnan

NAADA INBAM



Nisha Rajagopalan moved one immensely in the niraval at the pallavi, ‘Mohana rama mukhajitha soma’ in Mohanam. The alapana opened on a sublime, yet stately note. Nisha made the most of the swaraprastara to extract the essence of the raga.

Another raga that she eloquently elaborated was Saveri, which, by itself, is rich in gamakas. She developed it, savouring each phrase. Periyasami Theooran’s ‘Muruga muruga endraal’ was the chosen kriti. When the artiste strictly adheres to lakshana and takes freedom with lakshya, manodharma is at its zenith. And, Nisha further ornamented it with kalpanaswaras, concluding with a swara korvai.

Nisha came up with a well-crafted elaboration of Natakapriya in which she rendered Mysore Vasudevachar’s ‘Ithi samayamu brova rada’ (Rupakam). Niraval and swaras were at ‘Paramapurusha vasudeva’

(charanam). Her sketch of Chandrayothi was followed by a crisp rendition of Tyagaraja’s ‘Bagayanayya ni maya’.

The highlight of the concert was Nisha’s singing of ‘Ranganayakam bhavaye’ (Dikshitar, raga Nayaki). She appropriately prefaced it with a pasuram, ‘Punniyam seidhu nalla punalodu’ on Padmanabhaswamy of Thiruvananthapuram.

Nisha commenced her concert with ‘Parakela nannu paripaalimpa’ (Kedaragowla) by Syama Sastri. Kalpanaswaras were at the pallavi. She concluded with the popular ‘Muddugare yashoda’ by Annamacharya.

Nisha had excellent support from her co-artists – violinist B.U. Ganesh Prasad, mridangist Delhi Sairam and ghatam artiste Chandrasekara Sharma. The tani between Sairam and Chandrasekara (ghatam) created several dimensions of rhythm.



Adherence to manodharma Nisha Rajagopalan with B.U. Ganesh Prasad (violin); Delhi Sairam (mridangam) and Chandrasekara Sharma (ghatam). PHOTO: M. SRINATH



# Pleasing patterns

Jaikishore Mosalikanti's thematic presentation was marked by well-choreographed sequences

V.V. Ramani

The time and effort rasikas devote to watch a performance become worth it when the performance lives up to their expectation. One experienced that aesthetic delight while watching the group presentation ‘Triyambaam’ by Jaikishore Mosalikanti and his Shivamohanam school of Kuchipudi.

The show was conceptualised on the three aspects of dance – nritya, nritya and natya – and revolved around the theme of three goddesses, namely Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga. As the narratives related to each devi unfolded, what was constant was the rich tapestry of music and movement.

‘Ya kundendu tushara hara davalā’, a traditional obeisance to the goddess of knowledge was followed by the popular Muthuswami Dikshitar kriti ‘Sri saraswati namostuthe’ in raga Arabhi. The simple choreography and synchronised dancing by four artistes highlighted the attributes of Saraswati.

The narrative moved on to ‘Sree udbhavam’, the story of Lakshmi and the emergence of the goddess from the ocean in the Ksheerasagara Manthana episode, culminating in the wedding of Lakshmi and Vishnu.

Jaikishore entered the storyline as narrator, but soon became mountain Mandara. When the snake was being pulled on either side to churn the ocean, Jaikishore’s corresponding circular movements enhanced the visual appeal of the episode. In the wedding sequence, vocalist Adithya Narayanan’s singing and the depiction of the ritual were highly impressive. Lyrics for this were by Pappu Venugopala Rao and music was by



Synchronised ‘Triyambaam’ by Jaikishore Mosalikanti and group PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

Kuldeep Pai.

The understated manner in which the story of Durga and Mahishasura was depicted and the refrain of the lines ‘Jaya jaya durge’ was effective.

The highlight of a Kuchipudi recital is always the Tarangam, or dancing on a brass plate.

Performed by a male and four female dancers, the Tarangam by Narayana Tirtha was choreographed with meaningful pauses and vigorous group and solo movements. A thillana in raga Brindavani composed by Ramesh and Jaikishore made for a pleasant finale.

The musical team’s contribution in this show was immense, marked by Sweta Prasad’s singing, Adithya’s utterances of the jathis, B.P. Haribabu’s strokes on the mridangam, Easwar Ramakrishnan and B. Muthukumar’s melodious violin and flute, respectively. Padmavani Mosalikanti, Ala Venugopal, Vedya Spurti Konda, Sathwika Reddy, Lekshmi Raghunath and Srisammohana Mosalikanti brought alive the choreography with their dancing.

Steeped in bhakti Mahathi with V.L. Kumar (violin), Vijay Ganesh (mridangam), and K.R. Venkata subramaniam (rhythm pad). PHOTO: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM



Aishwarya Raghunathan

. Mahathi’s performance was rooted in reverence for Tamil musical traditions. She was accompanied by V.L. Kumar on the violin, Vijay Ganesh on the mridangam and K.R. Venkatasubramaniam on the rhythm pad.

Mahathi had curated a songlist of compositions by Tamil composers and saints – she began with an elegant rendition of ‘Vallabhai nayaka’, a varnam in Mohana Kalyani, composed by Lalgudi Jayaraman. This piece, filled with devotion and grace, set the tone for the concert. This was followed by Rukmini Ramani’s ‘Selva ganapathiye sharanammayya’, set in Valaji and Adi tala. Valaji, a pentatonic raga (audava raga) devoid of Ma and Ri, has a bright, uplifting quality. Mahathi’s kalpanaswaras, starting from ‘Aadiduvai endru’, explored Valaji’s crisp melodic contours. The mridangam’s rhythmic support and the rhythm pad’s understated ghatam tones added depth.

The concert’s progression brought a distinct shift with Ramalinga Adigalar’s Tiruvartupa, with the Virutham ‘Orumayin’, followed by the poignant ‘Appa naan vendudhal kaetarul’. While the emotional depth of the raga was palpable, there was a subtle, recurring moment where Mahathi referred to the lyrics, ensuring the precision of her delivery.

In Arunachala Kavirayar’s ‘Kanden kanden kanden Seethaiyai’ in Vasantha and Adi tala, Mahathi painted a vivid

# Of ragas and roots

Mahathi curated a playlist featuring Tamil composers

TAMIL ISAI SANGAM



musical picture of Sita’s darshan. The short alapana preceding the kriti was marked by elegant sangatis, with the violinist’s responses adding a reflective touch. In the kalpanaswara, there was a brief moment of pitch adjustment in the first round, but Mahathi regained her alignment, maintaining the flow of the performance.

Following this was the popular Nattakurinji composition ‘Vazhi maraithirukudhu’ by Gopalakrishna Bharati, known for its wistful beauty. The anupallavi, though interrupted briefly, due to slight vocal strain during the high-pitched phrases, regained its footing, particularly in the charanam.

The concert’s tempo shifted with ‘Sutrunai vediyan’, a Thevaram in Kedaragowla, and ‘Saravana bhavaguhane’ in Kannada, both fast-paced compositions.

The main piece, ‘Yadhumagi nindrai kaali’, was a majestic exploration of Varali, one of the

five Ghana ragas. Mahathi’s alapana unveiled the raga’s beauty through intricate gamakas, while the violinist mirrored her exploration with an equally eloquent response. Bharatiar’s virutham, ‘Ninnai sila

varangal ketpen’, set the stage for the kriti, which was rendered with an intensity that captured the divine ferocity of Kali. The robust support of the percussion instruments elevated the performance.

The tani avartanam of Vijay Ganesh’s mridangam began with traditional korvais, seamlessly transitioning into K.R. Venkatasubramaniam’s rhythm pad explorations, which produced tones of the ghatam, thavil, and khol.

The concluding segment featured a medley of Tamil compositions, beginning with a virutham in Nilambari, ‘Vaasi vaasi endru’, transitioning into a song from the film *Thiruvilayadal*, in Sindhubhairavi and Anandabhairavi that employed ascending numerals with devotional lyrics. Annamalai Reddiyar’s ‘Senni kula nagar vasan’ in Chenjurutti added a touch of rustic charm, while Lalgudi Jayaraman’s Misra Maand thillana celebrating Devi brought the concert to a conclusion.

The final rendition, ‘Vazhiya senthamizh’, came as a heartfelt ode to Tamil language and culture.



Improving Corporate Organizations  
Strategic Focus -  
Mohan Sellappan

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As organizations strive for sustainable growth and development, it is essential to align their strategic focus with business objectives, ensuring that growth, innovation, and workforce utilization effectively derive the achievement of key performance indicators.

Corporate organizations must prioritize strategies that integrate organizational development into their core business operations. The emphasis should be on ensuring that every business objective is fully driven by the overarching strategy with bottom line growth as a primary focus.

Manpower, being a major cost contributor, must be carefully planned and optimized. Decisions around manpower demands, skill development, and budgeting must align with the organization's growth trajectory, technological advancement, and the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance efficiency and innov ation. Employees must be equipped with the necessary skills to meet these demands, ensuring that every position delivers measurable value toward achieving the organization's goals.

The importance of a bottom up approach in driving excellence cannot overstated. This approach ensures that organizational outcome are effectively aligned with strategic priorities, preventing revenue deficits and maximizing return on workforce investments. By carefully evaluating the contribution and payback of each position, organizations can achieve optimal performance and realize their expectations for net growth and profitably.

With over 30 years of global experience across various industries. I, Mohan Sellappan, a globally recognized professional, recommend that corporate organizations embrace a holistic approach to organizational development. By leveraging strategic planning workforce optimization, and innovation through AI and technology, organizations can transform their outcomes, achieving sustainable growth and fulfilling their business aspirations.

## Ten-day nagaswaram fest

Brahma Gana Sabha presents its annual 10-day nagaswaram-thavil isai Vizha from January 26 to February 4, at P.S. Dakshinamurthy Hall, Mylapore. Nalli Kuppusami Chetti will preside and B. Hemanathan, deputy director, Department of Art and Culture, Tamil Nadu Government, will inaugurate the festival (Jan. 26) and will give away the ‘Thavil Maestro Vaadhya Padhmam Thirunageswaram T.R. Subramaniam memorial award’ to nagaswara vidwans Pandanallur P.M. Subash and Mettupalayam M.S. Ravikumar. Vellore S. Kuppuswami will be honoured with a special award on the occasion for his contribution to the field of Nagaswaram as talam artiste. The evening also includes a nagaswaran concert by Tirupathi P. Saikumar and Bhajantri Shree Bhargavi at 4.15 p.m. followed by a special nagaswaram-thavil tani avartanam concert by Thirumanur T.C. Karunanidhi and T.K. Maheswari with T.B. Radhakrishnan and Udumalaipeetai K. Manikandan on the special thavil. The concert will be presented as a tribute to thavil vidwan Valangaimaan A. Shanmugasundrama Pillai. A special flute recital by J.A. Jayant with nagaswaram and thavil; a nagaswaram performance with double mridangam; and a laya vinayasa ensemble featuring Thanjavur Govindaraajan on the thavil, Kunnakudi Balamurali Krishna on the mridangam and Sri Sundar kumar on the kanjira will also feature on the occasion. There will be two concerts by seniors and up-and-coming nagaswaram and thavil artistes during the festival.

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# Newfound layers

Neena Prasad has been gently pushing the boundaries of Mohiniyattam



Refreshing expressions  
Neena Prasad.  
PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

## Rupa Srikanth

Neena Prasad's performance was comprehensive, giving a wholesome feel of the dance style. Unhurried music, graceful dips, unobtrusive rhythm and stylised abhinaya are Mohiniyattam's hallmark. Rhythmic complexities are usually not a feature of Mohiniyattam, but Neena, The Music Academy's Nritya Kalanidhi awardee for 2024, commenced with a fairly complex one – a khanda gati khanda jaathi matya tala Cholkettu, paying obeisance to the five elements in the five ghana ragas. Changanasseri Madhavan Namboothiri sang this in an evocative vilamba kala, while the footwork was in a rhythmic madhyama. Neena introduced many 'dhi dhi thais' as against a simple back-leg heel lift, but that did not mar the piece. Rameshbabu on the mridangam played low pitched, flat-toned beats to add to the beautiful musical symphony. Violin by Shyamkalyan lent melodious support to the accomplished Madhavan Nampoothiri, who sang in the Carnatic style, but kept the emphasis on mood and sahitya. Nattuvangam by Aswathy Unnikrishnan was competent. The edakka by Kalamandalam Arundas, however, was barely heard. Sad, because this is an important component of Mohiniyattam and should not have been ignored. The next piece was Swati Tirunal's 'Andolika Vahane' in Anandabhairavi (misra chapu), picturing the grand

## THE MUSIC ACADEMY



procession of Padmanabha. The bees hover around the sweet flower garlands and the girls presume it is Cupid. This featured softly intoned nritta sequences. A Charukesi padavarnam followed in 'Kamopamaroopan Kamanan' (Adi, Balakavi Rama Shastri) in which Usha, daughter of Banasura, dreams of the handsome Anirudha. Her friend Chitralkha helps her identify him by sketching his face as per her description.

**Neena Prasad chose a complex cholkettu to pay obeisance to the five elements in five ghana ragas.**

This sringara piece was the show-stopper in terms of music and visualisation (Kalamandalam Guru Suganthi). It was beautifully suggestive and the gentle sways and bobs to the music showed keen musical sense. The contemporary offering 'Soorpanaka' in ragamalika (written by Jayakumar and tuned by Madhavan Nampoothiri) was a soliloquy about her encounter with Rama and Lakshmana, in which she feels she could have been handled with respect instead of being trivialised and injured. This was tuned well and mimed with good understanding. The Kapi thillana (Adi, Madhavan Nampoothiri) stood out. The dancer's energy was inspiring as was the music.

## Right moves

Shruthi Vidhyashankar's recital peaked during the varnam

### Srividya

Shruthi Vidhyashankar's Bharatanatyam recital proved her mettle from the start. A student of Jayanthi Subramaniam, Shruthi commenced with a traditional Shanmukha Kavuthuvam in raga Shanmukhapriya. This was followed by the evening's highlight – the varnam 'Samiyai vara cholladi', a composition by K.N. Dandayuthapani Pillai in Purvikalyani. The varnam, a combination of rhythmic movements and interpretative expressions, tests the skill and proficiency of the dancer. Shruthi's performance in this piece was testimony of her guru's diligent tutelage. The nayika in this varnam is a woman in love pining

recital with the well-known thillana in Hindolam and Khanda Eka tala. This was composed by Tirugokaranam Vaidyanatha Bhagavata and choreographed by Rukmini Devi. The nattuvangam by Jayanthi Subramaniam reflected the quiet confidence of her guru, Adyar K. Lakshman. The vibrant voice of Pozhakudi G.R. Praveen set the tone for the recital. The vocalist was ably assisted by R. Kalaierasan on the violin and Kiran R Pai on the mridangam.



Ode to Muruga  
Shruthi Vidhyashankar.  
PHOTO: M. SRINATH

to meet her nayaka, Muruga. She pleads with her sakhi to call her saami. By way of elaborating lines such as 'Bhumi pugazhum sivakami magizhum balan', Shruthi made fleeting references to the story of the birth of Muruga and a few other instances from his life, while keeping the emotion of a lovelorn woman at its core. The next item was the padam 'Adhuvum solluvaal aval' in raga Saurashtra, composed by V. Subbarama Iyer. The hero of this padam is Muthukumaraswami. However, the nayika is seen from a perspective very different from the one in the varnam. Here, she expresses jealousy and anger at the fact that her nayaka favoured her rival. Shruthi concluded her

## The show goes on

UAA's iconic play *Ragasyam Parama Ragasyam* was recently staged at the venue where it premiered 50 years ago

### Suganthy Krishnamachari

What happens when a man who has been nursing a secret for many years decides to bare his soul to someone? UAA's play *Ragasyam Parama Ragasyam* explored the psychology of those who harbour revealing secrets. Estate owner Manjunath (Manoharan) is on a flight, which is about to crash. There is a dark chapter in his life, and he wants to unburden himself to someone before he dies. Luckily for him, seated next to him on the plane is a Catholic priest Father Murphy (Ravi Raghavender). Manjunath confesses to the Father that he is a murderer. However, the plane does not crash, and Manjunath loses his peace of mind. To add to his worries, Father Murphy arrives at his doorstep. Manjunath's eldest son Ramji (DSR), his daughter-in-law Prabha (Madhuvanti) and the estate manager Raja (Sureshwar) all have their own secrets too. The play, with a serious underlying theme, had lots of humour. For instance, Mahesh (Y. Gee. Mahendra) attributes his garrulousness to being pricked with a gramophone needle, instead of an injection needle, during a vaccination. Suppini played the role of Ganesh, who cannot say *appalam*, but says *abbalam*, instead. Suppini's father says his son remains unscathed despite swallowing an *agarbathi* stand, because in his house, the *agarbathi* stand is always a banana. The LED visual backdrop, specially designed for the golden jubilee show by Kalai Ravi, was imaginative, capturing the grandeur of a majestic estate bungalow. *Ragasyam*, with story and dialogues by Venkat and direction by YGM, was premiered in 1975 at Mylapore Fine Arts Club. Its golden jubilee show was also staged at the same venue. Playwright Venkat says that Bombay Kannan introduced



From *Ragasyam Parama Ragasyam*

him to UAA. ARS (A.R. Srinivasan), who directed the play in its early years and also played Father Murphy's role, says: "That was a time when amateur troupes such as ours faced many challenges. Although professional stage artistes such as T.K. Shanmugam were busy doing films, they hadn't given up the stage altogether. So, our scripts had to be good for us to make the grade. We had set a benchmark for humour, because Mouli wrote many humorous scripts for us. Venkat came with a promising script just when Mouli had left." K. Balachander liked the *abbalam* and *agarbathi* stand jokes so much that he included them in his film *Apoorva Ragangal*. Y.GEE. MAHENDRA Suppini says, "ARS was very good at editing. There was a scene where YGM gets a barber to teach me music. We even rehearsed the scene, which was very funny, but ARS omitted it, because he felt the play was lengthy." *Ragasyam* marked Venkat's stage debut. "I have heard college students discuss the

play, not knowing that their fellow passenger on the bus was its playwright. When an officer visited the bank in which I worked in, he spent more time talking to me than to other senior staff, simply because of *Ragasyam*," he says. Mahendra, who has many precious memories to share about the play, says, "K. Balachander liked the *abbalam* and *agarbathi* stand jokes so much that he included them in his film *Apoorva Ragangal*. Muthuraman was keen to adapt *Ragasyam* to the screen. He even had a list of people he wanted to cast in the film. Unfortunately, he died shortly after he met us," says Mahendra. Over the years, different actors have played different roles in the play. Suppini has played the same role throughout and has probably missed only 15 shows. Mahendra has always played the role of young Mahesh, including at the recent golden jubilee show. He is now 75, but the audience gave him a roar of approval, when he walked onto the stage.

*The play will be staged on January 26 (7 p.m.) at YGP Auditorium, PSBB School, T. Nagar, Chennai. Tickets on bookmyshow.*

## CALENDAR



### Showcase of talent

Bharata Kalanjali presents the fourth edition of Jharna, the institution's annual festival, on January 25-26 and February 1-2, at the TEACH Auditorium, SPASTN, Taramani, Chennai. Six young dancers will perform in this edition. The festival platforms promising young dancers, who infuse new ideas into their original work. It's an opportunity for them to engage with the art beyond training and performance. Apart from young talents, the festival also features performances by senior artistes. A panel of guest reviewers — Padmini Chettur, Radhika Shurajit and Vijay Viswanathan — will provide critical feedback after the performances. For tickets log on to <https://bharatakalanjali.in/jharna/> The following is the list of performances. **January 25, 6 p.m.:** Jayakhavi Gautham; 7 p.m.: Akshaya Arunkumar; 8 p.m.: Navyashree K N. **January 26, 6.30 p.m.:** Sandhya Udupa (guest artiste); 7.30 p.m.: 'Hues of Kashi' by Girijashankar Sundaresan (musical presentation). **February 1, 6 p.m.:** Rajesh T K; 7 p.m.: Eesha Pinglay; 8 p.m.: Himanshu Srivastava. **February 2, 6.30 p.m.:** Nirali Samani; 7.30 p.m.: 'Naachiyar Next' by Anita Ratnam (guest artiste).

### Music and musings



Madhuradhwani has organised the following programmes at Arkay Convention Center, Mylapore. Schedule: **January 26, 4.30 p.m.:** Kamala Deepthi; 6.30 p.m.: Madhuradhwani-Veena Quartet featuring Sreevidhya Chandramouli, Chandramouli Narayanan, Kapila Chandramouli and Sushruta Chandramouli (veena) with T.R. Sundaresan and Nanthesh Sivarajah on the double mridangam. **January 28, 6.15 p.m.:** Musical discourse on Tiruvachagam by Madhusudhanan Kalaiselvan with vocalist Bhavya Hari. **January 30, 6.15 p.m.:** 'Maadham Thorum Maha Kavi', a special talk by Isai Kavi Ramanan.

### Three-day music workshop

Nadasangamam, the music wing of Narada Gana Sabha, will conduct the annual three-day residential music workshop for aspiring musicians (below 35 years) from February 7 to 9, at Thennangur, about 110 km from Chennai. Veena vidushi R.S. Jayalakshmi will be the convener. Interactive and creative sessions will be conducted by eminent musicians. The resource persons are Amrutha Venkatesh, Bharath Sundar, C.R. Vaidyanathan and Padmini Ravi. Registration forms will be available at Narada Gana Sabha Office. For details, call 2499 3201/2498 3201 or mail [ngsabha@gmail.com](mailto:ngsabha@gmail.com).

### Dedicated to Tyagaraja

The 39th anniversary celebrations of Sarvani Sangeetha Sabha will be held from January 29 to 31, at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. A series of concerts, dedicated to the saint-composer, will be held at 4 p.m. and 6.15 p.m.

### Bharatanatyam solo

Ravali Mylavarapu, disciple of Anitha Guha, will present her solo Bharatanatyam performance on January 26, 7.15 p.m. at Narada Gana Sabha mini hall. The performance will feature a live orchestra. Kala Darsana has organised a Bharatanatyam recital by Shruthi Kishore, disciple of Jayanthi Subramaniam, under the auspices of Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha. The performance will take place on January 27, 7 p.m., at R.K. Swamy Auditorium, Sir Sivaswami Kalalaya School, Mylapore.



### Remembering Dikshitar

Veenavaadini Sampradaya Trust has been conducting Samvatsara Mahotsavam as part of the 250th birth anniversary celebrations of Muthuswami Dikshitar. The seventh edition will be held on January 30 at Sri Kapaleeswarar Temple, Mylapore. It will feature Abhishek Raghuram's vocal concert at 6.30 p.m. Akkarai Subhalakshmi (violin) and Anantha R Krishnan on the mridangam are the accompanists.

### Lecture series

As part of its annual lecture series, Krishnamurti Foundation India in association with Krishnamurti Trust Madras, has organised a talk on 'The Vicious Circle of Conflict', presented by Javier Gómez Rodríguez at the lawns of Vasanta Vihar, RA Puram. The evening also features the launch of a new book *The Revolutionary Discontent: Conversations with Young. Date and time:* January 26, 5.45 p.m.