

friday Review

THE HINDU

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The tremolo effect

Subha J Rao

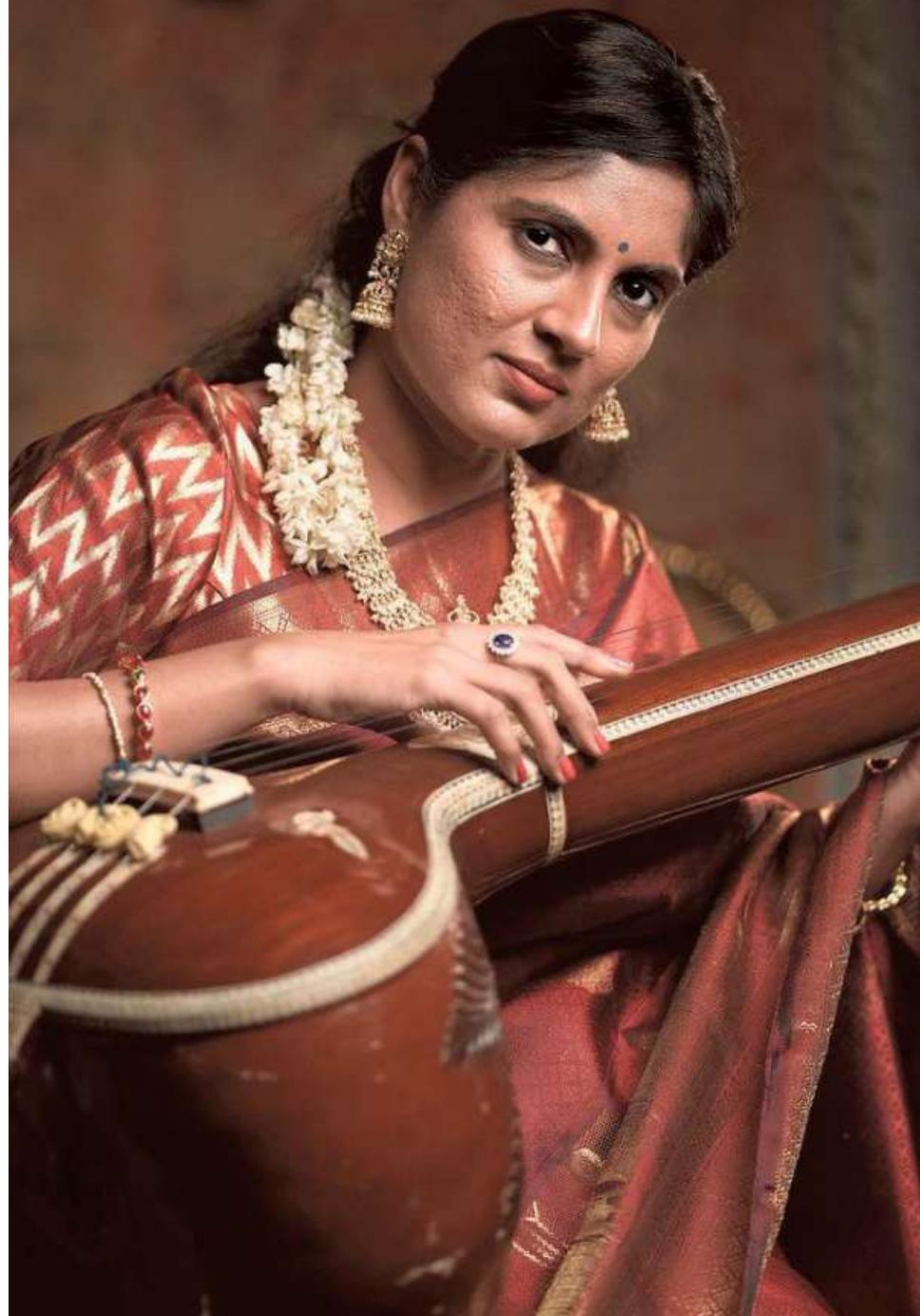
Last week, when the world heard the songs of Mani Ratnam's *Thug Life* at the audio launch, they found an A.R. Rahman album that catered to different moods all at once – among others, there was the rousing 'Vinveli nayaka' by Shruti Haasan, the lilting 'Mutha mazhai' in Chinmayi's voice, and Charulatha Mani's soothing yearning-lament 'Anju vanna poove', which featured the tremolo technique, drawn from the opera tradition.

'Anju vanna' also turned out to be an educative experience for the audience, many of whom wondered at the 'special effects' in the song. Charulatha Mani, a Carnatic singer who dabbles in film music and holds a doctorate in 'Hybridising Carnatic Music and Early Opera' from Australia, spoke about how the powerful lyrics nudged her to try the tremolo in some passages and how it met the composer's approval.

Charulatha is a familiar face to followers of both Carnatic and film music. She has always been this bridge between the two with her Isai Payanam series, where she makes classical music more approachable to those who do not know it, using film music as a guide of sorts. Inversely, this also helps purists see the innate classical influence on film music, sometimes unexpectedly, in pulsating numbers. She has rendered some too – more famously, 'Uchi mandaila' and 'Chillax', both for music director Vijay Antony.

Soothing verses
"When I read Karthik Netha's lyrics, I knew it was a lullaby, but the words 'Kaatha vaaren' felt like a mother's reassurance. There was also a tinge of pain and helplessness. The lines 'Pinju veral enge, konjum kural

Singer Charulatha Mani embellished the 'Anju vanna poove' song from *Thug Life* with a technique drawn from the opera tradition



enge' (Where are the tiny fingers, where is that affectionate voice), tempted me to try the tremolo, which dates back to the Early Opera period and was the top ornamentation of that time. Rahman sir said it sounded effective, and so we used it for the poignant lines," Charulatha says. The tremolo lends a trembling effect to the voice. "It is the ornament that connects to the soul," adds Charulatha. "In a strange way, this showed me, yet again, that what we learn stays with us, and resurfaces when we least expect it to."

And then, the researcher in Charulatha takes over. "The tremolo was considered important to bring emotion back to music after the spiritual bent of the Renaissance era. And my PhD was on the 17th Century Italian Opera, when Claudio Monteverdi composed the first opera L'Orfeo in 1607, in the city of Mantua," she says.

Call of the opera
Why did someone, tuned in to Carnatic and film music, seek the opera? Charulatha credits her husband Karthik Balasubramanian with this. "I entered a world of music I was not familiar with, outside the Carnatic realm and Western pop. He introduced me to

Puccini, Verdi, Wagner, coloratura singing in Bellini and Donizetti." Then, she introduced him to the earliest opera ever, with the work of Claudio Monteverdi when she started her PhD. "That is an interesting time in music. There was a lot of cross-cultural pollination between the East and the West. Oriental sounds traversed through Venice, which was seen as a hub of multi-culturalism. They were privy to sounds we are still discovering through their scores, that are heavily ornamented. When you look at a bar, a measure of time in music, they have gone up to the 1/64th bar. Their passaggio is similar to the sangathis and brigas. And, it has all been written down, note-to-note."

When doing her PhD, Charulatha delved deeper into opera music. "My professors were experts in the early opera, and I saw the commonalities with our music. I learnt Italian and, under their guidance, travelled to Mantua where Monteverdi lived and worked. 'La musica meets Saraswati' was a fusion piece in my production *Monteverdi Reimagined*.

Academic pursuit
All this cross-cultural integration has resulted in interesting things – Charulatha published several papers from her thesis, learnt to support her voice better with diaphragmatic breathing and navigate intricate sangathis with ease.

Most importantly, she says, "it taught me to bring back the emotional connect in singing". This helped her immensely in film singing.

These interactions also saw Charulatha go back to her roots and discover that Musiri Subramania Iyer sang the tremolo naturally.

When Charulatha began her career in film music in 2007 with 'kuthu' songs, there was not much protest of the kind that greeted the late actress Srividya (daughter of the stalwart M.L.

Vasanthakumari) when she sang 'Vethala potta sokkul' in the 1992 Karthik-starrer *Amaran*. "I think my audience was ready for me to make that transition. I am their 'chella ponnu' (fond child) and they knew I was not someone who would be satisfied walking the regular path. Sometimes, after Isai Payanam, they would request me to sing these film songs, and I would oblige. GS Mani Sir was the pioneer who bridged classical and film music in the form of a lec-dem and I was tempted to take it to the concert stage, because both gave me so much joy. I wanted people to experience that joy of discovery and the knowledge that every form of music dips into a common pool. Carnatic music is usually consumed with a certain sense of reverence. The series helped democratise classical music, and made it more accessible."

Other than singing, Charulatha has also published academic papers – there are not many practitioners who publish. "When I started, and wanted to find citations, I was primarily reading Western researchers speaking about Carnatic music from their perspective. It flummoxed me that while on a quest to decolonise music, we were still dependent on their earlier writing. As an insider, my perspective was very different, and that is something my supervisors valued. But, because I was seeing it through the lens of academic rigour, I developed objective clarity too. But, it was not an easy position to be in."

On a lullaby trip
Artistic research is a burgeoning field. When Charulatha did her post-doctoral studies in lullabies, she received a grant to work with refugee and migrant mothers in the perinatal phase in Brisbane, Australia. "They would all sing in their language, and I got to hear so many lullabies. I published a book *Sing to Connect*. But, more importantly, they spoke of refugee camps where they lost kids, found it hard to even get a meal. I was with them for 11 Tuesdays, and it was an probably the most enriching experience."

She might probably add to it the *Thug Life* experience, because it came to her after five long years – her last was the *Mahanati* hit number 'Sada nannu'. "I recorded 'Anju vanna' in December 2023 and instinctively knew this was special, not just because of the people involved in it. In just 72 hours after the song released, life changed. It has left me with – and I am borrowing Karthik Netha's words – *puthunarchi* (a feeling of being refreshed)."



High note Charulatha Mani's voice soars with 'Anju vanna poove' from *Thug Life*. (Above) With director Mani Ratnam and music composer A.R. Rahman.

PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

CULTURE BRIEFS**Gita lecture**

Vedanta Academy, Pune, presents a four-day lecture series 'Ancient Wisdom for Modern minds', based on the 12th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. To be presented by Sunandaji, it will take place from June 10 to 13, 6.30 p.m.-7.45 p.m., at The Music Academy. The session will focus on the essence of devotion.

Register at <https://www.vedantainstitutemadras.org/lecturesbysunandaji>.

Forty students from Vedanta Academy, founded by Swami A. Parthasarathy, will attend the lectures as part of their educational visit to Chennai, which includes cultural and spiritual experiences. More information is available on www.vedantaworld.org

Anniversary special

Chennai Fine Arts celebrates the 114th birth anniversary of Palghat Mani Iyer on June 10, 6 p.m., at Srinivasa Sastri Hall, Luz, Mylapore.

Legendary musician T.V. Gopalakrishnan will preside and present the Palghat Mani Iyer Puraskar to ghatam vidwan Suresh Vaidyanathan. This will be followed by Mallari Malai, a special music performance featuring Ayyarmalai A.B. Selvam (nagaswaram), Akshay Padmanabhan (vocal), Kovilur K.G. Kalyanasundaram (special thavil) and Suresh Vaidyanathan (ghatam).



Tyagarajswamy', a series of monthly concerts, based on these kritis will be inaugurated with A. Kanyakumari's violin concert. Srikanth and Siva Teja will accompany her on the violin. June 10, 6.15 p.m.: Thiruvachagam musical discourse series will be presented by Madhusudhanan Kalaiselvan with Bhavya Hari on vocals. June 12, 6.15 p.m.: Iyer Sisters's vocal concert themed on 20th century composers.

Thematic series

Madhuradhwani has organised the following performances at its Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore.

Schedule: Today, 6.15 p.m.: As part of the 250th birth anniversary of Muthuswami Dikshitar, Ravi Rajagopalan will present a curated session 'Unique and Novel compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar'. He will be supported by Amritha Murali on vocals, Madan Mohan on violin and S. Hariharan on mridangam. June 7, 6.15 p.m.: 'Ekaika raga kritis of saint



(violin) and Nochur Nagaraj (mridangam). ● **Rukmini Arts and Music Trust** and Gaanapriya Foundation jointly present 'Hymns from Tiruvachagam', to be rendered by Gayathri Girish on June 7, 6.15 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall. She will be accompanied by violinist M. Vijay and mridangist Kumbakonam Swaminathan.

Music concerts

Narada Gana Sabha Trust presents the following vocal concerts at its mini hall.

Today, 6.30 p.m.: Seetha Narayanan with Usha Rajagopalan (violin) and J. Vaidyanathan (mridangam).

● **June 12, 6.30 p.m.:** Jayakrishnan Unni with Deepika Venkatraman

(violin) and Nochur Nagaraj (mridangam).

● **Rukmini Arts and Music Trust** and Gaanapriya Foundation jointly present 'Hymns from Tiruvachagam', to be rendered by Gayathri Girish on June 7, 6.15 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall. She will be accompanied by violinist M. Vijay and mridangist Kumbakonam Swaminathan.



P Srihari

With collaborations and thematic presentations increasingly shaping the Carnatic concert scene, musicians are steadily moving beyond convention in pursuit of novelty and artistic synergy. Vocalists Vidya Kalyanaraman and Brindha Manickavasakan are among those who exemplify this evolving trend. The two joined forces to present a soulful recital of exclusive Syama Sastri kritis for Madhuradhwani at Arkay Convention Center.

Such ventures, though, entail their own challenges, like reconciling pantataram variations, managing sruti alignment, sharing of musical space between co-leads and ensuring seamless melodic flow. It is to the duo's credit that it succeeded in navigating these with aplomb, ably supported by Madan Mohan (violin), Poongulum Subramanian (mridangam) and Sai Subramaniam (morsing).

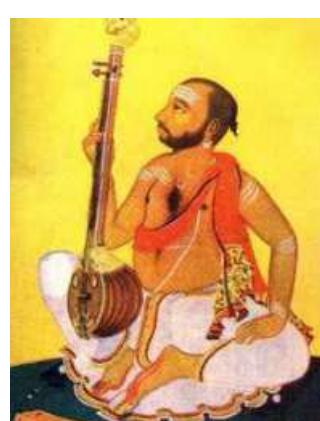
Syama Sastri, the quintessential Devi upasaka, infused his kritis with musical gravitas and lyrical candour. It is believed that he deviated from his central devotional focus (the goddess) only on two occasions: one in praise

United by song

Vidya Kalyanaraman and Brindha Manickavasakan come together to present a concert of Syama Sastri's kritis

of Kanchi Varadaraja perumal ('Samini rammanave' in Anandabhairavi) and the other for Muthukumara Swami of Vaidheeswaran Kovil ('Sami ninne nammiti' in Begada). Typically set in chowka kaalam (slow tempo), his compositions eschew abstract philosophical overtures and exude meditative depth, with heartfelt supplications to the divine mother.

Sprightly rendition
It made musical sense that Vidya and Brindha began with a varnam, given the composer's languid tempo in kritis. A bright 'Dayanidhe'



Begada set the tone, lifted further by sprightly kalpanaswaras. With 'Brovavamma' in Maanji, the artistes tapped into the

composer's anguish and soulful plea for succour. The layers of sangatis, sung in the unhurried cadence of Misra Chapu, offered an immersive experience.

Kalyani was the first raga taken up for elaboration, with Brindha setting the stage with a measured delineation that tracked its classic contours before soaring smoothly into the tara sthayi. Vidya followed suit, her traversal of the upper octave dotted with delicate phrases. Madan's reflective response on the violin embraced the raga's grandeur with restraint. 'Himadrisuthe pahimaana' in Rupakam was a popular choice, and the niraval and swara exchanges at 'Syamakrishna sodhari gowri' in the charanam underscored the ensemble's spirited engagement.

The rendition of the Yadukulakamboji swarajathi – a crown jewel in Sastri's oeuvre – was dignified in pace and emotive in appeal. Mridangist Subramanian's deftness in gap-filling was well complemented by Sai Subramaniam's crisp plucks on the morsing. The briskness of 'Triloka maatha' in Paras cut through like a flash of lightning in the calm of a moonlit sky.

Meditative Thodi
Thodi featured as the mainstay of the evening. Vidya

initiated the alapana with an introspective tone, and Brindha expanded it with finesse, both balancing imagination and restraint. They also did well to stay rooted in the raga's meditative spirit so very essential to Sastri's compositions, not getting carried away by Thodi's regal sweep and expansive scope. Madan replied with tonal purity and melodic sweetness. There were no surprises in terms of choices of kritis until then, and a rare one was due. As if on cue, the duo obliged with the rendition of 'Emani migula varnintu', imbued with bhava and visranti. The duo skipped the niraval, but the swara sequence in the keezh kaalam was particularly striking.

The tani avartanam saw Subramanian weave a rhythmic tapestry with a blend of supple touches and bold strokes on the mridangam, while Sai Subramaniam added vitality to the percussive dialogue through his animated interplay on the morsing.

'Kanakasaila viharin' in Punnagavarali, another ode to Kamakshi by the composer, was rendered evocatively, before the recital wound up with 'Bruhanayaki' in Madhyamavati.

On an epic scale

Dancer-couple Nirupama and Rajendra revisit the Ramayana in their new work

V.V. Ramani

The Ramayana has been retold through various art forms. Classical dancers, in particular, have been inspired to interpret the epic in their own unique way. Hence, in recent times, we have come across many engaging works based on the Ramayana. The latest is from Bengaluru-based dancer-couple Nirupama and Rajendra, whose production 'Rama Katha Vismaya' was staged recently at Chowdiah Hall in Bengaluru. It featured nearly 60 artistes from their Abhinava Dance Company.

The duo presented the epic as a tale being narrated to Krishna by Yashoda as a bedtime story. When she reaches the sequence where Ravana abducts Sita, little Krishna suddenly leaps out of his bed and shouts, 'Saumitri, bring my bow and arrow', leaving Yashoda both startled and confused. According to Nirupama and Rajendra, this moment, drawn from Leela Sukar's *Krishna Karnamritam*, where Krishna recalls his past life as Rama, inspired them to come up with this

Lakshmana and Sita going into Dandakaranya forest, the appearance of Soorpanaka, Maricha (the golden deer), and finally the abduction of Sita.

Some of the episodes were visualised well. For instance, in the Sita abduction scene, the depiction of Ravana's duality was done convincingly. Ravana is usually portrayed as arriving disguised as a sage seeking alms, only to disappear and re-emerge in his majestic form. But, here, the variation was creatively presented by two dancers as they appeared on stage and moved in perfect unison to convey the idea that the two person were, in fact, one and the same.

The introduction of Ravana was yet another riveting visualisation. In utter darkness, glowing masks (used to indicate the ten faces of Ravana) began to swirl across the stage, before gradually settling into a formation behind the dancer – the embodiment of Ravana, the ten-headed king.

Different approach
Even the scene about Rama's exile was dealt with



Visual narrative From 'Rama Katha Vismaya' presented by Nirupama and Rajendra at Chowdiah Hall, Bengaluru.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



inner truth that they revealed/shared with humanity. The more I read about them and their works, the more I found similarities in their concepts."

Each piece in *Bhakti* is centered around one evocative work by each mystic, interpreted by different dancers. The production features 10 dancers belonging to different styles, from across the country.

The creative process
Explaining the process of bringing the production to life, Mayuri says, "The researchers (Pooja Kaushik and Nandana Gopal) brought different aspects to the table, each with their own versions of stories that correlated well. Post this, was the process of song selection. Next was to add movements to the texts, prose and music".

Talking about the creative process, Mayuri, who was joined by Madhuri in choreographing the dance, shares: "The poetry dictated what the movement language should be. For instance, for poetry from Bengal, we drew inspiration from Uday Shankar's dance style, for Amir Khusro, we brought in Sufi-Kathak and so on. The dancers coming from different parts of the country lent their own cultural diversity to the production."

The production has a contemporary and minimalist approach in every aspect. "This is my simple but powerful response to whatever is happening around us", says Mayuri.

'Bhakti - A Shared Longing' will premiere at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bengaluru, on June 13, 7.30 p.m. Tickets on BookMyShow.

thematic production. Colourful costumes (by Rajendra), vibrant lighting design (by Ajay Vijendra), choreography that incorporates diverse styles, musical score ranging from classical to folk, grand sets and LED projections added to the appeal.

The presentation began with a group of girls wielding peacock feather fans and a group of boys holding bows and arrows, highlighting the common link between Rama and Krishna. Their dynamic formations and movements for this segment, leading to the introduction of Rama, were skilfully choreographed. A brief depiction of Rama's previous avatars by Rajendra was interesting. And Nirupama explored her dramatic skills with conviction in her role as Soorpanakha.

At one corner of the stage, Yashoda continued narrating the story to Krishna. She tells him about how Rama and Lakshmana vanquish the rakshasas, the breaking of Shiva Danush by Rama followed by Sita Swayamvaram, Rama, Nirupama and Rajendra.



The magic of movement

Mayuri Upadhyay, recipient of the Best Original Choreographer Award by Broadway World, premieres her work 'Bhakti- A Shared Longing' on June 13

Shilpa Anandraj

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History shows that Indian classical music and spirituality go hand-in-hand. While Purandaradasa, Jayadeva and Tulsidas are known for the Bhakti Movement, classical dancers and singers too connect more to their art spiritually.

In fact, bhakti is the dominant rasa of most concerts and dance performances.

Classical-contemporary dancer-choreographer Mayuri Upadhyay's new work is no exception. Titled 'Bhakti - A Shared Longing', it will feature verses by Purandaradasa, Akkamahadevi, Kabir, Lal Ded, Tukaram, Andal, Tulsidas, Meerabai, Namdev, Sadasiya Brahmendral, Guru Nanak, Basavanna and Rabindranath Tagore.

To be presented by her institution Nrityarutya, which she founded in 2000 with her sister Madhruv Upadhyay,



'Bhakti... will be premiered in Bengaluru on June 13.

Mayuri describes the production as "a multilingual, multidisciplinary immersive dance-theatre presentation that weaves together the soulful legacies of 13 Indian saints and mystics from across India. The production includes texts, dialogues and different Indian languages."

She also says that dance, for her, "is more than just movement – it is a language, a way of communicating with the world that transcends the limitations of words."

One of her most notable works is the Broadway musical *Mughal-e-Azam*, inspired by the film of the same name, which has had 300 shows across the world. Mayuri, a recipient of the Best Original Choreographer Award (2018) by Broadway World for *Mughal-e-Azam*, returns to the Bengaluru stage with *Bhakti...* after a 14-year hiatus. She has also worked as the lead

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"Bhakti - A Shared Longing" will premiere at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bengaluru, on June 13, 7.30 p.m. Tickets on BookMyShow.

differently. Instead of the usual depiction of the sadness that engulfs the people of Ayodhya when Rama leaves, the dancers showcased the happiness and reverence with which the Dandakaranya forest welcomes them. However, a group of dancers, dressed as flowers, trees, birds and animals, constantly moving on stage was disturbing.

The production aimed to include elements that would enhance the appeal, but the core of Rama's character and the narrative were lost amid a flurry of activity on stage. Some moments of repose could have significantly elevated the impact.

Lyrics were by Shatavadhani R. Ganesh. Music was by Praveen D Rao, who had combined varied sounds and swara patterns to suit the match the high-on-energy choreography. Sometimes a leisurely pace would help the audience connect with the emotions in the story better. Direction and visuals were by Vinod Gowda, and artistic direction and choreography were by Nirupama and Rajendra.



Driven by resilience Rajmohan and Lakshmi Narayanan work tirelessly with artisans (left) to keep the endangered art alive. (Below) Works created at Kalahasti and by Rajamohan. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Kalamkari artist at the age of 15, feels that the market remains uncertain even today though handmade items are slowly regaining appreciation from customers. "We wait for over 20 days for profits to come our way. And if there is a small error, then we lose up to ₹ 17,000 or even ₹ 20,000 – that is how much a fully-worked kalamkari saree can cost," he shares.

People who buy it need to understand the volume of work that goes into making a saree or even a dupatta. "First, the design is traced using charcoal. It is then treated with a mixture of cow's milk, starched and dried. Then, we fill in the black colour, wash and dry it; the process is repeated for each colour," he explains.

Black is derived from rusted iron, yellow from turmeric, and red from cinnamon. A single saree can take 15 to 20 days, depending on the intricacy of the design. "Sales mostly happen through word-of-mouth.

Sometimes, boutiques approach us, but sporadically. We are the only family in this village that makes and sells Kalamkari products commercially," he says and adds that both his sons (still studying) will eventually take up the craft.

Now, with quiet persistence, both Rajmohan and Narayanan ensure that this endangered art is not forgotten. They're not just preserving a technique but a tradition that is passed through generations.

The connecting thread

How Kalamkari, a popular craft of Srikalahasti in Andhra Pradesh, made its way to Thanjavur

When people think of Kalamkari, what first comes to their mind is Srikalahasti or Machilipatnam, and not Karuppur or Thanjavur, though the art form has its roots in the latter towns too. "Kalamkari first found royal patronage in Tamil Nadu in 1540, when Sevappa Nayak, the first Nayaka ruler of Thanjavur, brought a contingent of artists from Karuppur to adorn Thanjavur's palaces and temples," says Kalamkari artist Rajmohan, son of National award-winning Kalamkari artist R. Emperumal. These artists are descendants of migrants from Andhra Pradesh, where Kalamkari originated.

Also known as Chitrapadam ('chitra' meaning picture and 'padam', tracing), the art form was once used to depict stories from the

Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It was later used to create tapestries for palaces, temple decor, panels for door frames, canopies, umbrella covers, door hangings and tubular hangings and even decorating temple chariots. It eventually evolved into wearable art like sarees

and duppattas, and utility items such as bags and bookmarks.

Touch of modernity

As Rajmohan shows us the works of his ancestors, including a tapestry that is more than 400-years-old, he says, "I recreate old pieces with a

touch of modernity, yet try to keep alive the methodology adopted by my ancestors. For instance, he uses freshly-obtained paints or dyes the same day. The paints do not have a shelf life, as they are derived from Nature. I do not use paints or dyes containing preservatives as they do not match the depth and richness that naturally-derived ones impart."

The handmade pens or kalams that he uses are crafted from bamboo and tamarind twigs. While bamboo twigs are used as it is, the tamarind ones are burnt and covered in soil overnight before use.

Rajmohan's family has been practising kalamkari for more than 800 years now. A BFA graduate, who also studied filmmaking from MGR Film Institute, Rajmohan learnt the kalamkari art from his father. "There were no formal classes, I learnt by observing him. My son also learns the same way", he says.

The art form has been slowly fading into obscurity. When royalty

was abolished in India, the patronage disappeared, and with it, the livelihood of many artists. "They were given land and money, but not the means to learn another trade, and hence languished," he shares.

Not far away from Rajmohan's residence, Lakshmi Narayanan keeps the art alive in a different way. "This is an endangered art," says Lakshmi Narayanan, who runs a unit with Kalamkari workers in his two-storeyed home. Narayanan, whose family has been practising the art form, that obtained a GI (geographical indication) tag, for more than 400 years, explains how the motifs and colours set the Karuppur style of Kalamkari apart from the Srikalahasti style.

Narayanan, who began working as a



Echoes of the past

The performance series 'O Gaanewali', an ode to powerful female voices, releases its first EP

Narendra Kusmura

O' Gaanewali' is an ode to those legendary women singers who broke the glass ceiling and engaged with art beyond gender divide. Artistes such as Rasoolan Bai, Gauhar Jaan and Begum Akhtar showed the world how women can pursue their passion without being bogged down by societal norms.

'O Gaanewali', a show that celebrates the beauty of thumri, dadra and ghazal, will launch its first EP - 'O Gaanewali Session 1' at a concert in Mumbai's Royal Opera House on June 7. Having performed 55 shows across India over the past three years, the team behind 'O Gaanewali' series felt it was time to put out a recording. The very first song is Mirza Ghalib's ghazal 'Muddat hui hai yaar ko', which will be followed by a thumri later. 'O Gaanewali' plans to release songs every fortnight.

It is conceptualised and written by Avanti Patel, a Hindustani vocalist, who features along with singer Rutuja Lad in the series. The concert includes theatrical elements such as storytelling. Musical terms will be demonstrated and explained in a conversational mix of Hindi

and English. The shows are directed by theatre personalities Mallika Singh and Meghana AT.

Avanti and Rutuja are trained under senior Hindustani vocalist Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande. The duo also carries the legacy of Ashwini's aunt, Sarla Bhide, a senior disciple of Shobha Guruk. Says Avanti: "It helps that Rutuja and I have the same guru in Ashwini tai, in that, our approach to music is similar."

An interactive show

The idea for the EP, she reveals, originated during the lockdown as part of a series initiated by Harkat Studios. 'O Gaanewali' was presented in March 2022 at the Experimental Theatre of the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA). Soon, offers started coming in, but Avanti wanted the show to be interactive, and educate new listeners about the nuances of thumri. She says, "My knowledge of theatre was limited, but

The show presents thumris and ghazals popularised by legendary women singers such as Begum Akhtar, Rasoolan Bai and Gauhar Jaan.

Mallika and Meghana helped bring out that element and work with musicians and the script." The show was put together after researching the lives and music of legendary women artistes. "We wanted to talk about their hardships and challenges too," adds Avanti.

Rutuja, who had earlier learnt from Jaipur-Atrauli gharana doyenne, Dhondutai Kulkarni, says she had her inhibitions, but quickly adapted to and began enjoying the new format. She explains, "As a classical singer, I was accustomed to the traditional style, where we announce a piece and sing the composition. The directors helped me overcome that."

The theme of the shows keeps changing to add some excitement to the presentation. 'O Gaanewali' has had specials for Holi, monsoons and songs of Shobha Guruk to mark her centenary year, along with love songs and ghazals among others. Avanti says this helps audience come back, as they know they will get something different each time. She adds, "By changing the basic theme, one will look for



The idea of releasing an EP came after many members of the audience asked details about specific songs. "We would tell them to listen to a recording of the original singer, such as Begum Akhtar or Shobha Guruk. Gradually, we thought of recording a few songs that we performed," shares Avanti.

For Avanti, 'O Gaanewali' is a flagship project, as she spends much of her time conceptualising new shows. She is also into composing and is currently composing music for a theatre production. Rutuja, concurrently is into performing classical concerts, with her recent one being in Kolhapur at a mahotsav dedicated to vocalist Manik Bhide, Ashwini's mother and guru.

At the forthcoming concert, at Mumbai's Royal Opera House, the duo will be accompanied by Akshay Jadhav (tabla), Apoorva Petkar (harmonium) and Sandeep Mishra (sarangi). They will present a repertoire of thumri and allied forms, besides some ghazals.

Musical tribute Avanti Patel and Rutuja Lad celebrate the legacy of legends like Begum Akhtar (below). PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & THE HINDU ARCHIVES

songs that have not been performed before. At times, we have to learn and practise something totally new because it goes with the flow. But that is where the joy lies."

Rutuja also shares that she sought the guidance of singer Shubha Joshi, a student of Shobha Guruk, on how best she should approach certain thumris. She also speaks of learning the Hori ghazal 'Mere hazrat ne madine mein manay Holi', popularised by Gauhar Jaan. "There are hori songs sung for Holi, and there are ghazals. But Hori ghazals are rare and require a specific expression," she points.

As the shows are attended by different kinds of listeners – purists and uninitiated, Avanti says, "We structured it in such a way that it appeals to both. Hence, we make it interactive. We are happy to see more youngsters in the audience."

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Shower of talent

The talent promotion concerts, by Nadasangamam, the music wing of Narada Gana Sabha, will feature Vijayanti Pappu's veena recital with Vamsidara Anand (mridangam) and Karaikal Jaikishan (ghatam) on June 11, 5.30 p.m., followed by Aditya Sridhar's vocal concert at 7 p.m. with Mukantan Samraj (violin) and Jayendran Kumar (mridangam).

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Suganthy Krishnamachari

Isn't it interesting to document the life of a documenter? Meet T.S. Gopal, who commenced his journey as a documenter by collecting records. Over the last 60 years, his collection has grown extensively. Also known as an encyclopedia on music and a wizard at video editing, Gopal says: "Though it all began in a pre-technology era, I have now happily embraced technology. Till date I have posted 2,400 pieces of music on my Facebook, which have garnered many likes. I also have many hard disks of music."

To be surrounded by music, Gopal worked for a year at Super Radio Services, a shop that sold records in Chembur, Mumbai.

Inspired by ragas

What kind of music interests him? "Initially, I was into Hindi film music, because I grew up in Mumbai. But later took to Hindustani, Carnatic, South Indian film songs, pop and operas. Comparing different genres of music became my hobby and this led to the documentation of similarities between film music and

A collector's journey

For the past 60 years, T.S. Gopal has been documenting songs of Tamil and Hindi cinema

the use of ragas in film songs. I once heard a tune in the Mayamalavagowla scale at a restaurant in Mumbai, and it turned out to be Arabic music. I liked it very much. An Iranian friend shared with me his collection of Arabic music, which has inspired many Indian film songs. For instance, in the song 'Kallellam manikka kallaguma' (from *Alayamani*), music director M.S. Viswanathan has used the Mayamalavagowla scale and given the song an Arabic flavour. I discovered that the scale is used in Greek music too, as in the song 'Misirlou'. 'Bacchanale' in the opera 'Samson and Delilah' is also

in the same scale. The song, 'Ghar aaya mera paradesi' (from *Awara*) is in the Sindhubhairavi scale but has shades of Arabic music. Different Hindi music composers have used six tunes from the same album of Arabic music. Through a friend with connections in Bollywood, I visited recording studios in Mumbai. On one occasion, I found many composers using Sindhubhairavi. The same set of violinists played for all of them. But such was their integrity, that the violinists never revealed the tune of one composer to another.

"Film music composers have brought out a variety of emotions

Diary of a music connoisseur
T.S. Gopal's music analysis includes films such as *Kadhalikka Neramillai* (left) and *Madhumati* (below). PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



is Tuesday, this must be Belgium'. 'Kaun hai jo sapno mein aaya' (from *Jhuk Gaya Asman*) is a copy of Elvis Presley's 'Marguerita'. The Lata Mangeshkar song 'Ajeeb dastan hai' reminds one of Jim Reeves' country song – 'My lips are sealed'.

'Anubavam pudhumai' (film *Kadhalikka Neramillai*) has shades of the bolero song 'Besame mucho'. 'Dil tadap tadap' (from *Madhumati*) sounds similar to the Polish folk song 'Szla dziewczka do gajeczka'.

Gopal is fascinated by the counter-melodies in film songs. "I use a certain software to remove the voice and amplify the background music. You will then notice the counter-melody in the songs. Sometimes, it is an entirely different tune. 'Enge nimmathi' (film *Puthiya Paravaai*) and 'Avala sonnaal' (from *Selvam*) have interesting counter-melodies. I particularly find them appealing in Shankar-Jaikishan's compositions," shares Gopal.

Sitar interludes

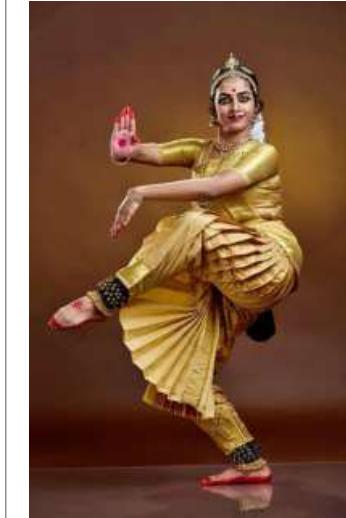
Apart from gathering such information and collecting records, Gopal took sitar lessons from Ustad Ahmad Hussain Khan, who was part of popular composer K.V. Mahadevan's troupe. He played the sitar in songs such as 'Ennathan ragasayamo' and 'Malargal naanindhana' from *Idhaya Kamalam*. "The Ustad also played in the Telugu film *Sita Kalyanam*, which got a mention in a review by *The Hindu*."

When asked if a Tyagaraja kriti has been sung in any film, Gopal immediately replies, "In the Telugu film *Missamma*, P. Leela sings Tyagaraja's 'Raga sudharasa' for Savitri."

Apart from film songs, Gopal used to upload tukkadas sung by various Carnatic artistes to pen drives and gift them to residents of a senior citizens home. Upon the request of a friend in the U.S., he compiled 200 such tukkadas. "Children in the U.S. learnt them and sang them in Navaratri kolus."

Gopal believes he does not deserve any credit for his work. "Does a man deserve credit for merely plucking flowers in a garden? All I do is to collect what is available," he says.

CALENDAR



Debut

Nithyashree Gopinath, disciple of Sheela Unnikrishnan, will present her Bharatanatyam arangetram on June 7, 10.30 a.m. at Rani Seethai Hall.

Talk series



Rasika Ranjani Sabha has organised a special talk series 'Ariviyal Paarvaiyil Aanmeegam' (Spirituality from a scientific perspective) to be delivered by Dr.

Sudha Seshayyan on June 10, 6.30 p.m. at the sabha.

This session is part of the Sabha's on-going monthly series, which will explore the interface between science and spirituality.

Kuchipudi performance

Saila Sudha presents Mugdha Maadhavam, a thematic Kuchipudi performance by Rasika Rajagopalan and D. Dilip today, 6.30 p.m. at Rasika Ranjani Sabha Mini hall.



Introspective mode

Raja Kumari on her personal connection with music.
PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

'Shivatandav' and how it took her a couple of days to record each of its 16 Sanskrit verses.

Raja Kumari also created 'Lingashtakam' in an Afropop version, and called it 'I Worship You'. The final song, 'Shambho', captures the effect of a *satsang* and the song goes through three different tempos, and even includes the voice of Raja Kumari's guru, Sumathi Kaushal.

As part of the album's launch, Raja Kumari

staged a live performance at Lohan Chowk, Hanumandhoka – one of Nepal's cultural and spiritual landmarks. Previously she performed at Chidambaram temple and on top of a hill in Tirupati, she chose Hanumandhoka, a UNESCO World Heritage Site this time round – paying homage to centuries of cultural heritage.

Recently, Raja Kumari sang a Punjabi love number with Guru Randhawa, and plans to continue making mainstream and Bollywood music, besides collaborating with different artistes.

Sound yatra

Rapper Raja Kumari's latest album, *Kashi to Kailash*, is about discovering places and one's inner self

Neha Kirpal

Grammy-nominated Indian-American rapper Raja Kumari's latest album, *Kashi to Kailash*, is a sonic pilgrimage through the sacred landscapes of the Indian subcontinent. Connecting the ancient city of Kashi to the mystical heights of Mount Kailash, the album is a result of her journey inwards.

With five albums to her credit, Raja Kumari will also complete a decade as a recording artiste next year. She took a year off to understand the kind of music she wanted to make and who she wanted to represent herself as. On a spiritual quest to Kedarnath, she felt moved by the term: "surrender". During Mahakumbh, she flew in her friend Nacho

La Raza, the producer on this project. Being Spanish, he did not have much experience with Indian or devotional music, so she wanted him to reimagine it with her. "From the moment I got on the microphone to the release of the album, fully mixed and mastered, it was 28 days, which was insane," she recalls.

According to Raja Kumari, the five-track album's goal is to convey that devotional music is still relevant. "People do not have to take a whole different mode to listen to this genre. They should just be able to make it part of their daily life," she explains.

The title track is the only English song on the album and is written by Raja Kumari herself. She also shares a personal connection with the second track

