

friday Review

THE HINDU

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**DRAMA IN ALL ITS DIVERSITY**

A recent festival in Chennai featured both long and short format plays p4

Amarjot Kaur

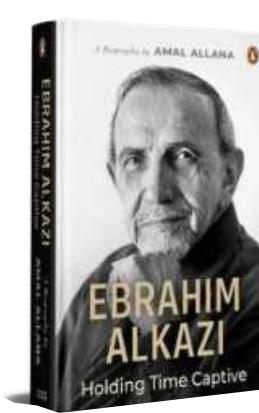
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The lines between personal and professional blur, engage and intertwine at every turn of the page in Amal Allana's biographical novel *Ebrahim Alkazi: Holding Time Captive*, which traces the quintessential identity of the father of modern Indian theatre. "You can't talk of my father on a personal level alone, because his work was an intrinsic part of his life," says Amal, who took nearly 10 years to come up with the book that finds its roots in a 2016 exhibition titled *The Theatre of E. Alkazi*.

"I never quite started out to write a book as I had never written one before; it all began with the exhibition," she shares, touring our mind through a copious collection of Alkazi's photographs and artworks found in a tin trunk, which she chronicled to chart the trajectory of her father's works. Before making their way into the book, these contents were displayed at yet another exhibition, *The Other Line* (2019), showcasing over 100 drawings and paintings of the theatre doyen just a year before he died on August 4, 2020.

"We were in New York in 1999, when my father agreed to my request of interviewing him. We put up a static camera and I started asking him questions. Looking back, I would have asked him many more questions, which I later never got the opportunity to," says Amal, justifying the dialogues that run parallel to the narration of events that contributed to the making of Ebrahim Alkazi. She attributes the conversations cited in the book to many of Ebrahim's friends – thespians, writers, critics and members of the Progressive Artists' Group – and his wife Roshen Padamsee. "I spoke with them too. The book is not the telling of a tale, I am making it alive, I am making scenes. I am a theatre director and I have an instinctive feeling to convert everything into a play or a scene. That was the best part about writing this book; it was like I was writing a long play," she says describing the book's literary form.

Amal inherits her love for theatre from her father, also his interest in various creative mediums of art. She was the chairperson of the country's premier theatre educational institute National School of Drama (NSD), which was founded in 1959 and Alkazi was invited to head it in 1962. She also founded Dramatic Art and Design Academy (DADA) in Delhi,



with husband Nissar Allana, in 2000. Amal also runs an Art Heritage Gallery. "I draw from him the whole discipline of theatre, looking at theatre as part of many art forms, the idea of drawing from world traditions (and not just India) and of being inclusive," she says. The writer in her emphasises on the last bit of the above-mentioned quote – she fervently unfolds the layers of Alkazi's cultural, nationalistic and artistic identity, starting from his roots in Bombay as the son of a migrant from Saudi Arabia.

"Despite the fact that Alkazi was not an Indian by parentage, his sense of belonging to India only intensified over the years. His parents left for Karachi after Partition, but he remained in India. Also, I was named Uma; there was no question of Hindu and Muslim. My mother wore a bindi. You couldn't tell that she is a Muslim or Khoja – those were different days, we grew up in a society, a family where there were no differences. My father's friends were Catholics, Muslims, and Hindus, no one was looking at anyone's religion. We have to understand that as Indians we come from a rich past and the richness comes from it being syncretic," she explains, adding that the book means to expose the younger generation to the fact that there was another way of life.

Love for literature
The book evolves with more nuanced citations of Alkazi's artistic and academic endeavours, building on his younger days – his love for literature, yearning for an Indian identity which stands validated by a Parsi man while attending Gandhi's Quit India rally, and his initiation into the world of theatre after meeting Sultan Padamsee

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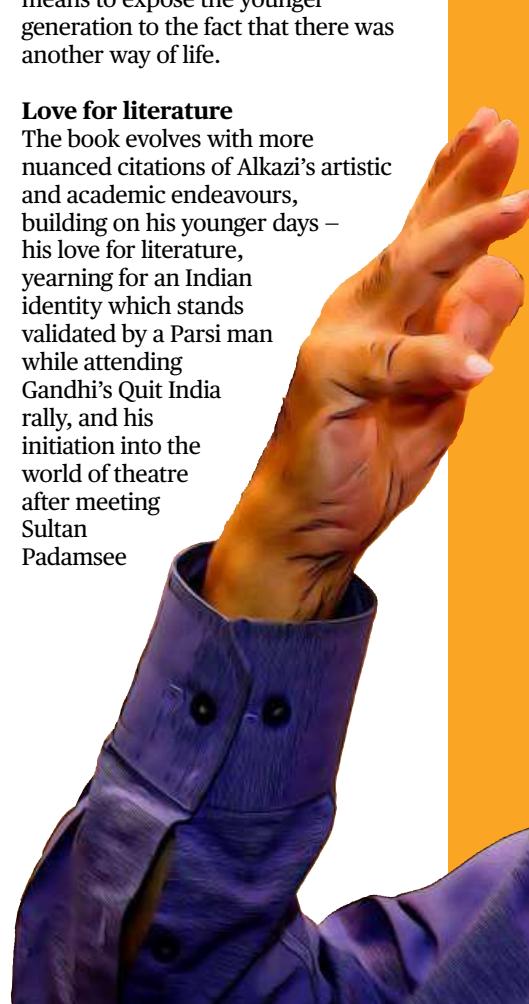


Changemaker (Left) Alkazi with former NSD students, including Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri, at a reception in his honour in Bombay. (Below) From the play *Murder in the Cathedral* that had set design by M.F. Husain. PHOTOS COURTESY: NADIRA BABBAR AND ALKAZI THEATRE ARCHIVES



Centre Stage

A new biography describes how Ebrahim Alkazi, one of the most original and influential directors, transformed Indian theatre



(whose sister he later married). After Sultan's death, he leaves for London to study art but ends up enrolling for theatre at Royal Academy of Dramatic Art only to return to India later. "Alkazi, being the man of his time, was imbibing the art trends of '40s, like Gesamtkunstwerke, where many art mediums such as poetry, painting, writing and theatre were being combined to make one total, integrated piece of art. You had Picasso and Henri Matisse designing theatre sets. So, when Alkazi came back to India, he invited M. F. Husain to design the set of his first play *Murder in the Cathedral*. Then artists like Vasudeo S. Gaitonde and Akbar Padamsee designed sets for him too," she adds.

Amal's book tenders one more interesting aspect of Ebrahim's disposition – of taking people along with him. He not only got his father to sponsor Nissim Ezekiel's trip to London, but also had FN Souza for a flatmate at his accommodation at 38 Lansdowne Crescent. "He was always inviting artists from different fields to collaborate with him. This led him to conceive integrated theatre courses that included a study of dance, mime, literature and the visual arts in his Bombay

years. Later, these ideas were developed to create a more detailed syllabus for a three-year course in theatre studies at NSD. He was also keen on housing the institute in Rabindra Bhawan, to share the space with Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sahitya Akademi and the Lalit Kala Akademi," says Amal.

Alkazi resigned from NSD on May 11, 1977. In her book, Amal states: "It was not the virulent critics, nor theatre people, nor his own beloved students who prompted him to take the final step. It was his realisation that the pettiness of those in power could not find it in themselves to support his brand of futuristic schemes. Tremendously pained that this, in fact, was the new harsh reality, he said of a moribund bureaucracy: There is a lot that our commissars of culture in the last 20 years have to answer for, and history is not going to let them off lightly. They have vitiated the national cultural scene with their pettiness and paranoia; their own embittered frustration; their sickening hysteria. They have crammed the akademi and other cultural bodies of the government with incompetent, servile functionaries; they have reduced them to dismal, arid, fetid charnel houses of culture..."

Free expression
Amal believes that the lack of financial support to Indian theatre has eclipsed its popularity, which is not so much the case with other art forms. "What's worrying at the moment in the art world is that the threat does not only come from political thinking on free expression. It also comes from the fact that art has over the last decade become a commodity, an investment, where the market defines what is good or fashionable art. It's the opposite in theatre. No one earns from theatre. Yet, one hears of sporadic incidents where certain plays have been censored," she says, while reflecting on the nature of art content.

She is driven back to the post-World War II era when artists in Germany went underground. "When someone tries to stifle you, you find new ways of expression. It births innovation which can spur a new movement. In theatre too there are so many new plays, by small groups, like the ones we saw at the recently held Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards. We need more such people and of course the government to support theatre, which is an expensive activity. We are a bit like the farmers," she feels, and suggests that the government must subsidise theatre.

"We have a lot of talent in our country, and so many issues to talk about and discuss. Theatre is the correct medium for these conversations," says Amal Allana.

Tributes to an icon

Renowned dancer and scholar Padma Subrahmanyam in association with Narada Gana Sabha has organised a special event to celebrate the 120 birth anniversary of her father and director K. Subrahmanyam on April 20 (6.30 p.m.) at Sathguru Ganananda Hall. Veteran film director S. P. Muthuraman will preside. N. Kamakodi, MD and CEO, City Union Bank is the chief guest. P. Thangappan, secretary-general, Indo-Russian Cultural and

Friendship Society and Kumar Rajendran, chairman, Dr. MGR-Janaki College of Arts and Science for Women will be the guests of honour and offer tributes. On the occasion, Director K. Subrahmanyam Memorial Awards for Eminence will be given to nagaswaram vidwan Sembanarkoil S.R.G. Rajanna, veteran dance guru N.S. Jayalakshmi, veteran stage artiste Kathadi Ramamurthy and Mali's drama troupe spearheaded by Kundanthai Mali. Two e-books published by Nrithyodaya on the director will be released and *Thirai Ulaga Thanthai*, a film in Tamil on K. Subrahmanyam, by Krishnaswamy Associates will be screened.

Curtains up on KFA's annual theatre festival

Kartik Fine Arts inaugurates the 33rd Kodai Nataka Vizha on April 22, 5.30 p.m., at Narada Gana Sabha Hall.

E.S.L. Narasimhan, former Governor of Telangana, will be the chief guest. Ramkumar Ganesh, Sivaji Productions, the guest of honour, will present a talk 'Shri Sivaji Ganeshan and Theatre'. S.N. Srikanth, president, Kartik Fine Arts, will preside over.

The annual vizha is a much anticipated one in Tamil theatre world. It is a 12-day series that provides a platform for both amateur and established theatre groups. Besides, it encourages young actors, directors and writers to showcase their skill. Every year awards are also given under various categories including Best Play, Best Actor, Best Child Artist, Best Director and Best

Supporting Actor. This year's award function will be held on June 1 and winners will be chosen from among the plays staged at the festival.

The 33rd edition, from April 22 to May 3 (7 p.m. and non-ticketed), will showcase the following plays, which will be premiered at the Vizha.

● **April 22:** Sathy Sai Creations' *Pattanathil Bootham* by Ezhichur Aravindan.

● **April 23:** Legally Yours' *Prananathan* by Satish Chandrasekaran.

● **April 24:** Prasiddhi Creations' *Ambi Mama* by Ambi Raghavan.

● **April 25:** Brahma Fine Arts' *Gnana Thangame* by K. Prakash.

● **April 26:** JC Creations presents *Meendum Thanikkudithanam* by V.P.S. Sriraman.

● **April 27:** Naatyaa Naadha Nataka Sangamam's *Vallamai Thaaraayoh* by T.V. Radhakrishnan.

● **April 28:** thRee will stage *Kaatchi Pizhaigalo* by V. Sreevathson.

● **April 29:** Gurukulam Original Boyz Co.'95 presents *Idhu Dhaan Swargam* by M.B. Moorthy.

● **April 30:** Koothapiran's Navabharath Theatres' *Surukku Pai* by Ratnam Koothapiran.

● **May 1:** PMG Mayurapriya's *Big Boss* by P. Muthukumaran.

● **May 2:** Komal Theatre's *Roudhram Pazhagu* by Dharini Komal.

● The series concludes on **May 3** with Dummies Drama's new play *Thotra Mayakkanglo* by Sridhar Ramaswamy.

A band of boys

After the Grammy win, violin exponent Ganesh Rajagopalan will perform in Chennai on April 21 (6 p.m.) at Narada Gana Sabha. Titled 'Grammy and the Next-Gen' the concert will also feature Akshey Ganesh on the violin and Anantha R Krishnan on the mridangam and members of Staccato band. Ganesh was part of the studio album 'This Moment' that won the Grammy for Best Global Music Album. Known for his experiments with strings, Ganesh has struck a fine balance between traditional and contemporary music. Tickets on [bookmyshow](#).



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Sreevalsan Thiyyadi

By catching talent young and nurturing their skill in groups, S. Ramanathan adhered to the Suzuki method of education that gave Carnatic music eminent practitioners of varying styles, pointed out vocalist S. Sucharithra, who is also the legendary musician's granddaughter.

Letting his students choose their tuition time on a first-come-first-served basis at his Chennai home, the pedagogy was a classic example of creating the right learning environment. Sucharithra spoke about Ramanathan's life as a musician and guru in her two-hour talk titled 'A Day with Dr S. Ramanathan'. It was held recently at Ragasudha Hall, under the aegis of Parivadini.

Ramanathan (1917-1988) never kept exclusive slots for seniors, juniors or beginners. He did not encourage notating while teaching ragas or compositions, instead upheld the strength of oral tradition in Carnatic music. These showed his allegiance to the Talent Education programme formulated by Japanese violinist Shinichi Suzuki, whose philosophy prescribed educating people of all levels of ability, promoting peer relationships and listening to music routinely.

Teaching sessions
The first teaching session at Ramanathan's modest house began at 6.30 a.m. "Once this batch of eight to ten students disbursed, there used to be a two-hour training session ending at 10 a.m. This would be followed by lessons on the veena. He was also proficient in playing the instrument. Then there would be classes in the evening and night. Besides home tuitions, he presented lectures at institutions such as Kalakshetra and Kalapeetham," recalled Sucharithra.

The scholar's day typically began around 5 a.m. with violin practice. "We kids would be in the room, playing. Our mischiefs least irked grandpa," reminisced Sucharithra, whose father is the famed recordist HMV Raghu (K.S. Raghunathan). At noon, even if the sun was merciless, Ramanathan would step out and attend to household errands. "He'd be soaked in sweat but



The maestro up close

S. Ramanathan's granddaughter and vocalist S. Sucharithra on the man behind the musician

would never crib about the weather." His food habits were simple. Late afternoons were spent reading research material.

According to Sucharithra, Ramanathan had a photographic memory when it came to books. "He would clarify doubts by referencing specific pages. Equally amazing was his expertise in drawing conclusions by linking nuggets of information."

When Ramanathan moved from Madurai to Madras in the mid-1970s, he brought along a "lorry-load" of books.

Fascinated by the beauty of music – not just Carnatic – Ramanathan never engaged in trivial conversations. "Kind,

Life sketch Sucharithra at the event and S. Ramanathan PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND THE HINDU ARCHIVES

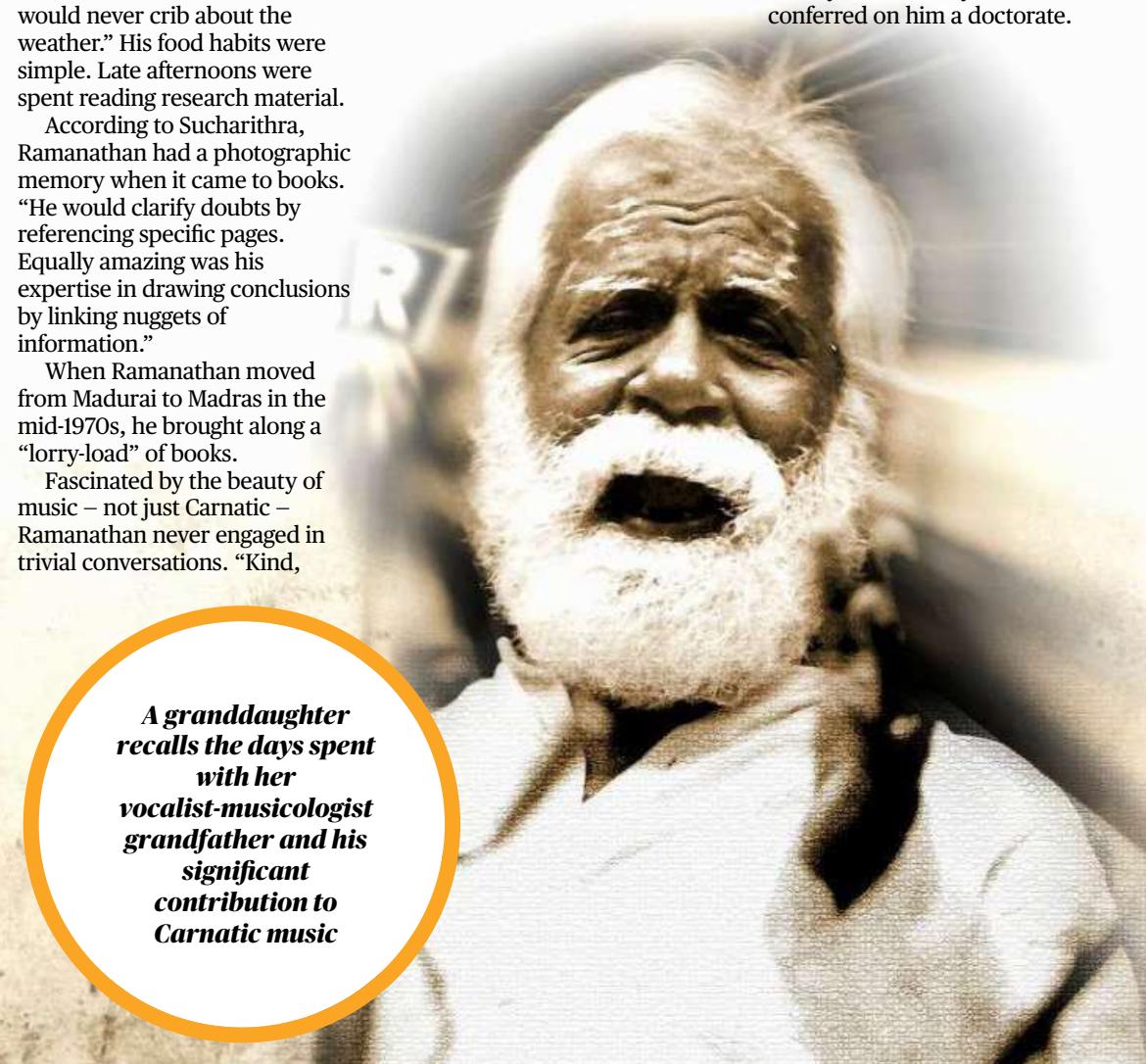
humble and approachable, none would have heard him speak ill of or belittle fellow musicians.

Penchant for straight notes
During Margazhi festivals, Ramanathan followed a busy schedule. It didn't include just concerts, he was keen in promoting the bhajan sampradaya, and would participate in *unchavittis* in *mada veedhis* around the Kapaleeshwar temple in Mylapore.

Ramanathan was keen to know more about pre-Tyagaraja compositions, and delved deep into the works of Bhadrachalam Ramadas, Annamacharya and Purandaradasa. While popularising *Kavadicchinthu*, he also tuned kritis by contemporaries such as Ambujam Krishna and Tulasivanan Ramachandran Nair.

With his open-throated singing and penchant for straight notes, he "never generated surplus sangatis," as violinist M. Chandrasekharan used to say. Sucharithra also played his records at the event.

However, there was no mention about the days spent by the ethnomusicologist at Wesleyan University, which conferred on him a doctorate.



A granddaughter recalls the days spent with her vocalist-musicologist grandfather and his significant contribution to Carnatic music

Unconventional choices

Sooraj Nambiar's *Vikramorvaseeyam* brought into focus Koodiyattam's expanding repertoire

reunion with Urvasi.

Pururavas next hugs a vine thinking it to be Urvasi. The divine power of the gem immediately transforms it into Urvasi, who carries the king to the cloud.

Sooraj's experience and creativity came through during the section where he interacts with the animals in the forest. While the unique technique of 'pakarnattam' in Koodiyattam is usually employed for the portrayal of multiple characters by the actor, here it served to represent animals and birds. The peacock dance appeared majestic. Impressive were the antics of birds, insects, animals and the river.

Sooraj's choreography deserves special mention. The swara (raga) arthan was selected for 'moolal' and 'paadal' (humming and singing) during the pravesakam (entry) of the hero to describe his mood. Also, the jumping on one leg was an unusual way to convey the emotional turmoil of the king.

For the chari (gait) of the peacock, the indigenous rhythm of marma was employed, which enhanced the appeal of this scene. Mizhavu artistes Kalamandalam Rajeev and Kalamandalam Hariharan need to be credited for choosing this.

The performance concluded with the customary 'Mudiakkitha'.

The team also comprised Kalanilayam Unnikrishnan on the edakka and Saritha Krishnakumar on the talam.

'Unmatta Vikramam' was the first in-house production presented under the auspices of Tripudi, the new cultural outfit, formed in memory of Sooraj's grandmother Brahmani Pattu artiste Savithri Amma.

Venu who broke the norm and performed Kalidas's *Abhignanasakutalam* in 2003. The worldwide recognition it received encouraged Venu to stage the first three Acts of *Vikramorvaseeyam*.

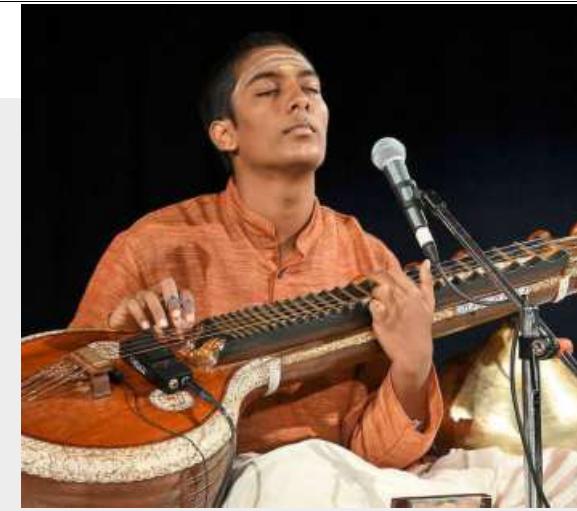
Recently, Sooraj Nambiar, an ace performer and a disciple of the maestro Ammannur Madhava Chakyar, sprang a surprise by presenting the fourth Act – for the first time in the history of Koodiyattam. With experience of over three decades in this art form, Sooraj premiered his production *Unmatha Vikraman* at Natanakairali, Irinjalakuda.

The two-hour solo play was an exposition of Sooraj's histrionics as

well as his dexterity as a choreographer.

The play highlighted episodes that ensue after Urvasi and King Pururavas get separated and how it affected Pururavas, who wandered recklessly in the forest in search of her.

While journeying through the forest, Pururavas enquires about Urvasi from peacock, cuckoo, swan, elephants and the river. All of them seem to be indifferent to his queries. Finally, he finds the Samgamaniya gem (formed from the juice of the hibiscus flower that flowed from the feet of Parvathy) among the rocks. Legend has it that this could be instrumental in his



Twin delight Ramana Balachandran at one of his earlier concerts in Chennai. PHOTO: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

The fine art of balancing

Ramana Balachandran's voice sounded as melodious as his veena

N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

Musiri House was jam-packed. Veena concerts are usually poorly attended but Ramana Balachandran has carved his own fan base. Ramana, along with Anantha R. Krishnan on the mridangam, presented a three-hour chamber concert that left the audience wanting more. A fine sense of balance prevailed throughout the recital.

Ramana is blessed with a voice that almost acts as an extension of his veena. A few years ago, there was criticism in some quarters that Ramana's performances involved more singing than playing the veena and that it was slightly distracting to listeners. But today, Ramana has managed to balance these aspects favourably. Listeners have also got attuned to his distinct style of delivery that seems to work well, especially when it comes to retaining the audience's attention.

Clear diction

Instrumentalists experience a unique challenge when it comes to manodharma and that is executing clearly on their vadhyams what they conceive in their mind spontaneously. Ramana's alapana sections sparked with clarity. This can only be attributed to his effortless execution of ideas almost instantaneously as he envisions them. Take for instance, his exploration of Natakapriya – it was truly a free-flowing gayaki style alapana that comes after deep engagement with the raga and unparalleled control over the instrument. Even the alapana performed as part of the RTP in Khamas was extraordinarily visualised. Ramana's raga alapanas clearly emphasise his distinct approach to handling ragas – extempore outpourings that are a result of extreme concentration and rigorous practice, which requires considerable intellectual balancing.

His tanam in Khamas was clearly unconventional and a search on its own. It can only be described as an effort to expand the potential of the instrument itself, similar to what the great S. Balachander did.

Swarakalpanas were included in the initial Andholika kriti ('Raga sudha rasa') and the

Natakapriya piece ('Idi samayamu'). The Andholika swaras, though deceptively simple to hear proved Ramana's technical mastery as he embellished the melkala swaras with super-fast rigorous meetus. The final swara that involved a 'SRM' pattern was magnificently delivered, reminding one of speedy Hindustani taranas performed on the sitar.

Perfect synchrony
Anantha and Ramana seemed to be perfectly in sync with one another during the kalpanaswara sections, almost as if everything was rehearsed well in advance. It is appreciable that Anantha could anticipate almost every move of Ramana instinctively, especially during the swaras at the charanam 'Murahara mandara' in Natakapriya.

Anantha struck a desirable balance between unobtrusive and loud throughout the recital, knowing how to skilfully highlight and complement Ramana's hard work. Ramana exploited the tala well to perform some complex rhythmic exercises in the swaras with Anantha tracing the patterns on the mridangam, proving to be a fun and wholesome experience for the excited audience. Whether it was a swara centred around a principal note or a swara involving judicious usage of jantais, Ramana displayed some brilliant ideas. The pallavi line for the RTP in a simple rendu kalai Adi talam 'Thiruvilaru alladhu enna saathiyan annamalai ramanarin' was demonstrated vocally by Ramana before he took a deep dive through his vaadhyam, ending with a pleasant ragamalika suite that enhanced the scheme of the pallavi.

The other compositions played were Syama Sastr'i's 'Devi brova' (Chintamani), 'Manadho kadho' (Kapi), 'Unnai minaindhale' (Chencherutti) and 'Kaya hi pandhari' (Abhang). The concert ended with a traditional prayer to Arunachala Shiva of Tiruvannamalai.

The veena, originally designed for chamber performances retains its sheen when performed in small spaces like Musiri House. This particular recital was special, as it was organised to mark Musiri Subramania Iyer's 125th birth anniversary.

An eclectic mix



Under the auspices of Mahendradhwani, the following programmes will be held at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. Details: **April 21, 6 p.m.:** Yaadgaar Taraane Band, Mumbai, celebrates the centenary of Talat Mahmood with a show featuring singers Usha Raj, K.R. Ravi and G.D. Sharma.

April 22, 4.30 p.m.: O.S. Mukundan's namasankirtanam for Thirupoonthuruthy Sri Narayana Tirtha Swamigal Trust as part of the seventh year remembrance day of Thirupoonthuruthy V. Venkatesan. This will be followed by Amritha Murali's vocal concert at 6.40 p.m.

April 24, 6.15 p.m.: Erode Balaji's 'Rama Bhakti Samrajyam' discourse.

April 25, 6.15 p.m.: A thematic presentation by Spencer Venugopal's compositions by Malladi Suri Babu with M. Sreeramprasad and M. Ravikumar.



The architects of Koodiyattam, the Sanskrit theatre tradition that survives only in Kerala, is the Chakyar community for whom the performance of the art form is 'Kuladharma' (family duty). While the works of various well-known poets have remained the mainstay of this art form, it is surprising to note that the Chakyars have been less enthusiastic about the works of Kalidas, who is popular across the globe.

It was Koodiyattam exponent G.



Dramatic
Sooraj's performance was unusual as it was based on a play by Kalidas.

PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

S. Ramanathan's granddaughter and vocalist S. Sucharithra on the man behind the musician

well as his dexterity as a choreographer. The play highlighted episodes that ensue after Urvasi and King Pururavas get separated and how it affected Pururavas, who wandered recklessly in the forest in search of her.

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Sawaal Jawaab Pt. Shankar Ghosh with Bickram Ghosh and Tanmoy Bose. PHOTO: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

for his impeccable communication skills. He was trained under masters of three main tabla gharanas - Farrukhabad (Pt. Gyan Prakash Ghosh), Punjab (Ustad Feroz Khan) and Lucknow (Pt. Sudharshan Adhikari.) Amongst his many students today are his son Bickram Ghosh, Tanmoy Bose, Arup Chatterji, and Parimal Chakravorty.

Anaddha not only traces the history of tabla and its practitioners but also gives practical lessons on how to play, methods of practising layakari, drumming technique, and compositions of different gharanas.

The books are fascinating treasure troves of information such as the differences in tabla terminology and why some gharanas refer to rhythm compositions as 'rela' while others call them 'quaida'.

The forward sums it all up: "The information I have given in this book on Teen taal and Jhap taal is enough for students to play an hour-long lahara," wrote Pt. Shankar Ghosh.

The chapter on 'sangat' (means accompaniment) is a

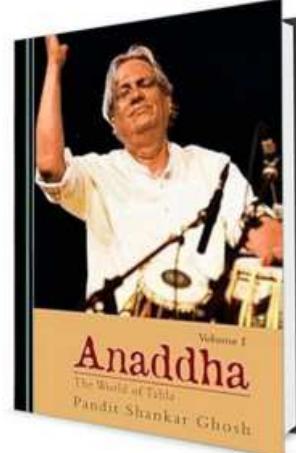
must read for tabla accompanists. It explains how to play for artistes belonging to different styles. The author lists three types of sangat – saath sangat, gun sangat and sawaal jawaab.

There is a full chapter dedicated to the ten aspects or *prana* of taal as enunciated by Narada in his *Sangeet Makarand* (approx. 12th century CE). The author explains that the Carnatic system of tala is based on one of these 10 aspects referred to as 'anga', and there are six kinds of 'angas'. The chapter concludes with the author writing, "The practice of these 10 'pranas' of taal has now almost fallen into disuse. However, I believe a proper study of these principles will add a new dimension to our music."

Volume I also comprises an essay by Pt. Gyan Prakash Ghosh, guru of Pt. Shankar Ghosh, who makes a significant point that the tabla is essentially a medium of vocal recitation, which on entering the field of vocal music as a supportive instrument transformed into an attractive art of percussion music. He also emphasises the need to standardise and regulate the art form.

Volume 2 delves deep into the subject by tracing the origins of percussion instruments through written records from second century onwards. This leads to a study of laya, taal, pakhawaj gharanas, and tabla playing styles. Interestingly, the family tree of exponents of the Delhi, Lucknow Farrukhabad and Banaras gharanas also find mention in the books.

Anaddha provides a valuable insight into the world of percussion and the philosophy that guides it. The book will help experts and young enthusiasts experience the joy of engaging with rhythm.



Shailaja Khanna

Anaddha - The World of Tabla published by Birutjatio Sahitya Sammilani, Kolkata, is an English translation of the original two-volume book in Bengali titled *Tihai er Sutra*. Interesting and informative, it is a must-have for students of tabla.

The word 'anaddha' refers to the skin over a hollow instrument that helps create sound. So, it refers to any drum, and not just the tabla.

Maestro Pt. Shankar Ghosh (1935-2016) was also known

Tabla talk

Anaddha, the English translation of Pt. Shankar Ghosh's Bengali book, takes the readers into the world of rhythm

Bharatanatyam solo

- The Music Academy has organised Shruthipriya Vignesh's Bharatanatyam performance as part of HCL Concert series on April 25, 6 p.m., at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall.
- Natyaramgam, the dance wing of Narada Gana Sabha, will present the following Bharatanatyam performances at its mini hall on April 20. Chaitra Rao, disciple of Indira Kadambi will perform at 6 p.m. followed by Jishnu Gopi, student of Kalakshetra Foundation at 7.30 p.m.



Listening session

R.R. Sabha and Gaanapriya Foundation will jointly present ConcertOpedia, the monthly guided listening sessions of past masters. This month's session, to be held on April 21, 11.30 a.m., will feature excerpts from Palani Subramania Pillai's concert recordings. Mridangist K. Arunprakash will share insights about Subramania Pillai's music. Venue: R.R. Sabha, Mylapore.



Dedicated to Syama Sastri

Kedaram has organised Archana and Aarathi's vocal duet as part of Syama Sastri day celebrations to be held on April 20, 6 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mylapore. The duo will be accompanied by Deepika Venkatraman on the violin, Arjun Suresh on the mridangam and Trichy K. Murali on the ghatam.

Music for a cause

Girijashankar Sundaresan teams up with Madan Mohan and Sai Shankar to present 'Concert for Autism' on April 20, 6 p.m. The event, to be held at TEACH Auditorium, Taramani, is jointly presented by Go Beyond Autism Centre and Bharata Kalanjali.

On a Dikshitar trail

Veenavaadhini Sampradaya Sangit Trust celebrates the 249th jayanti utsavam of Muthuswami Dikshitar with a special two-day concert series on April 27 and 28, at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. The line-up begins with Anahita and Apoorva's vocal duet (April 27, 4.45 p.m.) followed by G. Ravikiran's concert (6.30 p.m.). Day two features Revathi Sadasivam's veena recital at 9.30 a.m. The evening programme includes Veenavaadhini's thematic presentation 'Shubhakara Kaveri Teera', tracing the journey of Dikshitar along river Cauvery at 4.15 p.m. followed by J.B. Sruthi Sagars flute recital at 6.30 p.m.

CMYK



Annual art festival



The second and last day of the 20th edition of Kala Sampada, hosted by the Rukminidevi Natyakshetra Foundation, Mogappair East, will feature 'Andal Puranam' a dance drama by the students of The Rukminidevi Natyakshetra Foundation on April 21. The story of Andal Nachiyar, her undying devotion to Vishnu and her contributions to the Tamil literature will be traced in this production. The two-day event was inaugurated yesterday. Venue: Kalakshetra, Tiruvanmiyur. Time: 6 p.m.

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Different acts

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's annual festival highlighted the diversity in theatre

Suganthy Krishnamachari

Theatre Karpanai Kudhirai's *Tiruchiyyai Meeta Sundarapandian* is about three people, all trying to run away from their problems. After much haggling, taxi driver Sundarapandian (Rajbharath) agrees to take Mohana Priya (Subhiksha) to Tiruchi. Mohana is running away from home for a month! On the way, Peter (Navaneeth), a reporter hoping for a scoop in Tiruchi, and Thanikachalam (Paramesh), who has been rejected by his sweetheart, also hop on. The so-called problems of all three are exaggerated. In the case of Mohana, all she wants is her mother's attention. Peter, very much in love with his wife, is unable to come to terms with her premarital romance. Thanikachalam's love is just an online one. And yet, he wears a woebegone expression. With his earthy philosophy, Sundarapandian eventually helps his passengers bury the ghosts of the past.

Thanikachalam was amusing with his mixed metaphors and his torrent of meaningless messages. Was the character Peter deliberately named so? In Tamil Nadu, "talking Peter" means to show off by talking in English all

the time. And this is precisely what the character Peter does in the early stages of the play. Snippets of songs from old Tamil films, giving a hint about the scenes to follow, was a smart touch.

Writer-director Vedaran Rajkumar safely said in his introduction that the play was "attempted humour." It was precisely that. Arunkumar's journey to Tiruchi was well begun, but he has to travel a lot more to come up with a full fledged comedy.

Revisiting history
In Theatrekaran's *Blackout*, (directed by Raghavender Siva and Sabarivas), Namasivayam (Bharath Vinayakamurthy) is an inveterate miser yet his son tries to cagde money off him. Namasivayam's daughter is in love, but her father will not give his consent to the marriage.



Touch of comedy (Top)
Tiruchiyyai Meeta Sundarapandian and *Blackout*
PHOTOS: S.R.
RAGHUNATHAN AND M.
SRINATH

discover the idol of Murugan missing. It was a scenario that totally depended on the actors' skills. The two rose to the occasion with their brilliant comic timing and dialogue delivery, making the play thoroughly enjoyable.

Dabba Nadgam by Abhishek Srinivasan showed how theatrical elements can be used to create maximum impact. The actors dressed in black and donning different roles moved within a frame. They sometimes transformed into props and at others created vocal percussion. The slow motion effects reminiscent of cinematic fight scenes added to the viewing experience.

Meeting - the Conscience directed by Prasanna Rajaram resonated with the current times with its take on two politicians meeting to form an alliance. As a counterpoint, two other actors emerge as their alter egos highlighting their background details. The humour, though slightly overdone, lent an edge.

Akkara Adisal was about a lawyer, his wife and a court case. Directed by Aiswarya M, the domestic scenes were impressive but the courtroom scene was lacklustre.

Puratchi Onguga by Karthik Mohan highlighted how unemployed youth in the 1980s were drawn into political movements. It was a powerful play but the comic elements lacked punch.

At a time when the attention span of viewers are shrinking, these short duration plays come as a welcome format. The large audience turnout proved it.



V.V. Ramani

The sounds of music and dance start ebbing as the sun peaks and heatwave grips Chennai. To bring some respite and change of scenario, the city sabbas turn their attention to theatre by hosting festivals of plays. The themes range from comedy and historical to social.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan recently presented its week-long annual theatre festival. This edition featured four Tamil plays, one bi-lingual and a Dramathon (collection of six short plays).

Dramathon featured prize-winning entries from three different festivals – Short and Sweet Festival by Prakriti Foundation, Kiss Festival by Poochus Productions and Ten Ally Drama by Theatre Marina. The diverse themes and the standard of presentation made the short plays engrossing.

The travails and angst of devadasis who were left asunder by the Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act



was the theme of *Deva Kanya* directed by Namritha Kalai. To communicate the emotional turmoil and social milieu in a short span of 15 minutes is a mammoth task. The actors performed with great conviction and the play left an indelible impact. However, costume design reflective of the period, and entries and exits needed little more attention.

Perfect timing

Muruganai Kanom directed by Arun Rajkumar was an interesting story of how a grandmother and grandson, selling pooja articles outside a temple, spin a tale when they

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