

# fridayReview

THE HINDU

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N.C. Srinivasaraghavan

In the Varkari worship tradition of Maharashtra, it is customary to open with a description or *varnan* of Vittala’s form. In his solo production titled ‘Nama Mhane’, Vaibhav Arekar adheres to this convention by commencing with an alarippu, the opening piece in the Bharatanatyam margam, the subtext of which is layered by an abhang ‘Sundar te dhyaan’. The Mumbai-based dancer-choreographer recently presented this at Anubhuti Dance Festival in Chennai, organised and curated by dancer Divya Nayar.

Known for creating art that is thoughtful and deep, Vaibhav draws inspiration from various sources – Van Gogh and his paintings, contemporary dance legends such as Martha Graham and Pina Bausch, Bharatanatyam stalwarts C.V. Chandrasekhar and the Dhananjayans. As a performer and choreographer, he takes on a variety of themes, and one defining characteristic of his work is getting into the mind of the character he portrays. Whether it is ‘Venugaan’, which explores Krishna’s struggles with life’s dilemmas, or ‘Shrimant Yogi’ that details Chhatrapati Shivaji’s conquests and coronation, Vaibhav lights up the stage with his imagination and creativity. It often liberates the art form from its own constraints, leading to unexpected and beautiful discoveries.

Vaibhav confesses he never chose Bharatanatyam. “The art form chose me. I do not come from an artistic background, but I always wanted to dance.” After obtaining his Master’s from Nalanda Nrithya Kala Mahavidyalaya established by his mentor Kanak Rele, Vaibhav worked as a faculty there for close to a decade before turning a full-time performer. “Active teaching takes away energy from performance. I wished to explore the possibility of making performances and *riyaaz* a major part of my living.” This was when he decided to take up mentoring. “Dancers who have graduated from institutions with a degree in Bharatanatyam need internships to plug the gap between theory and practical application and my dance company Sankhya offers that space. I mentor around 15 full-time dancers and we explore

Bharatanatyam dancer Vaibhav Arekar on the process of creating emotionally resonant works

## Art unfettered



**Of mind and body** (Clockwise from left) Vaibhav Arekar during a performance in Chennai; with members of Sankhya Dance Company in ‘Nama Mhane’ and from ‘Shrimant Yogi’. PHOTOS: M. SRINATH AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



movement, experiences and new ways of looking at the world.”

When it comes to thought process, Vaibhav says Malavika Sarukkai’s thematic work was a major influence. He also looks up to Leela Samson’s Spanda Dance Company for group work. “By selecting full-time dancers for Sankhya, I focussed on choreography. These dancers are constantly practicing, and can immediately transfer an idea onto the body.”

He also points out that financial sustenance is hard for dance companies as no grants and monetary support are available. “This is why internship works – the dancers can leave and find jobs outside the company when they wish to.”

Vaibhav’s approach to dance was shaped by his training and collaboration with Marathi playwright Chetan Datar. Theatrical elements are interwoven into his productions. Sometimes, he seems to delve into the traditional relationship among dance, theatre and music as described in the *Natyashastra*, and, at other times, like modern dancers, allows the audience to interpret the connection. For

instance, in ‘Nama Mhane’, he goes into textual nuances to portray how sant Namdev humanises Vittala, getting exasperated when he does not consume the *naivedya* offered. Vaibhav’s performance seemed to demystify spirituality, making it a more personal expression. In the piece on Chokhamela, the saint who faced humiliation because of his caste, Vaibhav showed the inclusive philosophy of Namdev, who complains to Vittala and buries Chokhamela (who dies when the wall he was constructing collapses) outside the Vittala temple at Pandharpur where he was not allowed entry. Vaibhav depicted such poignant



Dancers who have graduated from art institutions need internships to plug the gap between theory and practical application and my dance company Sankhya offers that space.

VAIBHAV AREKAR

moments with rare sensitivity. Despite the theatricality, the raw emotion was palpable.

Music not just plays an important role in Vaibhav’s presentations, it shows what a fierce collaborator he is. In ‘Nama Mhane’, singer Sudha Raghuraman and musicians Satish Krishnamurthy and Kalishwaran K are a part of the visual and emotional landscape of the production. Vaibhav understands storytelling cannot be impactful without creating a suitable atmosphere. This is where Sushant Jadhav steps in – his contribution in terms of artistic direction and lighting lends a distinct touch to many of Vaibhav’s works.

“I realised in theatre every new play has a new structure, a new way of execution. I was used to repetition in Bharatanatyam, and wondered how to change this,” says Vaibhav. Although he finds much relevance in the structure of a margam, his choreographic works are structured based on what the themes demand. “Incorporating an alarippu and thillana in ‘Nama Mhane’ was important. But it doesn’t happen all the time. I allow my works to take their own natural course. Since we are dealing with an art form that is constantly evolving, there are no pressures to set boundaries.”

As a soloist, Vaibhav comes across as a thinking artiste. But what does it take to make an ensemble fall in line with his thought process and technique? “Every member is part of the creative process from start to the stage. I tell them to not look at me but to look beyond the narrative and emotion to discover themselves,” says Vaibhav.

### CULTURE BRIEFS



#### Bhagavata Mela is back

The 85th edition of the Bhagavata Mela Mahotsav, to be held at Sri Varadaraja Perumal Sannidhi, Melattur, will be inaugurated on May 11 at 9 p.m. Dancer-scholar Padma Subrahmanyam will be the chief guest of the evening and Aneish P. Rahan, director, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, the special guest.

The curtains go up with the staging of *Prahlada Charitam* at 9.30 p.m. on the occasion of Sri Narasimha Jayanti.

Performances to take place on other days are: **May 12, 6 p.m.:** ‘Nruthya Arpanam’ by Suman Nayak and disciples, and 9 p.m.: Anitha Guha’s ‘Parishvanga Pattabhishekam’.

**May 13, 9.30 p.m.:** Bhagavata Mela Natakam *Harischandra Part 1*.

**May 14, 9.30 p.m.:** *Harischandra Part 2*.

**May 15, 8 p.m.:** ABHA! presents ‘Mummoorthigalin Maanikkangal’; 9 p.m.: Sreelatha Vinod and students present ‘Hariswaranam’ and 10 p.m.: ‘Kuchipudi Nritya Hela’ by Sri Sai Nataraja Academy of Kuchipudi, Secunderabad.

**May 16, 9.30 p.m.:** *Usha Parinayam*.

**May 17, 9.30 p.m.:** *Markandeya Charitam*.

**May 18, 9.30 p.m.:** Tamil opera *Valli Tirumanam* in Bhagavata Mela style.

The curtains come down on May 19 with Anjaneya utsavam at 6.30 p.m., bhajan renditions by the Bhagavata Mela music team and a procession of Narasimhar.



#### Dedicated to a guru

Sruthi Laya Kendra has organised a series of concerts to mark the second year ‘Laya Aradhana’ of mridangam maestro Guru Karaikudi Mani. To be held on May 4 at Guru Karaikudi Mani Hall, Laya Priya, 14/6, Jeth Nagar 1st Main Road, R.A. Puram, the evening will begin at 3 p.m. with a performance by the students of Sruthi Laya Kendra, Chennai, led by EPL Muthukumaran. Students of Salem Ranganathan will perform at 4 p.m. This will be followed by R. Ramesh’s mridangam recital (4.30 p.m.); vocal concerts by Prathyaksha Kalyanaraman (5 p.m.) and Nithyasree Rajaraman (5.30 p.m.); Harikatha on ‘Guru Mahimai’ by Aadya Venkatesh (6 p.m.) and bhajan rendition by Dhayanand Bhagavatar at 6.45 p.m.

#### Special line-up

The Music Academy will feature the following endowment programmes at the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall. Schedule: **Today, 6 p.m.:**

T.V.S. Mahadevan will render the compositions of Purandaradasar with Kumbakonam M.R. Gopinath (violin) and Trivandrum V. Balaji (mridangam). The concert has been organised under the endowment instituted by P. Seshadri, managing trustee, Thyagaraja Music Festival Trust. **May 5, 6 p.m.:** Shruthi S. Bhat will present Bhadrachala Ramadas’ compositions. G. Kailasapathy (violin) and G.N. Bhuvan (mridangam) are the accompanists. The programme will be held under the endowment instituted by B. Dayananda Rao in memory of his wife Smt. B. Subhadra. **May 6, 6 p.m.:** Vocal concert by N.S. Kamakshi with Chidambaram G. Badrinath

(violin), Srivanchiam R. Sriram (mridangam) and Nerunam S. Manikandan (morsing), is organised under the endowment instituted by M/s Sri. Pichumony Iyer & Smt. Kunthalam Trust, in memory of Mrs.



Kunthalam Pichumony Iyer. **May 7, 6 p.m.:** Harikatha on ‘Bhoologa Vaikuntam, Srirangam’ by N. Subasri and N. Jayasri. The duo will be accompanied by Gayatri Vibhavari Vyakaranam (violin) and Aswini Srinivasan (mridangam). The event will be held under the endowment instituted by Sri Maruthi Bhakta Samajam Trust, in memory of Srirangam V.S. Venkataramana Rao.

**May 8, 6 p.m.:** Sweta Balasubramanian will perform for Syama Sastri day. C.S. Chinmayi (violin) and Ajeet Sridhar (mridangam) will accompany. The programme is organised under the endowment of Alibhoy Haiderbhoy Chitalwala Charitable Trust by B. Natarajan.



# Strings and steps

Dancer Urmila Satyanarayanan and musician Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi came together for Natyarangam's 'Vaggeyakara Bharatham'

V.V. Ramani

The third edition of 'Vaggeyakara Bharatham', presented by Nrithyopasana Trust and Natyarangam, featured a collaborative attempt between Urmila Satyanarayanan and Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi. The well-known dancer and the

violinist selected some compositions, including a few rare ones, suited for dance, which were performed by Urmila and her students. The auspicious sounds of the nagaswaram, by Pazhayaseevaram G Kalidas and thavil by Adyar G Silambarasan, were majestic in tone and tenor, and the mallari in panchagana ragamalika composed by Kulithalai Pichaiyapillai and

Valangaiman Shanmugasundaram Pillai, set to Sankeerna Ata talam, was danced by a group of young girls. After initial hiccups, they presented it with coordination and clarity, but their entry and exit needed to be streamlined better. Next was the prayer, a kriti composed by Vijayalakshmi, in praise of Narthana Ganapathy in Nattakurinji. The varnam, 'En manam niraindavar', composed by



**Fine blend** (Left) Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi and (top) Urmila Satyanarayanan with students. PHOTOS: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

the immense possibility it offers in detailing and expressing the emotions of a besotted nayika. By adapting it to a group presentation, the impact of the emotions of love got diluted, with attention getting divided among each character on stage. The latter half, which was visualised as a dialogue between Uma and Shiva in disguise with a peppy line 'Shivan en manalan', was akin to a natya nadakam (dance drama) – where swaras and sahitya, and rhythm and dramatics combined judiciously.

A Purandaradasar devarnama 'Mella mella bandane' in Mohana, speaking about with gopikas complaining to Krishna's mother Yashoda about the pranks played by Krishna, was portrayed as a costume drama with two Krishnas – the obedient son and a mischievous boy in conversation mode with the complaining gopis.

Urmila's portrayal of the emotions in the song 'Nidhi chala sukhama' by Tyagaraja in raga Kalyani, where he stresses the importance of devotion over worldly pleasures, was noteworthy for the sensitivity with which she expressed the thoughts.

Identifying and choreographing rare compositions suited for dance is a fine step forward, but it needs to move beyond the level of a routine margam presentation. The varied facets of each discipline could have been woven more seamlessly had there been greater creative engagement between the musician and the dancer.

Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi's concise explanation of the musicality and salient features of each composition helped the audience understand their intrinsic value. As for the dance aspect, the focus was group choreography.

Sai Kripa Prasanna, besides choreographing the pieces with Urmila, wielded the cymbals. Bhavya Hari and Prithvi Harish's vocal rendition was soulful and melodic. Guru Bharadwaj on the mridangam and Sujith Naik on the flute were the accompanying artistes.

# The Collective sound

Backed by a formidable line-up of musicians, the album *Sabr* is a celebration of music's diversity



**Seamless synergy** Singers performing at the launch of *Sabr* in New Delhi. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Shailaja Khanna

The Anirudh Varma Collective recently launched its third album *Sabr* at a packed Kamani auditorium in New Delhi. The more than two-hour concert featured 12 tracks from the album, and two old favourites 'Megh' and 'Tala Bop'.

Weaving together traditional pieces with a contemporary soundscape is the Collective's speciality. As Anirudh Varma put it: "Our intent has always been to not take away the classical essence but to present it in a contemporary format." Trained in both Western classical music (piano) and Hindustani music, Anirudh gives equal space to both genres in the songs his group presents.

A melange of musicians, including Sidharth on the saxophone and Aman Sharma on the trumpet, dominated by Suyash Gabriel on the drums, set the mood, before vocalist Prateek Narasimha sang the opening number 'Saade naal', accompanied by a full set of musicians, including a 12-member choir, flute, sarod, sitar and guitars. The lighting was excellent – designer

Gaurav Indaura enhanced the visual appeal of the concert.

The playlist included some Carnatic music too – 'Saraswati' was sung by Soumya Gurucharan, accompanied by the talented Abhay Nayampally on the Carnatic guitar. Bhagyesh Marathe, the talented vocalist representing Gwalior and Agra gayaki, was a guest singer at the concert. He sang 'Raga Rageshwari', accompanied by Anirudh on the keyboard, Soumitra Thakur, the talented Maihar gharana sitarist, and Punjab gharana's Yashwant Vaibhav and Ajrara gharana's Saptak Sharma on the tabla. On the ghatam was Varun Rajasekharan. This song lent a different dimension to the concert.

Folk songs, thumri and bhajan broadened the appeal of the band.

One admired the musical context of the pieces as well as the seamless mingling of genres and sounds. To create something novel that also kindles nostalgia is laudable; as is Anirudh's ability to present a diverse set of musicians on the same stage. "I was fortunate to find a group of artistes who were willing to contribute to this project," says Anirudh.

Suganthy Krishnamachari

It's 3.45 a.m., and there's a chill in the air. In the tender light of the morning, students line up for their daily schedule – practising the nagaswaram and thavil in the Then Tirupati Lord Srinivasa temple in Jadayampalayam, near Mettupalayam. Till 6.30 a.m., the temple echoes with the sounds of the instruments.

These are students of the Then Tirupati Nagaswara and Thavil school, set up in 2008, seven years after the temple was built and consecrated as part of the prayer complex of the KG group of industries, Coimbatore. Says K.G. Baalakrishnan, chairman, KG Fabriks and founder of the school, "When the idea of doing something to foster art and culture came up, I decided to establish a nagaswaram and thavil school, because of the close connection of the instruments with temples."

Initially, only nagaswaram was taught. In 2010, thavil classes began. "Students are given free boarding and lodging, and a monthly allowance of Rs 1,000," says Seshadri Bhattar, principal of the school.

**Early training** Pandanallur Subash has been teaching the thavil at the school since inception. He is the paternal grandson of vidwan Pandanallur Rathinam Pillai. "I first learnt thavil from my father's guru Pandanallur Vaidyanatha Pillai and later from my father Pandanallur Muthappan, Thiruppurangur



# Catching them young

The Then Tirupati Nagaswara and Thavil school near Mettupalayam, which offers free training and accommodation, draws students from across Tamil Nadu

Govindaraja Pillai and Thiruvallaputhur Kaliyamurthy. I picked up a lot from Thirunageswaram T.R Subramania Pillai as well," says Subhash. He was in Singapore and Canada before moving to this school.

Currently, 32 thavil and 14 nagaswaram students learnt at the school. They begin the day practising in the Srinivasa temple from 4 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. They attend classes from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., with a short break for lunch. From 6 p.m., they resume *sadhakam* at the temple.

Both courses are of four years' duration. In the first year, they are taught Pillayar paadam, talas,

otha kai paadam, rettai kai paadam, and so on. In the second year, they begin the silambu palagai. In the third year, they begin playing the

thavil. External examiners Swamimalai Manimaran, Aduthurai Perumal Kovil D. Sankaran, Swamimalai Sethuraman and Kottaiyur Chakrapani evaluate both nagaswaram and thavil students.

Paganeri Pillappan, a recipient of the Muthamizh Perarignar award from Tamil Isai Sangam, Madurai, is the nagaswaram teacher at the school. He used to run a gurukulam in his house in Madurai for 35 years, and trained over 200 students. When his wife passed, he moved to this school.

Pillappan learnt from his father Kottachami Pillai, who had been a student of

Vedaranyam Vedomurthy. Pillappan later was part of Thirupparankundram A.P. Raja's set, and has played in Singapore, Malaysia, Rangoon and Mauritius.

A video of Pillappan playing Malayamarutham in the Paganeri Neelakanteswarar temple caught the attention of actor Kamal Haasan, who shared the video on X, and composed a poem praising the artiste.

**Nagaswaram syllabus** So, what is the syllabus for nagaswaram in the school? "In the first year, there is only vocal training. I teach students geethams,

**Echoes of tradition** Students and faculty of the school; students playing at an utsavam of Then Tirupati Srinivasa temple; and K.G. Baalakrishnan, founder of the school. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



alankarams and talas. In the second year, they play the nagaswaram, and in the second and third year, they are taught varnams and kirtanas. In the fourth year, they are given pointers on raga alapana," says Pillappan.

Seventeen-year-old Arulchelvan is a second-year student of nagaswaram, who heard about the facilities at the school, and joined classes.

The students play during utsavams at the Then Tirupati Srinivasa temple. During the Purattasi Brahmotsavam, three well-known nagaswaram and thavil vidwans play in the temple, in addition to the two resident teachers. Senior students take turns to play along with them. "This helps hone their skills," says Subash. Students get a certificate at the end of the course. "Some of them want further training and we put them in touch with teachers of their choice," says Subash.

N. Sabari, a thavil student, whose parents and sister are nagaswaram players, says, "After I finish the course here, I want to go for advanced training under Dharapuram Ganesan sir.

The school draws students from across Tamil Nadu.

"One of our students, Srikanth, from Ulundurpet, received the National Bal Shree Honour, an award presented to creative children by the National Bal Bhavan. It is one of the highest national honours for children," elaborates Subhash.

Even as we speak, students line up after their day's classes to head for regular practice at the temple – from where the idea of the school began.

The initiative will not only help promote nagaswaram and thavil but also equip young learners of the instruments with the necessary confidence and skill to make their own space in the world of music.



The evening marked a rare

# Uplifting *symphony*

At the heart of RISE lies a

The symphony's own journey to the stage has reflected the ideas it holds. Ganesh recorded RISE in Germany in 2019, preparing for a scheduled premiere in Poland, a country closely tied to his earlier work, *The Journey*. Dates were set; rehearsals planned. Then came 2020 – and with it, the closures that silenced concert halls around the world. “It felt

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**GANESH B KUMAR**

For Ganesh B Kumar, music has always been more than sound. It is the act of remembering, and also of moving forward. It is the story of rising – one quiet step at a time.



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A pall of gloom hangs over 'Piravi', Shaji N Karun's residence in Thiruvananthapuram. This was where the ace auteur and cinematographer met admirers from all walks of life. This is where he had conceptualised all his works, including documentaries and short films. This is where I met Shaji more than three decades ago as a student of journalism. He had shared that it was his wife Anusuya Warriar's idea to name their house 'Piravi'.

Shaji spent considerable time speaking to a rookie reporter, discussing his maiden film *Piravi* (1988), his second film *Swaham* (1994) and his student days in Pune. *Piravi*, a huge success, was about the story of a father's futile search for his son who had been picked up by the police. The film brought alive the excesses during the Emergency in a poignant way. It won Shaji the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1989 and the National award for best director along with several other honours from across the world. *Swaham* (1994) was also screened at Cannes.

It was Shaji's fascination for the images painted by light that made



him take to cinematography. After graduating in Physics from University College, Thiruvananthapuram, he chose to join the Film and Television Institute of India in Pune. He passed out with a gold medal in cinematography.

Shaji always spoke passionately about the magic and moods of the tropical sun. He would excitedly capture its constantly changing hues and direction. His attention to detail was amazing. His simplicity was in stark contrast to the world he saw through the lens. Since he lived in the neighbourhood as ours, I often saw him walk quietly along the road. He was then the chairman of the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy. He was also the executive chairman of the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK). He was able to get the best of filmmakers and technicians



# Lights, Camera and *Shaji*

The ace auteur and cinematographer, who passed away recently, elevated Malayalam cinema to global standards

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to speak to him several times. Each time, I was left with a sense of wonder at the filmmaker's ability to delve into varied themes set in different periods of times. Shaji was not a prolific director. He took time to shape a story or a

theme and then spent some more time visualising it in a language and idiom that was all his.

### Cannes recognition

Among the many awards that Shaji had won, he particularly treasured the Sir Charlie Chaplin Award instituted to commemorate the birth centenary of the legendary comic

actor (1989) at the Edinburgh Film Festival. "After I boarded my flight to India, the flight attendants announced that I had won this prestigious award and the passengers gave me a standing ovation," he had recounted during an interview to *The Hindu*.

Shaji's deep affinity for music and painting was evident in all his films. His bond with artist Namboothiri resulted in the documentary *Neruvura* on the latter's life. *Moving Focus - A Voyage* captured the artist KG Subramanyam's journey. The free-flowing lines and strokes were beautifully translated onto the screen by Shaji.

The auteur stepped into the world of cinema by cranking the camera for KP Kumaran's *Lakshmi Vijayam* (1976). But it was his long association with G. Aravindan that marked his cinematographic oeuvre. *Kanchana Sita* (1977), *Thampu* (1978), *Kummattay* (1979), *Esthappan* (1979), *Pokkuvayil* (1981), *Chidambaram*, *Oridathu* and *Unni* were all filmed by him. He had an uncanny ability to understand what Aravindan had in mind. Shaji was able to transform Aravindan's abstract ideas into perfectly composed frames. "Aravindan's screenplay was often very brief. *Thampu*, for instance,



had only four pages,” he had recalled.

Shaji had also worked with other great directors such as P. Padmarajan, M.T. Vasudevan Nair, K.G. George and Lenin Rajendran. He was the cinematographer of writer-director Padmarajan’s *Koodoode*, which marked actor Suhasini’s debut in Malayalam films.

Paying tribute to Shaji, Suhasini had shared on Instagram: “Remembering Shaji Karun. Some people we meet are evergreen and eternal. He was the cinematographer for my debut film *Koodoode*. I was his Subhadra in *Vanaprastham*. A true artiste and a great human. People like him made our industry safe and marvellous for newcomers. Will miss him...”

In *Vanaprastham* (1999), Shaji's third feature film, Mohanlal came up with an award-winning performance as a poverty-stricken Kathakali performer and his inner struggle as an artiste and man.

*Kutty Srank* (2010) remains one of the most complex films of Shaji. It traced the past life of a dead Chavittunatakam artiste and the different memories he left behind in the places he had lived. Blurring reality and fiction, Shaji's story, in a sense, was also the story of certain regions of the State and the arrival of different faiths and belief systems. Mammotty effortlessly played the three avatars of Kutty Srank and his relationship with three women.

Shaji had once said that Mohanlal's large expressive eyes are his biggest advantage while Mammooty is so handsome that it is difficult to mask his good looks. "Even if one were to smear his face with mud, it would be difficult to hide his features."

After *Swaapanam* and *Olu*, Shaji's heartfelt desire was to direct a musical but it was not to be.

With Shaji's passing, Malayalam cinema has lost a director and technician who elevated it to global standards. I recently watched *Vanaprastham* on television and experienced the meditative pace at which Shaji's camera captured every nuance of emotion. It reflected Shaji's approach to life – observing and enjoying every moment in quietude.

**A**fter a year-long break from releasing music, Maalavika Manoj, aka Mali, has returned with a dark, esoteric concept and a music video that dives into the world of cults and control. 'Dr. Dust', which released on April 24, starts like a lullaby, and a deceptive, sweet melody accompanies an unsettling undercurrent as it reaches a crescendo.

The song was inspired from watching and listening to many stories about subtle as well as extreme cases of interpersonal control, ranging from domestic issues to sensational cults. “The more I sat on it, the more I was intrigued by this world where people, especially the young generation, fall prey to these luring cult spaces,” says Mali.

Directed by Hitaali Dharamshi, the song's music video stars Mali as a charismatic cult leader whose sacrificial ceremony makes way for a successor. Interestingly, Mali and Hitaali both share a morbid fascination with darker social phenomena.

"There was something eerily compelling about how belief systems can be built and distorted. We wanted the video to capture that surreal, off-kilter vibe – something that felt performative on the surface, but hinted at something darker underneath," says Hitaali. Shooting the video was an intense, playful process – somewhat like



# Song for change

staging a dream sequence that constantly shifted between whimsical and unsettling. To make it a little more fun and collaborative, Mali featured her fans, handpicked through social media, most of whom are creatives themselves – musicians, designers and artists – in the video.

Similar to 'Dr. Dust' are some of Mali's previous singles, including 'Mango Showers', 'Age of Limbo', 'Semi Automatic Butane' and 'Anniku Raathiri'. What connects them all are the darker lyrical elements.

In the past, Mali has worked with AR Rahman, Amit Trivedi, Indus Creed and Raghav Meattle, among others. "When collaborating with other artistes, what is most intriguing is to see each

person's style of working and way of interpreting the same emotions. We end up having so many in-depth conversations around it, and that sometimes becomes a bigger takeaway than the actual music we work on. But the music lives on as a souvenir of those thoughts," she explains.

A Forbes 30 Under 30 inductee, Mali won the award for Best Indian Act at

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The song explores cult  
culture and younger  
generation's growing  
fascination for it. Music  
being my medium of  
expression, I chose to  
voice my concern  
through it

the MTV Europe Music Awards in 2024. She was the first Indian artiste to be selected by Spotify to be a part of its RADAR programme. BBC featured her in a music documentary called *Rhythms of India*. Mali has performed at some of the most prominent venues around the world, including SXSW Sydney, Music Matters Singapore, Le Zénith in Paris, Wembley Arena, and Lollapalooza India. Mali was also invited to perform during the inaugural event of the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre in Mumbai.

Recently, Mali also opened for Ed Sheeran during the Bengaluru leg of *The Mathematics Tour*. “Performing to a large audience really pushes one’s abilities as a singer as well as a performer,” she says. Up next, Mali has a few more singles, including one called ‘Saviour Complex’, in the pipeline.

**Sarvani Sangeetha Sabha**  
**Trust** presents a thematic concert 'Dwaithamu Sukham - Adwaithamu Sukhama', by V.L.V. Sudarshan, Calcutta Shankar, Paramakudi S. Ravindran and Sridhar Nilakantan, accompanied by V.L. Kumar (violin), Shertalai R. Anantakrishnan (mrindangam) and D.V. Venkatasubramanian (ghatam). The concert, to take place on May 2, 6.15 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Mysalopore, is dedicated to S. Vasanta, co-founder of the Sabha.

**Madhuradhwani** will feature the following concerts at Arkay Convention Centre, Mylapore. Details: May 4, 6.15 p.m.: Sumitra Vasudev. May 7, 6.15 p.m.: 'Sangeetha Gnanamu', a musical discourse to be rendered by Erode Balaji.

Special rituals will be performed as part of the 16-day brahmotsavam at Arulmigu Tiripurasundari Udanurai Adipuriswarar and Adikesava Perumal temple, Chindatripet, from May 2 to 17. The presiding deities will be taken out in a procession on different vahanams in the evening.

Rukmini Arts and Music Trust and Gaanapriya Foundation jointly present 'Panniru Tirumuraigalil Pandiya Nattu Padhigangal', to be rendered by Madurai Shanmughanathan Odhuvar and Tiruparankundram T. Sivaprakash Odhuvar, with Melakaveri K. Thiagarajan on the violin and Chennai S. Thyagarajan on the mridangam. The event is to be held on May 3, 6.15 p.m. at Ragasudha Hall, Luz, Myslopore.

Sri Thiagaraja Sangeetha Vidvath Samajam will inaugurate Tyagaraja jayanthi celebrations on May 4 at 5.30 p.m. at 10, Thiagarajapuram, Myslapore. The evening will also include the presentation of the 'Sangeetha Seva Nirata' title to B. Govindarajan and Mangalam Shankar (vocal), Vasantha Krishnamurthy (vainika), M. Narmada (violin) and T. Shyam Sundar (mridangam). This will be followed by Durga Venkatesh's nama sankirtanam based on Tyagaraja kritis.

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