



Circle of life

Manipuri danseuse PRITI PATEL's choreography for Ananya Dance Festival will present traditional ritualistic forms like Lai Haroba with the martial Thang-ta. She shares details with DIVYA KAUSHIK

There is a popular story why Lai Haroba, ritualistic dance form of the Manipuri tradition, is used to describe the process of creation or to symbolise a beginning of the world. The legend has it that there was a time when the only one who existed was guru Sidaba, the highest Lord, in dark vacuum. Once the seven shades of the rainbow shot into his dark space and the beautiful light emanating motivated him to witness the world. He sent Atiya guru along with a creature to create the world. The creature spun a web-like framework for the establishment of human habitation. To give a solid structure to this framework guru Atiya needed something and therefore went back to guru Sidaba. The latter provided him with some dirt from his navel to solidify the framework and also nine men from his right side and seven women from his left side as

his team. As they sat down for work, they were interrupted by one Harba. Guru Sidaba sent the goddess of lightning to assist Atiya. With her beauty and charm, the goddess enticed Harba away. The framework was then solidified and declared fit for human habitation. On its completion, the occasion was celebrated as Lai Haroba. Twelve main sequences of the dance form, part by part, depict each process in the creation. Lai Haroba, therefore, is used extensively to portray the process of creation in Priti Patel's choreography *Anantaki* that will be presented during the Ananya Festival.

The Manipuri dancer's choreography depicts the power of universe and the process of creation, destruction and preservation. "It is about the cycle of life. Since Lai Haroba in Manipuri dance is all about the process of creation, so we will begin



with that. The second part of the choreography will be about dissolution of destruction. It will be presented in Thang-ta, the martial art form of the Manipuri dancer tradition. Folklore links the creation of Thang-ta and its related dances with the native gods. More than destruction Thang-ta explains the removal of negativities around us. It represents the destruction of the negative elements. The third part of the choreography will be about preservation. Among the classical cate-

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gories, *Raas Leela* — a highly evolved dance drama, choreographed on Vaishnavite *Padaavalis* — is the highest expression of devotion and excellence in the Manipuri dance. One would be able to see that to witness the entire circle of life that revolves around creation, destruction and preservation," explains Priti who was initiated into the world of dance when she was just five. By 12, she was put under the tutelage of Late Guru Bipin Singh and the famous Jhaveri Sisters. The

rigorous training that she underwent brought out the best in her. She excelled as a danseuse, particularly in the Vaishnavite *Raas Leela* form of the Manipuri dance tradition.

Priti had earlier come to Delhi with her performance at Nehru Park in 2006. The presentation was loved by people across age groups, "as it is not very often that one witnesses the traditional Manipuri dances." One of the reasons why the choreographer is looking forward to her forthcoming performance is to introduce the youth to these ritualistic temple traditions which according to her have not been explored much. "Though we will be able to present only limited elements from the traditional dance forms in one hour but we are trying that this choreography will introduce the youngsters to the traditional form. There is a difference in the styles of these dances when performed on stage and when in temple. Fortunately, we have the facility of performing with the live music here, which is as per the tradition. But not major changes have been done to the dance form as it will be like spoiling the sanctity of these religious dances. We cannot take much liberty with these dance forms," she said.

Over 40 participants will be seen on stage playing instruments and dancing. Mostly the dance ensemble consists of a person playing percussion instrument called the pung, a singer, small cymbals, a stringed instrument called the pena and wind instrument such as a flute. The drummers are always male artistes and, after learning to play the pung, students are trained to dance with it while drumming. The lyrics used in Manipuri are usually from the classical poetry of Jayadeva, Vidyapati, Chandidas, Govindadas or Gyandas.



Wall of fame

The *Green Cape* by Jehangir Sabavala, painted in 1974 and Tyeb Mehta's 1957 work, *Girl in Love*, will be auctioned at Christie's second outing. A public preview will happen here in November

Christie's will hold its second auction in Mumbai on December 11. This follows the success of the inaugural auction in India held a year ago. A strong selection of works will be also publicly previewed here at The Taj Mahal Hotel from November 28 to 30.

The inaugural sale in 2013 established the highest price for a work of art ever sold in India and the sale total of ₹96,59,37,500 (USD\$15,455,000) doubled pre-sale expectations with 98 per cent of the lots sold, a testament to the strength of the market and the interest in India's cultural heritage from the national and international collecting community.

The sale on December 11 will be offering approximately 80 lots of the best of modern and contemporary Indian art. With the specialist team still working on the consignments for the sale, early highlights include *The Green Cape* by Jehangir Sabavala, painted in 1974, with a pre-sale estimate of ₹120,00,000-1,80,00,000, an early work by Tyeb Mehta, entitled *Girl in Love*, from 1957, which will be offered with an estimate of ₹70,00,000-90,00,000 and Bhupen Khakhar's reverse painting on glass from the 1970s, *Untitled* (Chavani), with an estimate of ₹40,00,000-60,00,000. These



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initial highlights shed light on a critical period in the development of Indian modernism and of the artists' oeuvres as well. Alongside these masterpieces, a separate section of striking contemporary works by artists including Subodh Gupta, Rashid Rana, Mithu Sen, Thakur and Tagra, Nilima Sheikh and Bharti Kher will be offered to benefit the Delhi based Khoj International Artists Association, a globally recognised artist residency. All the artists have donated works to Khoj exclusively for this sale.

This year marks the 20th year that Christie's has had a presence in India. This October, New York will be under the spell of Indian culture with the opening on October 26 of the much-anticipated Vasudeo S Gaitonde retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum and the inauguration the following evening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art of *Treasures from India: Jewels from the Al-Thani Collection*. Christie's is one of the sponsors for the Gaitonde exhibition and their international director of Asian Art, Dr Amin Jaffer, made the original study of the Al-Thani collection for his book, *Beyond Extravagance*. Christie's will also be previewing a selection of highlights from the Indian sale at its Rockefeller Center galleries in New York.

'She was a great communicator'

Today is *ghazal* queen BEGUM AKHTAR's birth anniversary. Her disciple RITA GANGULY talks to KARAN BHARDWAJ about the legend's contribution to music and how she inspired several leading voices of her time

Did you know *Hamri Atariya* from Madhuri Dixit starrer *Dedh Ishqiya* was originally sung by none other than Begum Akhtar? Not only this, among her several hits, *Ab Ke Saawan Ghar Aaja*, set in raga *Tilak Kamod*, was used in Kiran Rao's *Dhobi Ghat*. Akhtar, the quintessential queen of *ghazal* and *thumri*, crooned several hits for decades and played a pivotal role in Indian classic music. Her life and contribution will now be discussed at length at *Jamal-e-Begum*, a two-day festival to mark her centenary birth year, jointly organised by Teamwork Arts and Kaladharmi.

"For the first time, Pankaj Udhass, Talat Aziz, Anup Jalota, Chandan Das and Penaz Masani will sit in a row to hymn *ghazals*. The second evening will have *shayari* recitals besides Amjad Islam Amjad, Sheen Kaf Nizam and Rajesh Reddy. They will be joined by two young people, Madan Mohan 'Danish' and Manzar Bhopali," shares Rita Ganguly, who will also be singing along with other legends.

Ganguly, who is the only direct disciple of Akhtar, has been organising several festivals and sessions on her guru. She also made the first documentary on the legend's life after her death. "She was not only an extraordinary artist who shaped the Indian classical music but also an amazing human being. She always encouraged me to establish a unique identity. She used to tell me, '*Nakal ko koi pasand nahi karta*'. (No one values the mimicry). So always be original, carve your own style and rule the world," she says.

It's shocking to learn that Ganguly, who has upheld the legacy of her guru for almost four decades, was once rude to her. "I started my training under the tutelage of Siddheswari Devi. When Begum Akhtar saw me singing with my guru, she was astonished. Once I met her at some event so she asked me to sing along with her on stage. I refused her and told her that I was not her disciple. She got shocked and said, '*Bhai tumhara guru kaun hai jiske liye tum Begum Akhtar se lad gai. Agar tum meri shishya banogi, to mere liye kya karogi*'. Then she picked me up from Siddheswari Devi for further training. Today, I recall that moment and keep doing something for her," Ganguly says.

Akhtar's songs especially *ghazals* are still loved. Few *ghazals* like *Aye Mohabbat Tere Anjaam Pe Rona Aaya*, *Mere Mumtaz Mere Humnawa*, *Woh Jo Hum Mein Tum Mein Qaraar Tha* and *Kuchh*



Begum Akhtar

Toh Duniya Ki Inayat Ne Dil Tod Diya, and *dadas* such as *Hamri Atariya* and *Koyalika Mat Kar Pukaar* are still immensely popular. "What makes her unique is her simplicity. Though there were brilliant voices like Rasoolan Bai, Amirbai Karnatik, Kesabai Kerkar and Roshanara Begum, no body could match up to her. She gave new identity to Indian classical music post Independence. So she married *ghazals* with classical music. She

was also the first conscious communicator who got people engaged. She was a pioneer communicator," she says.

For years now, the Begum Akhtar Academy of *Ghazal* (BAAG) — founded by Ganguly to promote Urdu and the art of *ghazal* — has been honouring artists on the legend's birth anniversary. This year, Pankaj Udhass will be bestowed with BAAG's Lifetime Achievement Award while the BAAG Award will be given to Pakistani poet Amjad Islam Amjad.

While many maestros have expressed their disappointment over the diminishing quality of *ghazals* and classical music, Ganguly is quite hopeful of a better future. "The present scene of music is really amazing. We are getting scared by what's happening in five metropolitan cities while ignoring the rest of India which is still in awe of classical music. There's no danger to genuine performing art to our country. Our classical music will always survive. It's stupid that our music is dying. The music that we do is like perennial flower, whose fragrance will always linger on. I still remember the amount of struggle we had to go make to be heard and seen. There was just All India Radio. Today there are many platforms and organisations supporting performing arts. I believe that if you have talent and work hard and above all, if you have a guru, then nobody can stop you," she says.