

# Indian Horizons

Volume 60 No. 3 July - September 2013



## Indian Council for Cultural Relations

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The objectives of the Council are to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations; to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people; to establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture; and to take such measures as may be required to further these objectives.

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Indian  
Horizons

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Volume 60 No. 3 July-September 2013

**Editor**  
Subhra Mazumdar

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It is uncanny how a small trigger is enough to unearth an entire movement. This issue based on the multi-pronged thrusts that are now visible in the sphere of Indian classical music was born of one such impetus, the closure of the Europalia India exhibition in Belgium and elsewhere. It immediately struck me how Indian music, with its roots ingrained into Indian thought and living, had found immediate appreciation in the west through this four month long effort in Belgium and elsewhere and led to the examination of the latest trends in Indian classical music.

A talk with some practitioners of the south yielded equally rich findings. Yes, there too, the popularity of the music sabhas, in the form of a series of concerts at various concert halls, big and small, across many centres and metro cities, has drawn into the music fold an ever increasing growth in its 'fan' following. The article on it examines the highs and lows of this process and indicates thereby that here is a format for classical concerts that is predicted to stay.

Another growing tendency among the youth who have gotten hooked to classical music as part of their explorative activities during the collegiate years, is to take classical music to the college fest platform. Colleges in campuses of Delhi University, Hyderabad and elsewhere, are no longer belting out western –Indi pop but trying to fill in that space with renderings of classical bandish numbers in choral presentations. Yes, there are taans and murkis, taranas and tempo variations, all very experimental, but full of youthful energy, as the article in it, suggests. Truly this is an indicator of our youth's remarkable ability to demystify classical music into something that is for all to savour and critique.

A more studied survey of the coming of age of classical music in its concurrent format has been traced in another of our essays. It is the turn-of-the-century inventory of this music that is brought to the fore. The chamber music character of this music that had become synonymous with nawabi patronage, was shaken to the core, when artists reinvented their music to suit the public platform, singing at sammelans and auditoriums, radio broadcasts instead of the mehfil in the nawab's Mahal. The nascent resurgence of the mehfil today also is touched upon, particularly its difference from its older forbear

Western interest in our music has largely been a private enterprise so far, but with the joint concept of Indian artists from Kashmir and the Bavarian Philharmonic Orchestra, this process seems to have crossed another milestone. The inside story of this venture and its links with one of the oldest schools of Sufi music in the state, makes for an interesting versatility in this music. So far, most of the versatility was visible to listeners through the creativity of the performer, but now, this concert has shown that our music lends itself to virgin territories waiting to be discovered through innovative combinations of western classical music, that have remained untried by and large, till this platform has been provided.

On the other hand, the efforts of individuals to establish schools of Indian music have now matured into well-rounded institutes. Their contribution towards creating an awareness of our music is invaluable. Not only have these schools been instrumental in propagating the art but have also become perpetrators of some of its less popular aspects. Thus there are now a sizeable number of sitar

and drum players, a number of sarangi and dhrupad singers, who not only perform but also research into these forms, giving the traditional content a fresh approach. The growth of such institutions in the Netherlands is chosen as an apt case study of this evolution.

The contribution of the female artist has been taken for granted, in the thumri genre. But the male thumri singer's input into the style of singing it, as also the interpretation of the various shades of meaning that a thumri invariably offers, comes up for a close look in the article examining the role of the nayika. This anchoring of thumri numbers around the feminine aspects of the nayika is given a fresh interpretation,

wherein she is not examined from the common level of a woman's feelings but as an entity which portrays the emotional components of femininity. Hence the new-age thumri singer can reflect on the nayika in her music from a totally different standpoint, thereby providing thumri with its latest avatar.

The arts have received their deserved coverage through a series of poems by Sitakant Mahapatra. The exhibitions at our gallery were great crowd pullers through their varied techniques, choice of subject and manner of execution. From the next quarter, we hope to bring to you a coverage of our performances, as well for your greater reading pleasure.

Editor



Subhra Mazumdar

# Foreword

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Satish C. Mehta  
Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations

A growing audience for classical music in India has thrown up several possibilities, and conjectures. This issue of *Indian Horizons* takes a look at this subtle change. From standards of presentation that relied on mandatory guidelines, the new articulation is examining different pathways, in terms of appreciation and methods of propagation of our music. A series of essays penned by its practitioners and connoisseurs examines the innovative trends that are currently seen in this genre.

The process of this discovery is started off with seeing the developments in the understanding of the modern rendition of thumri. Gone are the days of the masculine, baritone depths of Ustad Faiyaz Khan countermanded by the utterly earthy and personalized rendition of Siddheshwari Devi. Today's singer bases her presentation on the concept of the nayika or feminine form, thereby creating a novel platform of presentation.

Similarly, the increasing popularity of classical music abroad has led to it becoming a specialization at conservatoires in the west. The mapping of this journey is traced through a representative tracery; its growth in the Netherlands in particular. A more cohesive approach to Indian culture and its expose in the west was done through the mega event, the Europalia India initiative, wherein the arts, in their entirety, found adequate platforms across Belgium and Europe. The photo essay brings alive this momentous happening in all its splendour.

Another effort to link our music traditions with those of western classical music has been through joint performances in India. A notable event featuring the Bavarian Orchestra and a Sufi folk group from Srinagar, is elaborated in the issue as a representative example of it.

The turn-of-the-century performing artist and his breakaway from school fixated classical renderings, is aptly presented in this issue. Similarly, the changes that Carnatic music has undergone, with the growing popularity of concerts as a seasonal event, beginning in the last quarter of each year, is given a close look. Examining their import as regards their influence in taking Carnatic music forward is what we have tried to examine through an article in this issue.

Over the last few years, collegiate enthusiasts too, have woken up to the potentialities of our traditional offerings in music. One learns of the newest form of classical music making the rounds at college fests, and going under the genre of classical choral renditions. The exhaustive presentation in this issue is a frank analysis of the pains and pleasures of instituting a new movement by the youth of the country.

Concluding the issue we have a slice of poetry penned by the well known poet Sitakant Mahapatra. He succinctly unites the colours of the season, the spirit of the Ganga into a bind, that is both spiritual and physical.

We sincerely hope you enjoy reading the fine details of classical music practices that we have put before you in this issue.



Satish C. Mehta

# Carnatic Music

## Ruminating the Landscape

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Dr. Lakshmi Sreeram

Saksatkara ni sadbhakti sanglta-jnana-vihlnulaku  
moksamu galada

Is moksha possible for those bereft of musical  
knowledge - knowledge that is infused with true  
devotion?

So sang the 18th century Vaggeyakara of Tanjavur,  
Tyagaraja, whose compositions, too, form the core of  
today's Carnatic music repertoire.

Couched in this are the originary attitudes that have  
suffused the tradition of performance that is Carnatic



Serious rasikas at Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha, a 113-year-old sabha

music. A religious and spiritual orientation that is yet dispensable and, is indeed, dispensed with today.

This music, as other systems of art music, is a knowledge system. Its practitioners and sophisticated listeners need to internalize knowledge — of ragas — their core features, their idiosyncrasies, of tala, of meter, of prosody, of vocalization, of delivery, of play with light and shade, with build-up and release, of subtleties innumerable. This music is also a means to liberation, moksha. In the Hindu worldview, liberation from an endless cycle of birth and death is seen as the ultimate goal worthy of human pursuit. Music is widely regarded as an effective means to this end — not music pursued anyhow, but with “true devotion” or *sadbhakti*.

Tyagaraja worried about many things — about the death of *brahmanatva* — the lofty way of thinking and living, of sham religiosity, of sycophancy, of Lord Rama’s reluctance to bestow grace. In one such song in the poignant raga *Naganandini*, he laments: *sattaleni dinamunu vacchena*

Such days have come...  
Days that have no strength (*sattu*)  
Strength that faith in God gives.  
Reverence for parents and teachers is nought  
And men indulge in evil acts  
Such days have come...

But he did not worry for music except that it should not be divorced from *bhakti*. He did speak of the immense powers of music — power to profer liberation no less. In another *kriti* *ragasudha rasa* in the raga *Andolika*, he says, “What is sought by *yaga yoga tyaga bhoga* (rites, austerity, meditation and enjoyment), that music can deliver.”

Whither *Bhakti*?

This is the music that Tyagaraja sang of. Today Carnatic musicians sing his songs, but perhaps without the kind of *bhakti* he advocated. Many of them have almost nothing to do with his vision of music. Or indeed that of Muthuswami Dikshitar who travelled to Varanasi,

Badrinath, Kedarnath, Rameshwaram and sang of the temples and dieties in those holy places. His songs, austere with an aloof grandeur, ensconce references to tantra, mantra, yoga sastras, not to speak of exquisite *advaitic* statements. He calls the goddess *Kamalamba* of the great *Tiruvarur* temple *nirvishesha caitanya rupini*; in the *kriti* *Jambupate* in *Yamuna Kalyani* raga he addresses Lord Shiva manifested as water as *anirvacanlya nadabindo*. *Syama Sastri*, the third of the musical trinity of Carnatic music, sang to his goddess, the *Bangaru Kamakshi*. This idol, originally of the *Kanchipuram Kamakshi* temple, was carried to safety by a group of Telugu families who were hereditary priests at that temple when invading armies from the north poured in. These families fled over a period of several decades to *Tanjavur* where the idol, all gold, finally found safe haven in a temple the *Maratha King, Sarabhoji II*, constructed for her. *Syama Sastri*’s songs are suffused with poignant devotion, couched in simple language but complex ragas and rhythmic structuring but yet handled with graceful melodic accessibility. *mayamma ani ne pilichite matladarada* - “I call you my mother, won’t you speak to me?” Many composers after and before this trinity or *mummurthy* of Carnatic music too had religious, spiritual impulses.

Most performers a generation or two ago, were deeply religious — *M.S. Subbulakshmi*’s music and persona were centred around deep piety and devotion. Today, religion is not dead but is certainly not the main or even one of the impulses in most Carnatic musicians. More than ever before today’s Carnatic musician is very well educated with college degrees, even professional degrees, is tech savvy, completely urbanized and will sing compositions about *Vatapi Ganapati* and *Sri Saraswati* without devout fervour, but with true passion for the music. And that is important. The brave new world of Carnatic music has passion, commitment, and professionalism. *Bhakti* is pretty much not part of the picture.

Leading Carnatic performers today wear their atheist badge openly. Even if not confirmed atheists, they are



Tourists at the Narada Gana Sabha, another prestigious venue

certainly not devout. How then do they relate to these compositions? Simply as wonderful instantiations of the raga; the coming together of lyric, melody and rhythm. Indeed, it is arguable that a certain distancing from the semantics of compositions is a necessary condition for those compositions to be used in art music. Art music seeks to evoke emotions, but not directly by speaking of them in words, but by the device of musical creation. What the great Kashmir thinker of the 9th century, Anandavardhana captured so eloquently in the expression — *svasabda-avacya* — that meaning which is not conveyed by literal use of words but by metaphorical, suggestive use of language.

What makes one refer to Carnatic music as “classical or art music”? Evoking Dr. Ashok Ranade’s suggestion of the musical pentad in India, religious music is a different genre of music from art music. Religious music consists of repertoire that is religious in content and it may and very often does use ragas and the tala. But the whole musical effect is towards heightening religious fervour. The repertoire of Carnatic music is predominantly religious; but the intent of a Carnatic concert is not religious — it is aesthetic. A good presentation of a composition focuses on correctness of lyrics, of *patantara*, of delivering raga nuances, of following the *kala pramana* or measure of time or *laya*, and indeed of *bhava* or communication of an emotive content. This emotional content is not religious but

musical; intensity of imagination, artistry and delivery must evoke emotion, not literal meanings of words.

A leading Carnatic musician T.M. Krishna voices his dilemma: "When I sang a kirtana, I used to grapple with the idea of people telling me I needed to know the meaning if I had to bring out the bhavam. This used to bother me because I may not really feel that way or believe in that sentiment. Does it make me disrespectful if I don't understand it? Do I need to understand it? And gradually, these questions became louder. What happens when an atheist sings this music? How does an atheist look at it? I had friends from different religions and they did not understand one word of what I was singing. How do they deal with this music? That's why I feel that the relationship between melody and text is far deeper than its linguistic meaning."

Carnatic musicians today, more than ever before, bask in media glamour, fan following and monetary success. Even though she sings of Rama and Krishna, she is not necessarily concerned with religious content. Even the brilliant Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, who was himself deeply religious, clarified that bhakti is essential for a Carnatic music, but this bhakti is for music, not for any personal diety.

### The Season and the NRI

It is therefore a coincidence, and not at all a religious factor at work, that the unique annual music season, an extravagant festival of Carnatic music in Chennai called "The Season" happens in December, or margazhi, a month regarded as the most auspicious. Margazhi is the month associated with hymns dedicated to Lord Shiva (Tiruvempavai) as well as Lord Vishnu (Tiruppavai and other pasurams). These ancient Tamil hymns (the first expressions of the ubiquitous

bhakti movement) exhort the devotee to wake up and worship the lord by singing his glory.

The "Season" happens in December because that is when courts have a vacation! Sabhas, the main organisers of Carnatic music, have historically been run by lawyers - mostly. Today, holding the festival in any other month would be difficult to conceive because the NRI patronage, crucial as it is, would be threatened. December is the coolest month in Chennai and most tolerable for the NRIs.

Chennai is today the indisputable centre for Carnatic music. Most of the front-ranking performers live here. Most of the senior vidwans and vidushis live here. The "December Season" in Chennai is the place to be for any Carnatic musician or aficionado. You can't claim to be a serious musician unless you have



Sreeram: Bombay Jayashri exchanges a moment with her percussionist

performed during “the Season” in Chennai in one of its many sabhas. You can’t claim to be a serious listener unless you have paired over the little booklets that carry information about the 3000 odd events - mostly of Carnatic music — happening in the span of one month - to hop from sabha to sabha from morning 7 am till night catching harikathas, lecture demonstrations, concerts by juniors, sub — seniors, veterans, and finally to wind down the day with the performance of a popular musician for most of December. The canteens in the sabhas also earn semi legendary status during this time with prominent city caterers taking on the task of feeding vegetarian fare to satiate the hungry rasika with culinary wonders like idli, dosa, sambhar and badam halwa!! It is a mela, a huge festival in the world of Carnatic music. Certainly, you have dance concerts too and a few, very few Hindustani concerts, but it is mainly a celebration of Carnatic music.

NRIs come down in large numbers during this coolest month and camp in Chennai to soak in the season. Rasikas queue up outside sabhas in the early hours of the morning to buy tickets to the concerts of their favourite musicians. Newspapers devote space to carrying reviews of concerts; the internet goes abuzz with blogs and posts.

Is Carnatic music alive and kicking - certainly yes, from all this. But is it in good health? That is always a worrisome question for all classical art forms, at all times, at all places.

More people are learning this music. Gurus are in great demand and they rise to the challenges and needs of the time by going the virtual way. Using the internet and devising ways of imparting this music, skype lessons and other kinds of modules of lessons are making inroads in a large way. The internet has been tapped imaginatively by a few outstanding



T. M. Krishna and his muse

musicians and teachers who take care to keep the integrity of the music even while resorting to such indirect guidance. What is particularly interesting is that there are many learners among NRIs, especially in North America. They have absorbed fundamental values of this music astonishingly well and some of the young and upcoming faces of Carnatic music of great promise are indeed Indian Americans. The historical evolution of Carnatic music will doubtless be impacted by this phenomenon of Indian performers born and brought up on foreign soil making strong claims to be part of the home scene.

### A brief historical survey

Historically, the influences that shaped Carnatic music are multitudinous and complex. We have to begin at some point in what is too long a trail of evolution and today the 15th century saint musician, Purandaradasa is by common agreement, regarded as the Sangeeta Pitamaha — the grandfather of Carnatic music. He belonged to the ubiquitous Bhakti Sampradaya and is said to have composed over a lakh of songs, wandering from village to village singing of Purandara Vitthala. A near contemporary was Annamacharya, who is said to have composed one song everyday in praise of the Lord of the Seven Hills, Venkateshwara. Interestingly he has composed a large number of compositions with graphic depictions of the lovemaking of the Lord and his consort, Padmavati. Bhadrachala Ramadas was another great composer and in the songs of these three, we find the kriti format evolving, kriti being the main compositional form used today in Carnatic music.

In 18th century Tiruvarur in Tanjavur it was as if stars had aligned themselves in a particularly musical way, for within a span of 13 years and in neighbouring streets of the famous temple town of Tiruvarur, the Carnatic trinity were born. The compositions of Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri and Mutthuswami Dikshitar form the core compositional repertoire of today's Carnatic music. They had very different lyrical and musical styles. And within the broad gamut of their

divergent styles, other composers, some of them equal in their accomplishments to the trinity, can be accommodated.

Importantly, there is also a tradition of composing love songs in the tradition of the astanayika or the eight heroine types. These are the padam and javali, compositional types different from the kriti which forms the core compositional form with devotion as its theme. Kshetraya of the 17th century was a composer of rare merit who sang songs bordering on the erotic in the tradition of madhura bhakti. Though thematically he is comparable to Jayadeva, the structure of the song and its music are very different. His padams are noted for their lyrical quality as also for their weighty raga bhava. These compositions were preserved among the devadasis; regrettably the tradition of composing padams and javalis did not survive long. In Carnatic music itself they have traditionally been sung towards the end of concerts though they are more and more infrequently heard. Padams being heavy and highly nuanced, it makes more demands on the listener than a light bhajan and so as part of the process of reaching out to more audiences the exquisite padams are being given a go by.

### Composition and Improvisation in Carnatic Music

While like Dhrupada, the composition is important in Carnatic music. Like Dhrupada too, manodharma (translated as improvisation) is equally an important aspect of this music.

The main improvisational aspects of alapana, kalpana swara and neraval (which actually translates into 'bharana' as in avartan bharana but which refers to improvisation around a single line of the composition) are pivotal aspects of a concert as are rendition of compositions.

How does one build up raga alapana? Alapana, swara prastara and neraval, the three main aspects of improvisation in Carnatic music are highly sophisticated. The build-up, the tension and release

at various points, can create heady moments. The music making involves training, listening, and mastering technique and gaining aesthetic maturity.

The level of sophistication today harks back to the extraordinary musical period of the 1950-70 — to performers like Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, M.D. Ramanathan, G.N. Balasubramanian, Madurai Mani Iyer, M.S. Subbulakshmi, D.K. Pattamal, M.L. Vasantakumari and Brinda and Mukta, and above all, to the originator of today's concert paddhati or concert pattern — Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar who was a trendsetter. Before the last mentioned ushered in a new era, a Carnatic concert was closer to the format of a dhrupad concert. Elaborate alapana followed by tanam (like the nom tom part of the alap of dhrupad) and a short composition of one avartanam of considerable laya complexity called pallavi. Improvisation of this line in neraval followed by kalpana swara would be the structure of the 4-5 pieces that would comprise a 4-5 hour concert. Musical lore surrounding the prowess of this or that great in handling this raga, or that or stupendous command over laya of other vidwans who might be able to handle a tala cycle of 108 beats make up the imagination of even today's young musician.

Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar (1890 - 1967) pioneered a novel way of presentation. He included more compositions mostly of the trinity. Picking a few pieces for elaboration in alapana, neraval and swara prastara he managed to possibly gather a greater following for this music. More people were able to enjoy and relate to such concerts; the demand on attention span was much less — instead of each piece running into 45 mts to one hour, Ariyakudi offered a fare with a mixture of short and long pieces. This experiment of his is the historical origin of today's concert pattern or cutcheri paddhati.

### **The cutcheri and its contentions**

Today, a typical concert of two hours may contain 7-8 pieces rendered in a variety of ways. Some are

rendered without any improvisational elements — just the composition — some are rendered with one or two of those. And one, which is called "the main" is rendered with all the elements of improvisation. The pieces are rendered in a variety of ragas of course, but also of tala, laya, language, composers etc.

This variety is seen as a strength of Carnatic music; but this when overdone is the bane of Carnatic music. Raga has to be at the centre of an Indian classical music concert. But often in a Carnatic concert songs and sometimes display of sheer technique seem to hijack the performance.

The Carnatic gamaka defines the stylistic core of this tradition. The movement towards diminishing the Carnatic gamaka had started with G.N. Balasubramanian (1910 - 1965) who, instead of gamaka, resorted to the brika or quick crisp voice flicks (murki). That is the main feature of the GNB bani. His music was a craze and he brought a sharp intelligence into his music — the alapana especially. It seemed like melodic ideas poured incessantly from all directions. GNB was bewitched by Hindustani music and was an ardent fan of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. But his music did not bear any influence of that music although he did compose a few pieces in ragas like Gavati. Today the impact of Hindustani music on a few Carnatic musicians, some very popular ones, alarms connoisseurs. And we are not talking of star performers singing abhangs and bhajans almost as their URL. We are talking of deeper stylistic issues. Connoisseurs note that in the music of some popular performers, gamakas, which form the essential stylistic feature of Carnatic music, are considerably softened and the vocalisation borders on crooning. There is a cosmopolitan sheen and stylish finish to the presentation but substance is often lacking. Prof. T.T. Narendran of IITM, a veteran observer of the scene and himself a veena player, captures the trend with the expression '21st century style'.

In a public lecture, musicologist Prof. N. Ramanathan predicted a bleak future for Carnatic music if the

current trend goes unchecked. "Carnatic Music will remain a sort of a regional variant, a poor cousin of Hindustani music."

But, there are many musicians who see the trend and seek to stem it with their own steadfast adherence to core values. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, a musician with extraordinary imagination and unflinching integrity draws full houses whenever he performs. In a web interview he says: "It is mainly the kind of music I was exposed to — I have been lucky to hear the best music and I suppose my own music reflects that. My gurus too have guided me towards appreciating the aesthetic and technical values of ragas and their presentation...."

As has been noted elsewhere, the movement of art music into public spaces inevitably has to reckon with the lay listener. While our art music forms both Carnatic and Hindustani can and do appeal to the lay listener, they are not as accessible and as digestible as popular music. To say that classical or art music is not popular music is a near tautology, but it bears pointing out because this is one of the main factors in the perceived difficulty in maintaining standards.

Senior musician Smt. Suguna Varadachari, says "Today music is moving towards populism. There are so many musicians, that to make one's mark, young musicians want to do something different to grab the audience attention. And this is usually a gimmick or a superficial tweaking or worse, a dilution which is detrimental to music."

Histories of classical arts are often filled with moments of dumbing down, a simplification, even dilution, of the form to appeal to the audiences. And Carnatic music is no exception. The subtle complexities of the



T. M. Krishna and his muse

art forms like Carnatic music are difficult to absorb and then to present it impactfully is even more difficult. If an easier way is available, then some musicians do take that path. When that becomes a success story others are tempted to follow, and then hands are wrung, tears shed for the art. Can the level of the audiences be lifted? Can they be brought up to loftier standards, to learn to appreciate heavier music?

Musician T.M. Krishna seems to precisely be doing this. He has been openly critical of many current trends in Carnatic music. "Is Carnatic music like a circus act, a display of some skills and technique? Is

it like a light music show where song after song are rendered?" His concerts for the last couple of years have deliberately moved away from the regular cutcheri or concert formula. He sings elaborate alapanas, sometimes standalone alapanas with no composition attached to them. Certainly, he seems to be succeeding in his concerts in extricating core aspects of Carnatic music from the outward, conventional aspects of presentation. Even if many are peeved and angry with what is perceived to be idiosyncratic, arrogant even, behaviour, the point of his sometimes outlandish experiments are not lost on the average intelligent listener.

The world of Carnatic music in the 21st century is a busy one, a vibrant one with the whites, the blacks and the greys. The math never adds up. After all, it is an insignificant industry in terms of the money involved — unlike pop music or film music which are about big money. V.V.Sundaram, called Cleveland Sundaram, because he has been organising a festival of Carnatic Music in Cleveland for many years now, says: "It is passion alone that drives this industry. Altogether it cannot be more than 10 million dollars — a pittance. It is sustained not because of commercial factors but because of passion! Passion of organisers who organise for no returns, of parents who spend

money, time and effort in having their children learn the music, of young people pursuing this because they see its value. Monetary success visits only a very few at the very top."

Passion, commitment and hard work, there is aplenty in the various people involved in the today's Carnatic music scenario.

What about Tyagaraja's vision of music — nadopasana — music itself as the object of worship, and the means of worship? Pursuing music for and as a spiritual goal?

In the brave new world of Carnatic music nadopasana is not even a relic. Lions don't move around in groups. It is unrealistic to expect a vast number of people to follow an intense path that only serves self-upliftment and has nothing to do with worldly success. This is true. But one can expect an awareness of such potential that great musicians have spoken about; a serious acknowledgement of these more sublime aspects of this music. A person pursuing the sadhana has no need for acknowledgement, but for the health of Carnatic music, the happening scene would perhaps gain a subtle but important dimension if it were to acknowledge the value of such pursuit.

# Evoking the Nayika in Thumri

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Vidya Rao

I explore here an aspect of thumri in performance — that of the creation of this *nayika* through the singing. I will do this by referring to the music of two extraordinary singers—Siddheshwari Devi, and Faiyaz Khan. Both singers lived and performed in the twentieth century, both are now no more. Both traversed the journey from the days of court patronage



Siddheshwari Devi

and other traditional arenas of performance to the post-Independence scenario. Both are highly regarded exponents of (among other forms) thumri *gayaki*. They each represent very different styles and aspects of thumri *gayaki*. Siddheshwari Devi represents the delicacy and beauty of the Banaras ang of thumri. Faiyyaz Khan, on the other hand, is the doyen of the majestic Agra gharana.

The songs of the thumri repertoire are almost invariably in the female narrative voice, in the voice of the *nayika*. The *nayika* is the one who speaks. In some cases the *nayika* might be the one to whom, or about whom someone — generally a *sakhi* or female friend-confidante — speaks. Traditional systems of aesthetics alert us to the centrality of the *nayika* in literary and performative traditions. *Nayika bhed*, the description and delineation of the *nayikas* is especially important in poetry, dance and drama. While the bandish of the music repertoire do also encode descriptions of the *nayika*, it is really only in thumri that the *nayika* and her emotions receive conscious and detailed treatment. This is because of the very nature of the *gayaki* — the quality of the dramatic, the importance of the poetry and its many layers of meaning, and its more conscious acknowledgement of the particular context in which a performance might be taking place.

Traditional aesthetics identify for us the many types of *nayikas*. Primarily *nayikas* are considered to be of eight types — the *ashtanayikas*. These are identified



Gauhar Jan

according to the particular mood and moment at which we encounter them, in the moment of the drama that the text recounts. These eight basic types are then further categorized according to age, intrinsic temperament, and relationship with the other, giving us a vast number of *nayikas*. Thus a *nayika*, in addition to being an *abhisarik* (a woman who defies all to meet, sometimes, secretly, her beloved), might be either very young, naive and inexperienced (*mugdha*), or a woman of some maturity (*proudha*). Similarly, a *khandita nayika* (one who is angry at her philandering lover) or any other *nayika*, for that matter, could be further categorized as *uttama* (she, who, though angry, still speaks gently and with restraint), *madhyama* (expresses her annoyance, but still retains some restraint), or *sadharana* (the one who quarrels, no holds barred). A *nayika* might be a *svakeeya* (married to the one whom she considers her beloved) or a *parakeeya* (one who is married to another, or who is involved in a relationship that is considered illicit).

The notion of the *nayika* seems to have remained a fairly stable category of representing women and female desire over a long period of time. However, clearly the *nayika* of the texts (of poetry, drama, thumri) is not the same as an ordinary woman. Just as *rasa* is an essentialised emotion — the essence of an Emotion rather than the emotion that each of us experiences in our ordinary lives, so too, *nayikas* represent an iconicised femininity; it is an iconic woman and her (equally iconic) emotions that are represented here.

Two questions of interest arise here in the singing of thumri. First, that while indeed the notion of the *nayika* has remained a stable category over the years, it is my understanding that the success of her representation and evocation in the singing of thumri depends on the ability of the singer to actually *destabilize* (and then re-establish) the notion of the *nayika* as 'given' in the poetic text. This would be a kind of dramatic/narrative parallel to the musical technique used in thumri of *avirbhav-torbhav*, or the moving from the main raga into other ragas, and back again to the main raga. Second, that because both women, and some men too have sung thumri, the *nayika* is evoked and expressed in very different ways, very gendered ways, by men and women—again resulting in a kind of destabilizing and re-establishing of our notions of iconic femininity itself.

#### ***Destabilizing the nayika***

*Take the beautiful dadra*

*Haan, tum jao jao mose na bolo:*

*Yes, that's right, go away, just go*

*Don't speak to me*

*Go back to my rival*

*Dawn is breaking, and you come to my house now*

*Making new excuses!*

*Go, just go*

*Don't speak to me*

*Stay with that other woman.*

This dadra, immortalized by Begum Akhtar has been sung also most beautifully by Shobha Gurtu, and there are recorded versions also available by early

singers. It is set in the raga Mishra Jhinjhoti, and dadra tala. The *nayika* of this dadra is easily identified as the *khandita* — the one who is angry at her deceiving, philandering lover. But is she an *uttama* or a *madhyama*? Or might she even be a *sadharana nayika*? Is she a *svakeeya* or a *parakeeya*. Is she a *mugdha* or a *proudha*?

In singing, one could actually move between all these shades and qualities of *khandita*-ness. Equally one could shift from the *khandita* to another type of *nayika* altogether — in the *antara*, one could indicate the *virahotkandhita*, for example, the one who has waited all night. This suggests to me a destabilizing of the 'given' *nayika* of the text, the creation of infinite dramas within a single phrase of a line of the poetry '*bhor hot*' — dawn is breaking/ at dawn. A singer would do this via the specific techniques of thumri *gayaki*. *Kaku* modulations of the voice would create dramatic shifts of emotional register. *Avirbhav-tirobhav changes* of raga would, by suggesting different times, or by foregrounding certain associations, create different emotions and suggest different spaces and diurnal and seasonal time frames. *Bol banao*, by focusing on the phrase, would create meaning via the somewhat more ambiguous phrase rather than via the complete sentence/text. By such an approach, the text itself, and the *nayika* of the text become open to many different interpretations — in a sense, destabilized.

However, one thing we can be certain of is that the *nayika*, iconic or otherwise, *khandita* or *virahotkandhita*, or any other, is understood to be female. It is Femininity that is iconicised and represented here. But then how do we hear certain male voices singing thumri? What kind of iconic femininity is being evoked and represented here?

### Iconicised femininities

To understand this, let me turn to the voices of Siddheshwari Devi and Faiyaz Khan.

About Siddheshwari Devi, the musicologist Raghava Menon would often say that her singing was so rich in



Hirabai Barodekar

emotion, that she had almost no need to sing beyond the first note. He would tell how she would begin the *bandish* with a single perfectly sounded word or phrase. The power of her voice and *gayaki* was such that the entire drama of the *bandish*'s emotional universe would be contained in that one moment. One needs only listen to her many recordings that are available to appreciate some of this bhav-laden quality. Listen to her extraordinary *Saanjh bhayi ghar aao*, or the pathos of her *Suratiya kahe bisarayi*. In her singing, the iconicity of the *nayika* is leavened by the truth of ordinary experience, of life as it is, as it has been lived. There is pathos, irony, laughter too, the familiar sense of fluidity of the *nayika*'s identity. But there is also a kind of groundedness in real life, real, experienced emotion. Her singing makes us aware not just of the *rasa* of the singing, not just of the *nayika*'s predicament, but strangely also of



Kesarbai Kerkar

our own everyday griefs and joys. The nayika who laments that even her face has been forgotten by the beloved expresses pathos, a mocking irony, even an unexpected hint of laughter, a philosophical acceptance. Siddheshwari Devi's singing brings together the transcendence of her *gayaki* and the earthiness of our everyday world in a seamless whole. Listening to her, we are healed, brought to a deep understanding of ourselves and our predicament and wonder as human beings. The heart opens, tears flow, the world is gentled.

Could there ever be a more extraordinary example of fluid identities than her *Saanjh bhayi ghar aao*? As she sings, as she makes us aware of the voice and emotions of a myriad speakers of this one simple line — mother Yashoda, Radha (Radha as *vasakasajjita*, as *virahotkanthita*),

one nameless *gopi* among many, the *gopa sakhas*, the devotee asking for redemption... She also makes us aware of the different meanings encoded within the word '*saanjh*' — evening. Is this the time of *godhuli*? Is this the time of romance and lovers' meeting? Is this the evening of one's life, the winding down and dissolution of all that one has been and known? Siddheshwari Devi's *bhav-laden* singing brings thumri so close to bhakti in its treatment of the *bandish* and of the *nayika*. Yet, in its technique, it remains unmistakably thumri, *shringarik*.

Turn to recordings of Faiyaz Khan — and we have a whole different experience here. The wonder of his thumri is that it comes to us as a fabric woven with the warp and weft of the apparently very different stylistic qualities of the *gayak*, his thumri and of the Agra gharana. Faiyaz Khan's is a strangely robust thumri, yet for all that there is an unexpected tenderness and sweetness that flits through it.

It is interesting that until Faiyaz Khan's time the male singers of thumri had tended for the most part to imitate the women singers and their mannerisms. In his book *Thumri in Historical and Stylistic Perspectives*, Peter Manuel points out that male voices had tended to be high pitched, as in the case of Pyare Saheb and Anant Nath Bose who sang thumri in falsetto in imitation of the courtesan style. Raghava Menon would often speak eloquently about his experience of hearing Faiyaz Khan for the first time — 'Nothing like this had been heard before,' he would say. Peter Manuel also points out how Faiyaz Khan's thumri *gayaki* differed from another male singer, like Abdul Karim Khan. Karim Khan's higher-pitched voice sang a thumri that tended to focus heavily on *karuna rasa*, pathos, foregrounded the devotional aspect, and eschewed 'the blandishments of the courtesan style'. Faiyaz Khan's *gayaki*, on the other hand, as Manuel points out, delighted in the *shringarik*, and was replete with these so-called blandishments.



Siddheswari Devi

Agra gharana *gayaki* itself is sometimes considered to be a more masculine *gayaki*, not an easy *gayaki* for most women to master. Then there was Khan Saheb's own voice — his rather broad 'leathery baritone' as Raghava Menon would describe it — not the kind of voice that one would immediately associate with iconic femininity. Nor even really the kind of *gayaki* that we would culturally be disposed to hear as feminine. People who had heard him perform live in small *baithaks* and *mehfils* also tell how singing a thumri, Faiyaz Khan would often wink at the audience as he sang, and generally push the performance even further away from the culturally accepted notion of female emotion. He also often chose to sing thumris with rather suggestive words. In his book on thumri, Peter Manuel also mentions being told that Khan Saheb would sing a somewhat risqué *bandish* and 'twirl his moustaches and wink at the ladies....'

Faiyaz Khan's performance of thumri becomes female seduction turned on its head. It becomes almost a kind of ventriloquism, even a caricaturing of femininity. Yet listening to his recordings, one can only marvel at the wonder of this singer and

his extraordinary performance! Listening to him, one has to ask oneself-- bewildered, laughing at the humour of it all, amazed at this creation of the iconic precisely via a kind of iconoclastic subverting of it — just what is the notion of the *nayika* that is being presented here. This *nayika* is extremely complex, as is this *gayaki*. The *nayika* is evoked here through humour — but it is not the gentle irony of Siddheswari Devi's *gayaki*. If women singers have, through the power of their singing, wrested the power and the voice back from the male gaze of the performance, from the ventriloquism of male poets composing as women, Faiyaz Khan's *gayaki* amazes and delights precisely by mocking both gaze and gazer, but also the one gazed at. This is heightened by the seeming 'roughness', the 'bigness' of his voice.

Then there is the way he negotiates the performance itself. There is the on-the-surface unlikely coming together of the grandeur and ruggedness of the Agra *gayaki* and thumri's delicate cameos. Yet Faiyaz Khan brings to his singing a quality of *masti*, colour and delight. Listening to the passages one will hear the movements of thumri bol, but now mediated through the lens of Agra. A movement that might be



Begum Akhtar

smooth, meend-like and somewhat slower in the voice of Banaras now comes to us like a sharper rocking. In his 78 rpm recording of the dadra *More jobana pe aai bahar*, we hear a version studded with tappa-style taans. Yet, in other recordings, probably of privately-organised *baithaks*, possibly recordings from his later years, we hear this and other compositions devoid of any such virtuoso techniques. What we have instead is another interesting element. His vocal accompanists seem sometimes to be forming a human tanpura — a steady *aakar* on the *shadja*, the tonic; against this aural background, Khan Saheb weaves his musical phrases that both are and are not typical thumri *bol banao*. And then at other times, his vocal accompanists pick up and repeat the *mukhda* refrain repeatedly, against which, again, Khan Saheb weaves his phrases.

I cannot believe this is just happenstance. It seems to me that in some fashion Khan Saheb is playing with

the notion of musical forms as gendered. (Admittedly, such a phrase would not be used by him, or indeed by anyone of that time! But surely the idea is present.) For, in the first instance I am immediately reminded of *soz-marsiya*, laments for the martyrs of Karbala, recited, in this case, by the *gharanedar* ustads during Moharram. Just so do the younger sons of the gharana create a human tanpura by uttering a steady *aakar*, sans any tanpura or other instruments; the *ustad's* recitation of the *soz* unfurls against this background. This particular style of reciting *soz* and *marsiya* is typical of the male voice, specifically the style adopted by *gharanedar* male musicians. (Women's recitation at the Moharram *majlis* is different.) Admittedly, the style, context and cultural meaning of *soz* recitation is totally different from that of *thumri*. But therein lies the element of surprise, an element that moreover immediately brings two most unlikely spaces — and two highly gendered spaces at that — into juxtaposition.

In the second instance, I am reminded of the style of singing *qawwali*, again a primarily male form — sung by male musicians (traditionally), albeit often in the female narrative voice, in praise of, or addressed to the *pir* or Sufi Master (again male). Certainly elements of *qawwali* singing are to be found in Faiyaz Khan's *gayaki*, illustrating the connection between Agra gharana *gayaki* and the early roots of *khayal gayaki*, one of the sources certainly being *qawwali* and its precursor forms (*qoul*, *qalbana* etc), and indeed of *khayal gayaki* itself in the voices of what are known as the style of the *Qawwal Bachche*. Faiyaz Khan brings these elements into the somewhat unlikely space of *thumri*. There is thus a sense of an unmistakably male universe (of *qawwali*) being brought into the (feminine) space of *dadra/thumri*, and into the voice of the *nayika* who here beseeches her beloved not to leave her and go to a far-off place, just as her body is flowering into youthful womanhood. This improbable and yet wonderful coming together of two universes, two gendered spaces creates for us a very different kind of *nayika*!

***Evoking gender/questioning gender***

There is an incredible tension created in thumri *gayaki*, whether sung by men or women, between the experienced world of real women, their hopes and fears, their situation in a patriarchal society, the fear of abandonment by a male beloved, etc, and the iconicised feminine presence that we call the *nayika*. It is this shuddering, bone-melting tension that both moves and delights us and shocks us out of our complacency; it forces us to look afresh at the idea of the *nayika*, at the lives, joys and pains of real women, and indeed at our own predicament (whether we are men or women). Siddheshwari brings alive the predicament of femininity, being female in a patriarchal world; more specially because her singing evokes bhakti so deeply. This evoking of the feminine becomes an understanding of the human predicament. Her singing humanises us, brings us to an awareness of life and its many colours.

In Faiyaz Khan's singing, another, different layer seems to be added to this already most complex

response to the *gayaki*. In his performance, there is the added layer, and sharp tension of the questioning of gender itself. Faiyaz Khan's *gayaki*, astonishes by exaggerating the male gaze of the form via his performance. His *gayaki* sharpens the inevitable presence of the other — present as the one addressed, present also as the other half of the narrative, the listening other/the one addressed/the absent one. And by this quite astonishing route, the *nayika* is evoked for us. But in this evoking, gender itself is questioned.

The singer and musicologist Chandrashekhar Rele once remarked that the most important aspect of thumri *gayaki* was its element of surprise — something that follows inevitably from its non-linear method of elaboration. It seems to me that this element of surprise also involves this almost unbearable tension between these seemingly contradictory situations and personae who inhabit thumri's dramatic moment; it also involves the throwing into abeyance all given notions, identities, affinities.

# Learning Indian Music in the Netherlands

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Jane Harvey

Searching for a way to study Indian classical music in Europe is still not easy. In the 1980s and '90s quite a lot of progress was made in the Netherlands in particular, and I propose to review parts of the Indian music scene in those decades and see where it has led to today. The review is based on my own observations and participation, and recent talks with Codarts colleagues Marianne Svasek (dhrupad vocal and sarangi) and Henri Tournier (bansuri), and Prewien Pandohi-Mishre (Rasique institute).

So what makes a person in Holland seek to learn sitar, sarod, tabla, sarangi, bansuri or Indian vocal

music far from its origins in South Asia? Reasons vary from venturing down new musical pathways through cultural curiosity to exploring one's roots – the last with the new Europeans of Indian ancestry who have migrated from (former) Dutch colonies in Latin America, mainly Suriname which gained its independence in 1975.

Naturally, exposure to Indian music is a first requirement. Since its growing popularity in the 1960s there have been several possibilities each year to attend Indian music concerts in Europe by artists on tour, whether organized by private or government



Toss Levy (l.) and Hulib Schippers at the Indian Music and the West Conference, NCPA 1996



Hariprasad Chaurasia and disciples at Codarts Rotterdam

initiatives. Even as far back as 1838, and through the decades and centuries, there is evidence of tours to Europe by Indian music and dance troupes (for example see Joep Bor's chapter on 'Mamia, Amani and other Bayaderes: Europe's Portrayal of India's Temple Dancers' in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s-1940s*, pub. 2007).

The late scholar, musician and educator Gerry Farrell writes about the historical phenomenon of rediscovery – that succeeding generations rediscover the music of India, for example, and apply it to their lives in different ways (*Indian Music and the West*, 1997). Those of us born after the second world war and Indian independence grew up with a sense of separation of Europe and Asia. It took the new wave of travel to the East in the 1960s and '70s and some popular musicians' attraction to traditional Indian music (especially George Harrison of The Beatles) to bridge the gap once more.

Several Dutch men and women found ways to study music and dance in India in those decades, and on settling back in the Netherlands started teaching,

researching, writing and organizing concerts. Some Indian musicians started exploring the possibility of migrating to Europe to teach and perform, a few of them establishing their own teaching practice here. There was an increasing audience for classical music concerts as Westerners interested in yoga and meditation appreciated the format of long alaps, slow, then fast compositions, and the long exposition of a single raga. Many also tried out Indian music lessons locally, and a few of them continued to study for many years so that they could perform quite reasonably at a student or amateur level, or even better. It was time to introduce Indian music into the official Dutch music education system. A major step was taken when the Indian Music Department was established at Rotterdam Conservatory of Music in 1987.

I'll go back a few years to the time when I initially made contact with the Indian music scene in Amsterdam, so I can give my first-hand observations. After a search of nearly four years in London and Amsterdam for an opportunity to study Indian music seriously, I came across the Tritantri Music School in Amsterdam and



Women in Dhrupad : Marianne Svasek (l.) and Celine Wadier

knocked on the door in November 1979. Tritantri was a private school run by sitarists Jamaluddin Bhartiya (d. 2012) and Darshan Kumari, and had been functioning since 1973. It was one of the activities of Tritantri Vidyapeeth Foundation, established with a grant from Ravi Shankar – Jamaluddin was one of his senior disciples. The Foundation also organised a several-day music festival in Amsterdam every April around the time of Ravi Shankar's birthday. And they supported initiatives such as the Indian Music Newsletter, edited by Huib Schippers and myself from 1982-85.

There must have been at least 15 to 20 students at any one time, most of them learning sitar, a few vocalists, and a couple of tabla students. An annual tabla workshop was given by Lateef Ahmed Khan. Mostly, lessons were given as individual one-hourly tuitions, once per week with the possibility to come in any day to practise at the school. I opted to learn vocal and found myself in the strange new world (to me) of sargam, scale types (10-thats), ragas, talas, alap, compositions, improvisations, tanas and so on.

In addition to his sitar career, Jamaluddin had studied with vocalist Amir Khan in the 1950s and was now experimenting to see how Westerners could learn classical vocal, if they could pick up the intonation, rhythm and improvisation structures as well as the necessary raga theory. I became a beneficiary of this experiment though I was thrown straight into the deep end. Lessons were difficult for me at best but I stuck with it. After a while vocalist Indu Srivastava started teaching fortnightly at the school as well and taught a more usual beginners' approach, which was of great benefit too.

In late 1981 Jamaluddin moved Tritantri school to Herengracht 607, and Darshan continued at Kromme Waal 16, the old premises, starting her independent Ripa School. One vocal student from the Kromme Waal days, Carolina de Rooter, opted to move to Calcutta and took a BA in music there while studying with vocalist Bires Roy. On Carolina's request, Jamaluddin invited Bires Roy to teach at Tritantri for a three-month period while he was absent on family business. Later Bires Roy and his son Koustuv Roy,

a sarod disciple of Buddhadev Dasgupta, came back to Amsterdam to start their own music institute. Koustuv Roy settled in the Netherlands and taught both sarod and vocal. An earlier migrant was Zamir Ahmed Khan, tabla disciple of Hidayat Khan, who also started a number of Dutch students off on their journey into Indian music. So the small institutes mushroomed. Other initiatives for studying Indian music were being formed in The Hague, Utrecht and Arnhem that I heard about, and surely others too.

For most students, a few years' acquaintance with the music was enough and after that it was difficult to progress very much away from the musical environment of India itself. However, some sitar students already became quite advanced in the 1980s. Huib Schippers and Siddharth Krishna, for instance, could perform adeptly and both later contributed to the teaching at Rotterdam Conservatory. Bob Wessels taught classes in Utrecht. Jamaluddin was able to

start his own sitar orchestra composed of seven or eight of his sitar students, a couple of tabla players and a tanpura player.

Playing or singing in student concerts was part of the training. There was a monthly house concert in 'Het Pand Brandaan', usually a performance space for medieval music. Three student ensembles would play in the first half, and Jamaluddin Bhartiya would play after the interval. Sometimes we all travelled to other cities, or venues in Amsterdam, and once to a castle in Belgium to play with the same formula. When Tritantri school moved to the Herengracht the premises were big enough to hold house concerts there.

At the Herengracht, students were encouraged to come to the school more frequently. My routine was to come to the school to practise every morning from 8 till 9. From 9 to 10 Jamaluddin would do his sitar practice with one of Lateef's tabla disciples, usually Henri Nagelberg who lived nearby, often Ted de Jong,



Andrea Poddighe (Codarts graduate) and Nasco van de Zande



Jamaluddin Bhartiya and Henry Nagelberg at Het Pand Brandaan (1982)

or Toss Levy. Any students present would observe the practice. Then individual lessons started, and we could stay and watch in the music room or form our own ensembles to practise in the living room. Regular students helped Jamaluddin manage the school.

I've mentioned the Indian Music Newsletter published by Tritantri from 1982-85. Its chief aim was to provide information for audiences at Indian music concerts so they could have a deeper insight into the music. Huib Schippers and I were given a great amount of information to form into articles by two musician scholars who became our associate editors, sarangi player Joep Bor (author of *The Voice of the Sarangi*, 1987) and vocalist Wim van der Meer (author of *Hindustani Music in the Twentieth Century*, 1980). These two had studied music in India in the 1970s from Dilip Chandra Veda, among others. He gave them much inspiration to continue working with Indian music back in Europe, in many ways: teaching, publications, musicology, research, performance.

In 1986 the four of us plus Toss Levy started a Netherlands branch of ISTAR, the International Society for Traditional Arts Research founded in Delhi a few years earlier. In the summer of 1986 a premises was found in an old squatted school for a new institute in Amsterdam, to incorporate the sitar lessons from Tritantri by Jamaluddin and also to invite teachers in other subjects.

This became the School for Indian Music and Dance, with teachers Durga Bor for Odissi and Kelly Varma for Kathak. Ted de Jong organised tabla and tala classes and Latif Ahmed Khan was invited as a guest teacher – but it was not long before he passed away (1989). Vocalist Mohammed Sayeed Khan was invited to teach khayal; Joep Bor taught sarangi and became the director. Wim van der Meer taught raga theory and vocal. Harsh Wardhan came from Delhi to teach bansuri. I was both a manager and a student. In 1987 we gained a dhrupad department with Yvan Trunzler, and later Uday Bhawalkar, as resident vocal teacher.

Their gurus Zia Mohiuddin Dagar (rudra vina) and Zia Fariduddin Dagar (vocalist) were regular guest teachers. I should mention that subsidy was provided for this school by the Amsterdam Arts Council and the Ministry of Culture.

Now 1987 was the year that Joep Bor was asked to form and head an Indian music department at Rotterdam Conservatory (now named Codarts Rotterdam) using the resources of the ISTAR school (teachers, some of the students, subjects) to start it. Students who chose to enroll for a professional training course had lessons at Rotterdam one day a week and supporting tuition provided by ISTAR in Amsterdam for four days a week. Zia Mohiuddin Dagar was the first artistic director and examiner in the Rotterdam department until he passed away in 1990.

On a national level, around 1990 the government decided it was time to integrate the various non-Western music institutes they had started supporting, including the ISTAR school, into the municipal music schools. Thus we were invited to merge our Indian music and dance classes into the Amsterdam Music School. Unfortunately we could not continue

independently. Several other municipal music schools added Indian music to their range of studies.

At Rotterdam Conservatory the World Music Department was started in 1990, with Joep Bor as head. It included the disciplines already taught there of Indian music, Flamenco guitar and Latin American music. In 1993, Argentinian tango music was added, followed by Turkish music in 1998. I myself joined this department in 1993 as a staff researcher. Today, in the academic year 2013-2014 the World Music department still has those five disciplines.

It will have become clear by now that I've been describing the process of education in the Netherlands in Hindustani music only. Carnatic music has not gained much of a foothold although concerts are fairly well-attended. Emmie te Nijenhuis has published several musicological works, and study material for the Saraswati vina (including *Varnam: Selected Concert Studies for the South Indian Lute*, 1992) and Ludwig Pesch has compiled *The Oxford Illustrated Companion to South Indian Classical Music* (1999, revised edition), as well as an e-learning course. Both studied Carnatic music in India (respectively vina and flute).



Participants at Indian Music and the West, NCPA, Mumbai 1996

Although Indian music is not yet fully part of Dutch music culture except for adventurous souls, there is one section of the population, the 'Hindustani' community (migrants of Indian ancestry from Suriname, former Dutch Guyana), where learning Bharatnatyam dance has become fully embedded for children and young people. Dance teachers work with tapes they've had recorded in India and invite Carnatic musicians from abroad for their students' graduate performances. One such dancer and teacher, Sitra Bonoo, came to Rotterdam Conservatory to study North Indian vocal music, and graduated in khayal. For a couple of years Sitra and I organized vocal music lessons in The Hague given by Rama Varma, vina player and Carnatic vocalist from Trivandrum, Kerala. However, we could

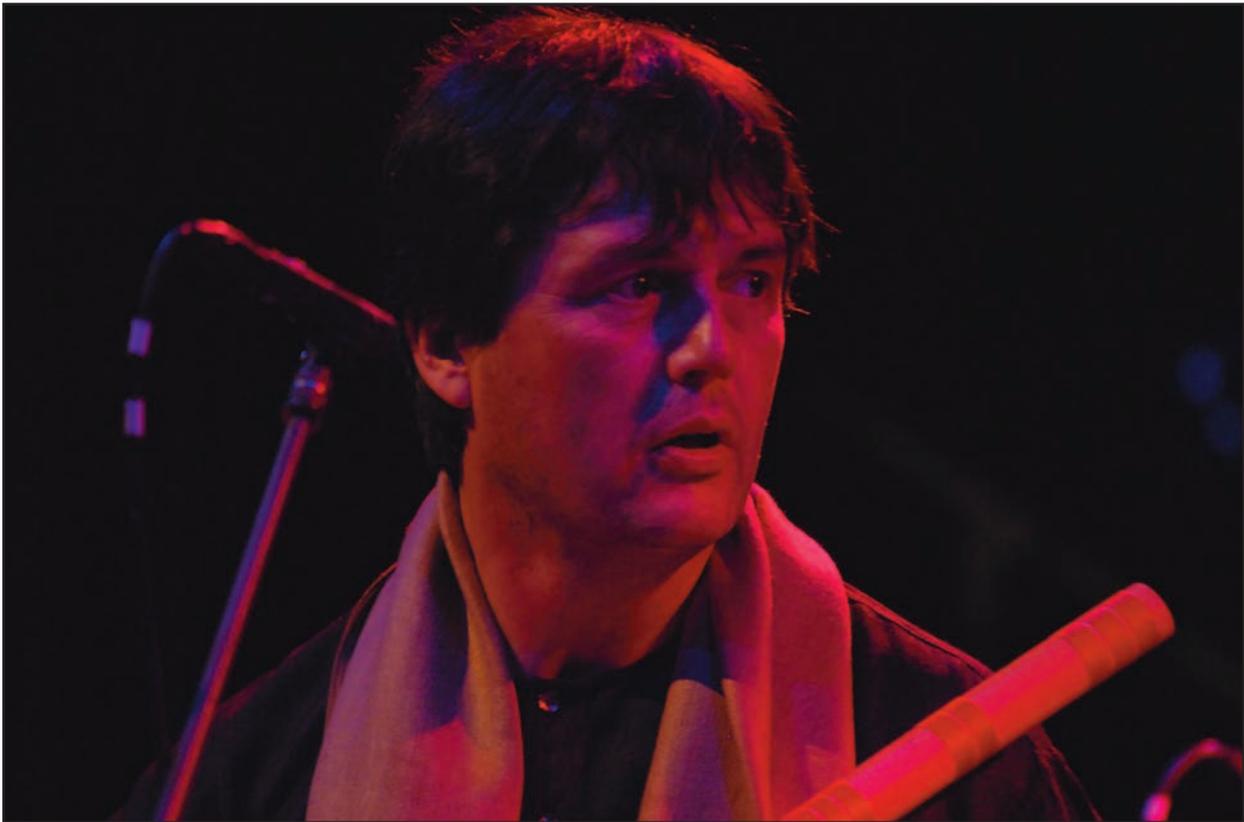


The author singing khayal, Zeist, Netherlands ca. 2002

not obtain enough funding to continue the series of lessons.

Back to Rotterdam Conservatory: the Indian music study programme thrived in the 1990s. Hariprasad Chaurasia was appointed artistic director in 1990 and attracted many bansuri students. Paul Grant, adept in sitar, tabla and santoor, took over the sitar classes for two year before moving to Geneva, Switzerland. Budhadya Mukherjee came as the regular guest teacher for sitar. Ali Akbar Khan visited to give workshops and several other prominent Indian musicians came as guest teachers. Faiyaz Khan was appointed as regular guest teacher for tabla. Koustuv Roy was appointed to teach khayal vocal and sarod. Zia Fariduddin Dagar was guest teacher for dhrupad. Buddhadev Dasgupta came as sarod guest teacher and helped the department tremendously in collaborating on its publication *The Raga Guide* (1999, editor Joep Bor).

Core founders Joep Bor, Wim van der Meer and Ted de Jong had initially worked out a comprehensive study programme with emphasis on the main instrument or voice, practical side subjects, ear training and theory – Indian music theory and history, Western theory, world music, tala, raga analysis and teaching methodology. Instruments were both purchased from India and donated by the Indian Embassy. As well as sitar, sarod, tabla and voice, there were students studying and excelling in sarangi, violin, and cello (and later a saxophone student). During this decade (1990s) the Indian music department generally had around 25 students. There was a basic five-year course; some students took one or two foundation years and really talented performers could continue for two years after obtaining their teaching diploma for a performance degree. Students were encouraged to visit Indian for extra tuition when they could, and go on with their music study after leaving the institution. Many started a career in performing and teaching, even if only part-time. Although Indian music students at Codarts come from all over the world, many stay on in the Netherlands after graduation as they have a ready-made music community.



Henri Tournier

Rotterdam Conservatory participated in the SRA-Music Forum conference 'Indian Music & The West', held at NCPA, Mumbai in 1996. This inspired a symposium on the history of Hindustani music, held at Rotterdam in 1997. A huge volume later resulted from the symposium contributions, *Hindustani Music: Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (2010).

Between 1992 and 2013 there have been around 20 bansuri graduates, over 12 for sitar, sarod or tabla, 11 for dhrupad or khayal vocal, 5 for bowed instruments, and saxophone. After 2002 the existing study programmes were converted to fit the Bachelor-Master's structure introduced into higher education in the Netherlands (which previously had an individual system though equivalent), and all the curricula were adapted and inspected.

One of the very first Indian music students at Rotterdam Conservatory, Marianne Svasek graduated in both sarangi (learning from Joep Bor and Ram

Narayan) and dhrupad vocal (teacher: Zia Fariduddin Dagar), and is now teaching the same at Codarts (the umbrella organization including the conservatory, dance academy and circus arts academy). Even as a student she worked as a teaching assistant for ear training. Marianne also runs an intensive dhrupad study programme in her home teaching practice (not all students can or wish to learn conservatory-style). She is active in performance and has an ensemble called 'Women in Dhrupad', in which she sings together with her former student, dhrupad graduate Celine Wadier, with Nathaniel van Zuylen on pakhawaj.

Henri Tournier (who still lives in Paris, France) commutes to Rotterdam to teach bansuri. He came as a teaching assistant and student of Hariprasad Chaurasia from 1990 onwards, graduated in teaching and performance and now shares the teaching of Indian music theory and raga analysis with Marianne

as well. Henri was drawn to the improvisation possibilities of Hindustani music and gives combined modules in improvisation with teachers and students from other departments of Codarts Rotterdam. He published the book *Hariprasad Chaurasia and the Art of Improvisation* in 2010.

I recently spoke to Prewien Pandohi-Mishre, who is building up a new institute for Indian music teaching in Rotterdam with Rishi Dhir, one of the Codarts graduates in khayal. Julia Ohrmann, a bansuri graduate, will teach there too. Prewien's vision is to provide Indian music training for students of all ages who do not necessarily want to become professionals but wish to include music-making in their lives. Rasiq has a base in the Hindustani community and they intend to cater for students in four streams – classical; 'filmi' and ghazal; bhajan and kirtan; baithak gana and folk.

Last but not least, I must mention the musicology department at the University of Amsterdam. The study programme naturally has an academic orientation with historical, cognitive and cultural musicology as its central themes. With Wim van der Meer there as senior lecturer, students have been able to take an introduction module to Indian music in general, including a weekly practical class in sargam training with dhrupad and khayal compositions.

I hope I have given an impression of the intensity with which Indian music has been approached in Holland. I could not mention everybody involved and my apologies go to those I've left out. I also haven't had space to describe the many concerts and festivals and their organizers who played a large role in the Indian music scene (let alone the collaboration with other 'world musics' and the fusion experiments). There's ample scope for a good research project to collect data on Indian music in the Netherlands.

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## Europalia.india A Festival Link

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*A multi-cultural tie-up between the Government of India and Europalia International culminating in the Europalia.india Festival, was flagged off on 4 October, 2013. Jointly inaugurated by H.E. Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Hon'ble President of India, along with the King of the Belgians, Mr Phillipe-1, and Queen of the Belgians H. M. Mathilde, among others, the four-month extravaganza showcased India's cultural wealth through a multidisciplinary programme,*

*including a recital by the Gundecha Brothers, and a dance ballet led by Ms Leela Samson. Subsequently an art exhibition – The Body in Indian Art – was inaugurated at the same venue. Mapping India culturally, via this platform, albeit in a capsulated form, has given European viewers a unique opportunity to become updated with cultural transformations, both experimental and traditional, in India, under the auspices of the ICCR.*























# The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Musical Mix

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Kuldeep Kumar

Indian music has evolved over several millennia as a result of a complex dialectic of continuity and change that has determined its shape and defined its broad parameters. What we know as continuity is often called tradition—a highly revered word among musicians and music lovers alike. Unlike western music that comes to us in a finished form as it is written and notation-based, and where the hiatus between composer and performer is near complete, Indian music is not written and the performer is also a composer in a deeper sense. Here, he may not



Abdul Karim Khan



Ahmad Jan Thirakwa

have created the raga or composed the bandish, but the music that he creates is entirely his own. The raga and the bandish (composition) act like pegs on which the performer hangs his performance. In so far as the tradition of music is concerned, it is handed down from guru to disciple in the course of a long pedagogic process that relies primarily on a direct, one-on-one relationship between the giver and the recipient. Consequently, tradition plays a much

greater role here as the disciple is viewed as the one who would carry on the tradition represented by his guru and the guru's predecessors. There is ample scope for creativity but it has to express itself without transgressing the parameters of tradition and the values associated with it.

Far-reaching changes occurred in the conditions of production of music towards the end of the nineteenth century impacting its nature as well as reach. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Hindustani classical music was the preserve of professional musicians and their clans (known as gharanas) who jealously guarded their music as one would guard one's property. Outsiders were not allowed or encouraged to learn music. Musicians were totally dependent on the patronage of wealthy royals, zamindars or merchants.

However, the situation gradually changed when some royal patrons— Maharaja Daulatrao Scindia of Gwalior, for example—started asking their court musicians to teach their music to outsiders too. On the express directive of Maharaja Daulatrao Scindia, Hassu Khan and his younger brother Haddu Khan taught many Hindu disciples such as Vasudevba Joshi and Shankar Pandit whose lines of disciples represent the two main branches of the Gwalior gharana even today. It was Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, disciple of Balkrishnabua Ichalkaranjkar who was in turn a disciple of Vasudevba Joshi, who in 1897 revolutionized the music scene by holding the first-ever ticketed public performance of Hindustani classical music in Rajkot in Gujarat. This trend was picked up by other musicians too and we hear about a ticketed competitive performance of Bhaskarbua



Ali Akbar Khan



Allaudin Khan

Bakhle and Khamiyajan in Pune in 1907. Two years later, Kirana gharana founder Abdul Karim Khan broke another taboo when he presented his seven-year-old son Abdul Rahman (who came to be known as Sureshbabu Mane) and four-and-a-half-year-old

daughter Champakali (who later became famous as the legendary Hirabai Barodekar) at a ticketed public concert in Sholapur and announced the name of the raga that they would sing. It was a departure from the practice as Ustads, ever fearing that their art would be stolen by others, shied away from revealing the name of the raga they were singing. Even while teaching, the disciple would be taught the bandish (composition) but would not be told the name of the raga, or if told at all, it would often be the wrong name. Even on the labels of the old gramophone records, one finds the name of the ragas wrongly published on account of this tendency. The gharana pedagogy relied a little too much and a little too deliberately on obfuscation. However, a visionary like Abdul Karim Khan could look into the future and realise that the uninitiated listeners at a public concert must be told the name of the raga to inform and also to educate them so that they could compare two performances of the same raga and develop their own sense of appreciation.



Amir Khan



Amjad Ali Khan

Three significant changes with far-reaching implications took place towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, and all the three contributed in a big way to freeing music from the shackles of a constricting feudal environment. As a result, Hindustani classical music entered the public domain leaving the narrow confines of the private mehfil held at royal palaces or mansions of the wealthy zamindars and businessmen behind. The first was the practice started by Vishnu Digambar Paluskar to make music accessible to anybody who was willing to buy a ticket to attend a public performance of classical music. The second was the opening of music schools where students from educated middle class families could learn on the basis of a thoughtfully formulated common syllabus. This obviously necessitated fundamental changes in the pedagogic practices hitherto employed by traditional gharanedar musicians. The third was the advent of sound recording technology that made

it possible for the general public to not only listen to the recordings of acknowledged masters but also to repeat the experience by playing the same gramophone record again and again. As is well known, the first recording was made in 1902 and the artiste was the one and only Gauhar Jan. All this resulted in a process of gradual democratisation of our music and the feudal ethos prevalent in the music world began to slowly crumble.

The history of the 20th century bears testimony to the unfolding of this process of democratisation on multiple levels. One most obvious result was the emergence of non-gharanedar musicians i.e., those who did not belong to families of professional musicians. This offered an impetus to the gradual weakening of the gharana system as well as gharana ideology because, slowly but steadily, top-notch non-gharana musicians began to outnumber their gharana counterparts. After the demise of Rahmat Khan



Bade Ghulam Ali Khan

in 1922, the Gwalior gharana was almost entirely represented by those who did not belong to the family or clan of the gharana founders Haddu Khan-Hassu Khan. Therefore, as the 20th century went ahead, the concept of gharana shed its original meaning of being a clan and increasingly came to be understood as a synonym of style or approach towards music.

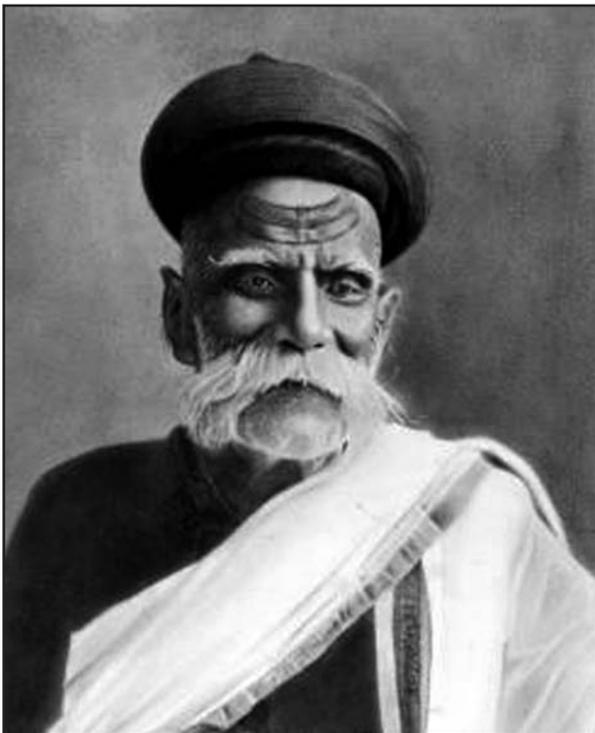
Kumar Gandharva, who was trained in the Gwalior gayaki by Vishnu Digambar Paluskar's disciple B. R. Deodhar, provided the ideological basis for the loosening grip of the gharana system as it was, in his view, encouraging the trend of replicating one's guru's art instead of fostering creativity. He evolved his own highly individualistic style of singing without breaking the traditional rules of raga-vidya. The gharanas had a dual identity. They were at the same time a clan as well as a guild of professional musicians whose livelihood depended on their art. Therefore, they were against teaching any outsiders the secrets

of their art. It was said that the core of their learning was reserved for their sons, a highly diluted version for their sons-in-law, and the utterly peripheral for ordinary disciples. In olden days, a disciple had to live in the guru-shishya parampara — glorified by many these days as the hallmark of the Indian traditional system — in the house of the master and had to perform all kinds of menial jobs just like a mere servant. This would go on for years and if once in a while the Ustad was in a good mood, he would teach the student a thing or two.

Allauddin Khan, who belonged to a peasant family of East Bengal, came to Rampur in Uttar Pradesh in the latter half of the 19th century and became a disciple of the famed Wazir Khan who was also the ustad of the nawab. He recounts in his autobiography how he worked for four years for more than twelve hours everyday in the house of the ustad, but Wazir Khan was not even aware of his existence. One day, a

telegram came with the news of his wife's attempted suicide. This made Wazir Khan realise what great sacrifice Allauddin Khan was making in order to learn music and his heart melted. Because of his bitter experiences like this, Allauddin Khan vowed to teach as many students as possible without accepting any fee from them. No wonder he gave such incomparable artistes to the music world as Ali Akbar Khan, Annapurna Devi, Ravi Shankar, Pannalal Ghosh, Sharan Rani, Timir Baran, Nikhil Banerjee and so on. However, the gharana musicians never accepted the charge that outsiders were not properly taught and dubbed it as a slander.

Yet in a recent book titled "*My Father, Our Fraternity*", sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan admits that this practice was one of the main reasons why the need to open music schools was felt. And he is perhaps the only gharanedar musician to acknowledge it. Says he: "In those days, disciples lived with their guru and served him and his family almost like domestic helps. The system had its advantages, but sometimes things



Balkrishna Ichalkaranjekar



Habib Painter

got ugly in this tradition. Though the guru-shishya parampara had its charm and sanctity, in many cases, gurus would have their students serve them for years and not teach them anything substantive. This in time created bitterness towards the tradition itself. In fact, this was also one reason for Indian classical music, primarily an oral tradition, to be converted into courses that could be taught through books."

Today, the situation is different and the bleak reality stares us in the face. While there are thousands of music institutions in the country, they have been unable to produce even a single high calibre performing artiste. So, while the guru-shishya parampara has to a considerable extent withered away, nothing of comparable significance has taken its place. Thus, there is a veritable void in the field of music pedagogy where bookish knowledge is being imparted in schools, colleges and universities, but the real art is losing its way.

It may sound ironical that in the latter half of the 20th century when life has become faster, Amir Khan was able to stage a kind of revolution by offering a very slow, reflective or rather meditative style of khayal singing to an audience that was used to fast-paced taankaari and a very ornamented style of presentation. At a time when stalwarts like Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Omkarnath Thakur, Krishnarao Shankar Pandit and Kesarbai Kerkar were very much active, it was no



Kumar Gandharva

easy task to perform. Yet, Amir Khan succeeded in getting the approval of the lay listener as well as the cognoscenti for his unique merukhand-based style. Later, many top musicians drew inspiration from this very style that was initially debunked as "sust" (lazy) by those who were used to vocal acrobatics.

Kumar Gandharva too brought about another kind of revolution. He took classical music to its very roots i.e., to the folk tradition, and created many charming ragas on this basis. He also elevated bhajan singing to the level of an independent musical genre and excelled in rendering nirguni bhajans, especially those of Kabir.

As was stated in the beginning of this essay, music, especially of the classical or highbrow variety, evolves through a dialectical interplay of tradition and change. Those changes that are in tune with tradition and its values enrich it. On its onward journey, music, like all other arts, experiences such changes too that militate against its very core. Sadly, Hindustani classical music is at present faced with such a situation where it has to find a way to avoid dilution in its core values. This music is essentially chamber music meant for a small number of initiated connoisseurs. However, for reasons explained earlier in this essay, it began to make an appearance on the public platform towards the end of the 19th century. Today, celebrity musicians perform for very large audiences in India and abroad.



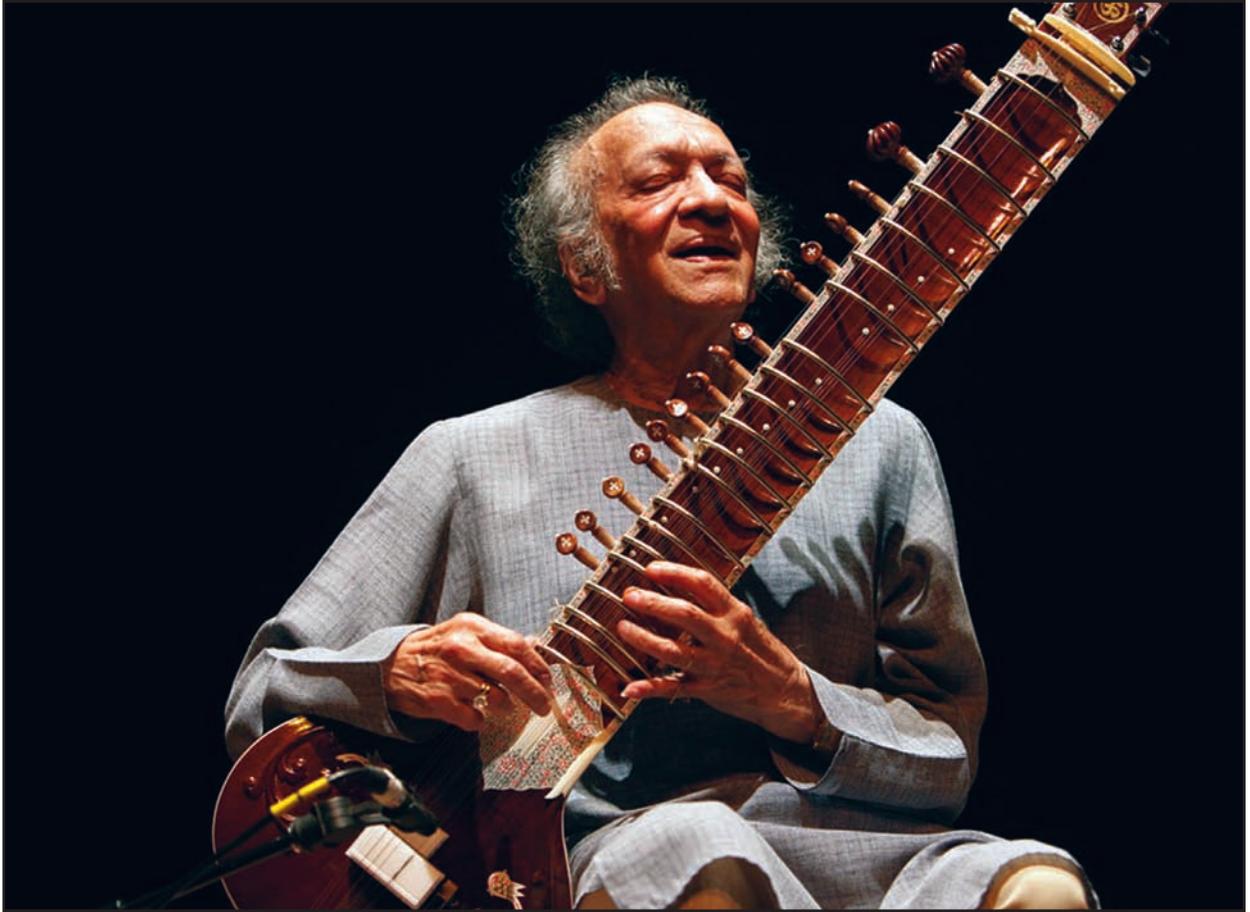
Nikhil Banerjee

However, just as the Hindi film music has made a transition from being melody-based to becoming rhythm-based, Hindustani classical music too is slowly following suit. In the process, the centuries-old equation and relationship between the main performer and his percussion accompanist is getting warped. In the bygone era, accompanists on tabla, sarangi, violin or harmonium used to sit on the concert stage in a way that they did not directly face the audience but faced the main performer. This arrangement gave primacy to the main artiste and enabled the accompanists to take the cue from him or her. Today, most tabla players face the audiences. They want to be treated at par with the main performer during the performance. It is not at all unusual to see listeners sitting with deadpan faces while a sitar or sarod player is probing the depths of a raga in the *alap-jod-jhala* section and breaking into an uproarious applause the moment the tabla accompanist starts playing. On most occasions, it is the tabla player who receives more appreciation and applause from the audiences whenever the main artiste keeps to repeating the melodic line and allows the accompanist to play solo passages. As vocalists or instrumentalists want to attract as big an audience as possible, they too go along with this so that the concert becomes 'successful'. One feels that if tabla players are so keen to display their art and virtuosity, they should give solo performances.

The practice of giving tabla players a chance to play solo for a few minutes was started by Ravi Shankar with very good reasons and intentions. Firstly, unlike quite a few of his contemporaries, he had tremendous mastery over *taal* and wanted the tabla player to enrich his performance. Secondly, he wanted to give them a chance to display their art too. Earlier, the tabla player was only allowed to play the *theka* and there was no scope for him to display his art. There were instances when the tabla player was asked to get out if he tried to even produce a *tirakit*. However, today the situation is just the opposite as the tables have turned. Now, the tabla player wants that the audio volume for his microphone should be as much, if not more, as that of the main performer. And, he generally succeeds in overshadowing the main artiste. In view of this trend, one is sure that even Ravi Shankar could not have anticipated that his well-intentioned effort would culminate into this situation. There is an old long-playing record of Ravi Shankar's *Bihag*. He is accompanied by Ahmad Jan



Omkarnath Thakur



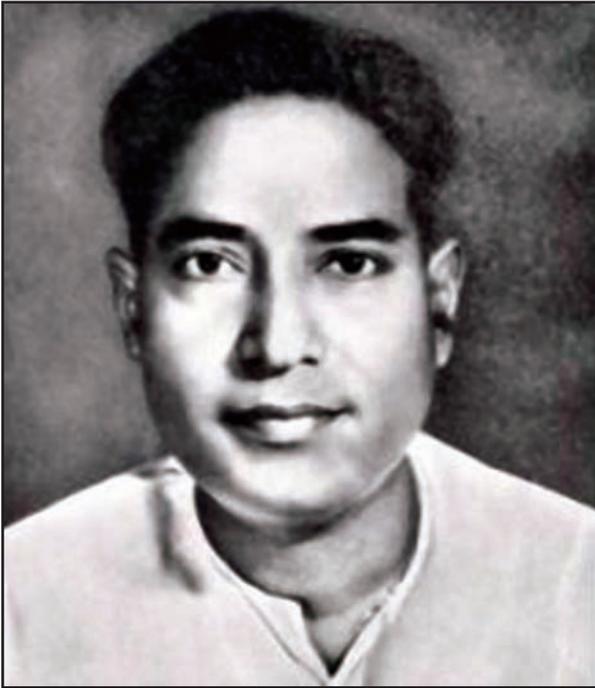
Pandit Ravi Shankar

Thirakwa who was perhaps the greatest tabla player of the last century. While the Bihag is truly soul nourishing, the way Thirakwa plays tabla is a lesson in the art of accompaniment. Not for a moment does he try to steal the thunder from Ravi Shankar and goes on to play with great dexterity and remarkable restraint, thus showing due deference to the main performer who was junior to him by several decades.

For many years, attempts have been regularly made to recreate the chamber music ambience by organizing baithaks in public places. However, the old-world etiquette is never followed. The unwritten rule for such baithaks was that very senior and knowledgeable people were seated in the front row, followed by those who were less senior and less knowledgeable, and the last row was given to those who were uninitiated. Those sitting in the front row

wielded such authority that if the performer was very disappointing, they could stop him even in the middle of a performance. There is a story that a vocalist of great repute visited Delhi's Chandni Mahal, the residential area of musicians, in the 19th century. At a soiree, he was stopped by a very old ustad who took the tanpura away from him, asking, "Are you singing Malkauns or Bhairavi?" Certain taans are common to both and one is allowed to use them only fleetingly, which perhaps the singer was not doing.

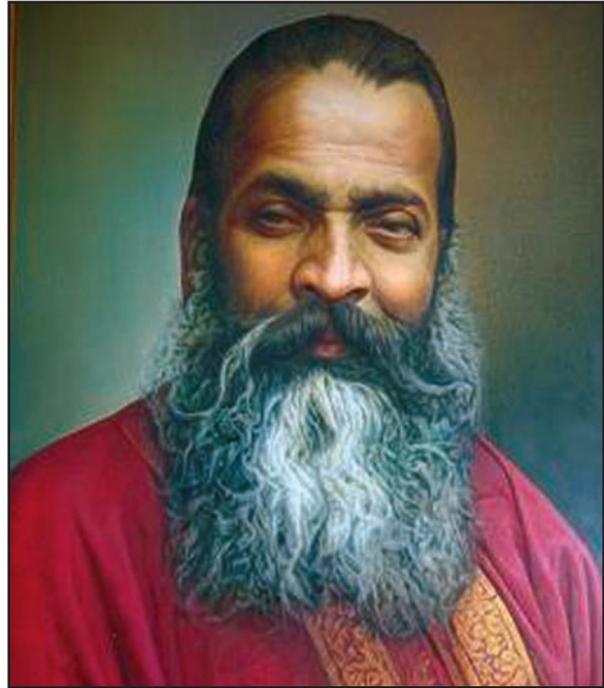
While a gharanedar ustad like Abdul Karim Khan felt the need to announce the name of the raga more than a century ago, lesser musicians of today do not feel any such need. They come and without announcing the name of the raga start their recital. Quite often, they would choose a raga from the Carnatic repertoire that is not widely known to



Suresh Babu Mane

the listeners of Hindustani classical music. There is another disconcerting trend. Most musicians these days are not conforming to the raga-time principle. As is well known, in Hindustani classical music, each raga is assigned a particular time in the day-night cycle when it is supposed to be performed. However, these days one should not be surprised to listen to Darbari Kanhda, a midnight melody, being performed at 6 pm. Quite a few well known musicians perform afternoon ragas in the evening. Such anarchy does not bode well for the future of our music.

It is regrettable that a kind of star system has come to stay in the music world today, resulting in the repetition of the same performers over and over again while so many deserving artistes remain unnoticed. As the role of All India Radio and Doordarshan has dwindled over the years, corporate interests have taken over the sponsorship of musical events where the popular appeal of a particular artiste matters much more than his or her real worth. In a place like Delhi, doing away with the practice of holding ticketed music festivals and handing over the financing of these events to the corporate entities



Vishnu Digambar Paluskar

has reinforced this tendency. It has also given rise to commercialization of musical events.

Another disturbing trend today is the trivialization of the word 'sufi' by divorcing it from its religious and spiritual context. The prefix 'sufi' is being so liberally used with all kinds of music that it is fast losing its meaning. We have sufi-rock, sufi-pop, sufi-jazz, sufi-hiphop and so on. Everybody knows that qawwalis originated in the dargahs of sufi saints. But did Roshan claim that he was composing sufi music for the Bharat Bhushan-Madhubala starrer '*Barsat Ki Raat*'? Did Habib Painter or Shakeela Banu Bhopali ever call themselves sufi singers? However, the present-day performers are not daunted by such questions. The ever-applauding audiences are their source of strength and they are in no mood to think about the lasting values of their art.

Yet, all is not lost. Even now, there are quite a few artistes who are pursuing in right earnest their musical goal and who remain true to the values of their glorious tradition. They assure us about the future.

# Halftrang: Linking Bavaria and Srinagar

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Abhay Sopori

In a countryside where a generation had grown up hearing the crackle of AK 47s as their lullabies the idea of growing up had meant the taking up of arms, swaggering with the sullenness of rebellion and changing their world from a place of repose and serenity into one of manouevres and rebellious actions. For their elders, there was a constant

yearning for those lost days when villagers sang folk ditties dripping with romance, about maidens and lovers, providing them a space for liberating their minds from the ground realities around them. Into this socio political culture there still lived faint rays of hope, in the form of isolated musicians who of an evening tuned the strings of their rababs and tapped



Abhay as a toddler with father Pt. Bhajan Sopori

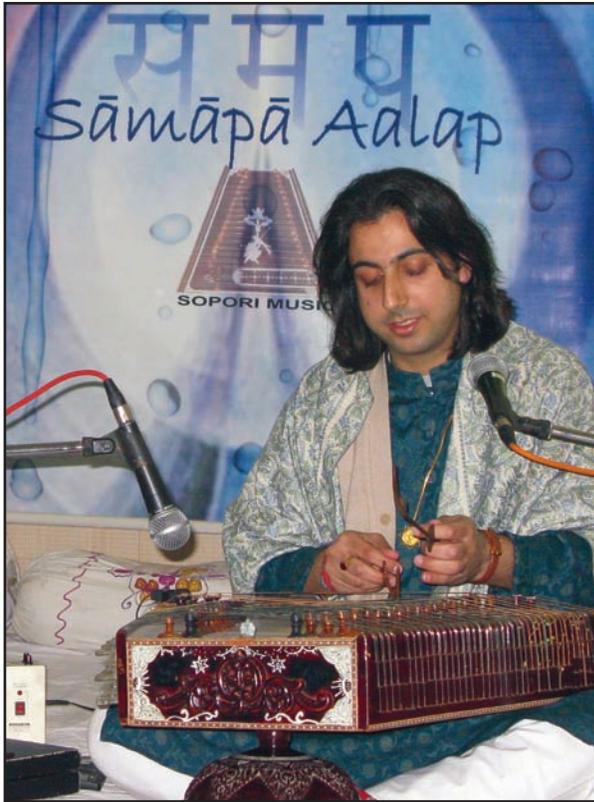


Abhay with elder brother Sohrab

the notes of their tablas to relive their culture through the songs of their fathers. As they gazed through the latticed openings of their wooden khirkis humming their songs in high pitched notes, their voices merged and complemented the trickling sounds of streams flowing through emerald fields planted with rice against the backdrop of the Himalayan foothills. How they wished for a return to the days, when the soiries of yore were a part of village interaction, once again. When lo! their wish was granted. Their intense desire to regale the world with their cherished arts had been heard 7000 miles away in the Bavarian region of Germany where the musicians of the Bavarian Philharmonic Orchestra had engaged with them to propagate the music of their two worlds once again.

But it was quite another ball game when it came to ground realities. The intrinsic musical folk culture of Kashmir was largely an intangible entity existing

in the hearts and minds of its people and which had been heard across village hamlets and kept alive as keepsakes. The European conservatoire were accustomed to written scores, conductors and concerts where the task of making music was combined with professional flourish. Yet the song that they heard preserved in the innards of village hamlets went to their hearts and refused to budge from there. It captivated their senses as it talked of a lover who sees his beloved flitting across the fields of saffron, singing along, sans music accompaniments for her very footsteps danced and jingled to the rhythm of the song in her lover's heart. And this 'Rinde Poshmal' as it is popularly called, when sung in native Kashmir had magnetised generations of its people as a tender picturisation of familiar scenes, an instant pick-me-up following from the very notes of the melody. To test the efficacy of this number on the German musical psyche, maestro Abhay Sopori had specially



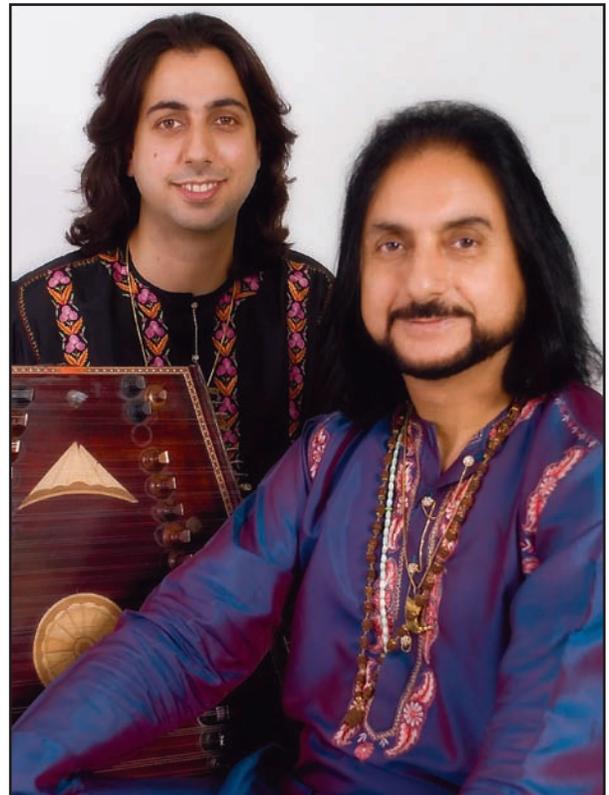
Abhay Rustum Sopori

a piece where he had incorporated the refrain of this popular ditty of the Kashmiri poet Habba Khatoon into his composition and the music travelled a 7000-mile route to the German conservatoire and instantly fired imaginations out there.

But there were prickly situations on the way. At first came the hurdle of understanding the two musical cultures. But there were imperceptible goadings fanning their effort. After all, the world was going global in terms of economic cultures. Indian music had been sung and chanted across three thousand years and needed to be explored. Yet there was that intrinsic advantage: the song went right to the musicians' hearts. Thus the first step of having regular rehearsals got going, not by meeting in Srinagar, the ultimate venue chosen for this musical experiment, nor in Munich, for the orchestra was travelling across the globe. The internet was harnessed into action and scores were exchanged from across cyber

space to South America, where the orchestra was performing. Then finally, one evening before the actual performance the two musical cultures met face-to-face and presto! "The perfect marriage was solemnized," claims Abhay Sopori, on whose shoulders had rested the entire episode of creating this slice of Kashmiri flavour in musical terms, placing it into a musical score and then exerting fellow musicians from his state to join in the process of writing musical history for the state. "All these friendly musicians proved that classical European music culture and Islamic culture can cooperate when there is a friendly reception for it in both cultures," is his categorical observation, post the experience.

Yet this remarkable achievement, resting on the shoulders of a single musician family of Kashmir, the Soporis of Sopor has energised deep concerns in the father-son duo of Pandit Bhajan Sopori and his son Abhay Sopori. Speaking to the Indian Horizons team, maestro Abhay Sopori chartered out the course ahead



Abhay with father Pandit Bhajan Sopori

with a hardcore practicality. The forging of this deep musical relationship strangely enough has taken root at a time when the traditional arts, both classical and folk, are tottering on the brink of extinction, surmises the maestro. While at one time, almost every home in the countryside would have a rabab or santoor hanging from its walls, today, these familiar sights are now hearsay. Long revered as a stronghold of Sufism, the classical links of this state had a Sufi bias. It was fundamental to every musical aspirant of the forties era, claims Sopori, to cherish their Sufi links in music. Such fierce regard for their unique blending of a great philosophy with a great musical tradition, had earned it encomiums beyond their boundaries.

How then did this fountain of musical richness suddenly dry up? The simplistic answer one is given says Sopori is the onset of terrorism and political upheavals, that have racked the state all across living memory as he maestro likes to draw attention to the history of this troubled state and comes up with numerous examples of such volatile situations

from the past. Hence, he logically surmises, unrest is an ugly omnipresence in the state which has seen several ebbs and flows in this direction and yet, in the past its music has thrived despite such distractions, gamely. Looking elsewhere to spot the reason behind the current malaise, Sopori points to a lack of state patronage as regards the music of his state. "The way in which our music, both folk and classical is being neglected, it will not be a surprise if in a decade or so, these numbers begin to exist in books and treatises only, banished from the performance stage into complete oblivion." What really restores such sinking traditions to their former glory," he cites, "is the effort to carry them across to the international stage. This is what has been done with the folk traditions of the Langas and Manganiyars of Rajasthan so today, their colourful turbaned groups enthral audiences worldwide with their joi de'vere of their numbers to such an extent that in the popular imagination, the Langa numbers have come to be regarded as the symbol of Indian folk music.



Kashmir - Abhay conducting with maestro Mr. Zubin Mehta - with Bavarian State Orchestra and Sopori's Soz-o-Saaz Ensemble



SaMaPa Award to German Ambassador Michael Steiner by Pt. Bhajan Sopori and Dr. Farooq Abdullah

But this small step taken in collaboration with the German Philharmonic Orchestra, has given a unique boost. Efforts are on therefore to keep the musical graph of the state at an upbeat level through a systematic policy of nurturing and promotion. 'The musical graph of Kashmir has witnessed highs and lows all through its existence, and should not be traced to a single cause such as political unrest in the state. Kashmir has not been alien to divisive elements in the past but what has been its saving grace in this land is the continuous blending of its twin beliefs of Shaivism and Sufism, where the two thought processes have been instrumental in saving Kashmiri culture at large and its musical traditions in their variety and entirety.'

Being no stranger to musical erosion in the past, has led to the surfacing of a few Samaritans, whose contribution to the arts of Kashmir are revered as

a household prerogative. One such pioneer who is definitely a household memory even beyond the state is lineage of Pandit Shambhunath Sopori, the grandparent of maestro Abhay Sopori. A trained musician himself, the Pandit had inherited a great treasury of Sufi music, as his was the sole family of Hindus who had nurtured the art of Sufi singing down the ages. Once he was drawn into its fold, Panditji realized the imminent threats that this form would have to encounter in the land of its birth. Music was considered taboo among the Sufi followers and thus reviving and nurturing an entire school of Sufi thought to be sung at gatherings was frowned upon among the orthodoxy.

This meant that the music revival process would have to adopt a non-traditional and hitherto untried route for survival. Thus Panditji hit upon a brilliant alternative for circumventing this adverse situation,

that of the path of schooling. Way back in the forties Panditji began teaching music as a subject of study at the local college, the Maulana Azad College of Music. Later in Srinagar, he went on to establish the Institute of Music and linked it with the Sopori family, by risking his reputation and his safety for the sake of his principles. He stoutly supported the idea that the music of Kashmir must be revived and restored to its former glory by all means possible. To ensure that this institution would not become a bread earner for his progeny or later generations, he followed a strict regimen of academic appointments of various categories. There were heads of departments, lecturers and an admission process for students, thereby keeping it beyond the clutches of hedonistic influences. .

While the public service to music was ongoing, the Pandit did not delink himself from the humble amateurs who lived in his neighbourhood. The doors

of his home were always welcoming of their company. The standing quip in the family was that grandfather Sopori had a stock greeting formula for all his visitors. His questions invariably centred on: "Have you eaten?" If the answer was in the affirmative then it was followed by: "Then start tuning your instrument and join in the singing." If the visitor had not had his meals, the next act was that of feeding him followed by the same directive of joining in the musical soiree.

Aside from its jocular connotations, this tendency to engage with the humblest in the community in a musical involvement slowly and silently took on the nature of a mini revolution. Old numbers were unearthed and shaky and forgotten voices began to sing, hesitantly at first and then more confidently, taking courage from the strength of numbers. The community rallied round an identity of music, instituted by their beloved 'Masterji' as he was



Abhay Rustum Sopori

referred to and from the royal households to the humble vegetable seller in the town the bonding around music, the pride in knowing and singing the long forgotten folk songs of the region, and the ability to forge a Sufi tradition uniquely Sopori, took root. Also, knowing that the time to be dedicated to learning a number barely crossed the quarter hour, Panditji oriented his instruction into 15-minute capsules, so that a learner who had spent 15 minutes of his day in Panditji's presence went back richer by a song number, in the form of a bhajan, or a Sufiana kalam or a folk number, that he then hummed, sang and polished at leisure.

And as with flower gardens, a garden in bloom is bound to attract bees to its flowers, so in the town of Sopor, the growing enthusiasm to revive old folk numbers, strum or tap on their instruments, and recall the musical traditions of the past became a matter of self-gratification and self-identity. There also developed alongside, a growing coterie of listeners,

who contributed in yet another positive way. These enthusiasts began a campaign to pen the Sufi songs of the region and before long it had taken the shape of a valuable publication for the benefit of posterity.

It wasn't just amateur revivals that Panditji was encouraging. This for him was merely to serve as a ground for greater improvisation. Thus when the time was ripe, he had given the tradition of Sufi music as was commonly practised in his region, his own touches. The classical form of tarana singing wherein syllabic patterning of the music according to the raga format, provided a successful assimilation. Their appeal was so gripping that before long, it had matured into a composition fit for broadcast over AIR and continued to hold its own.

As this tradition became the legacy of the next generation in the Sopori family, there was more to be done. 'When father (Pandit Bhajan Sopori) came into the picture, he decided to take a cold, hard look at the folk repertoire of Kashmir,' states Abhay Sopori. He



Award - Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit felicitating Abhay



Generations - Pt. Bhajan Sopori with Grandson Soumil & Abhay practising music

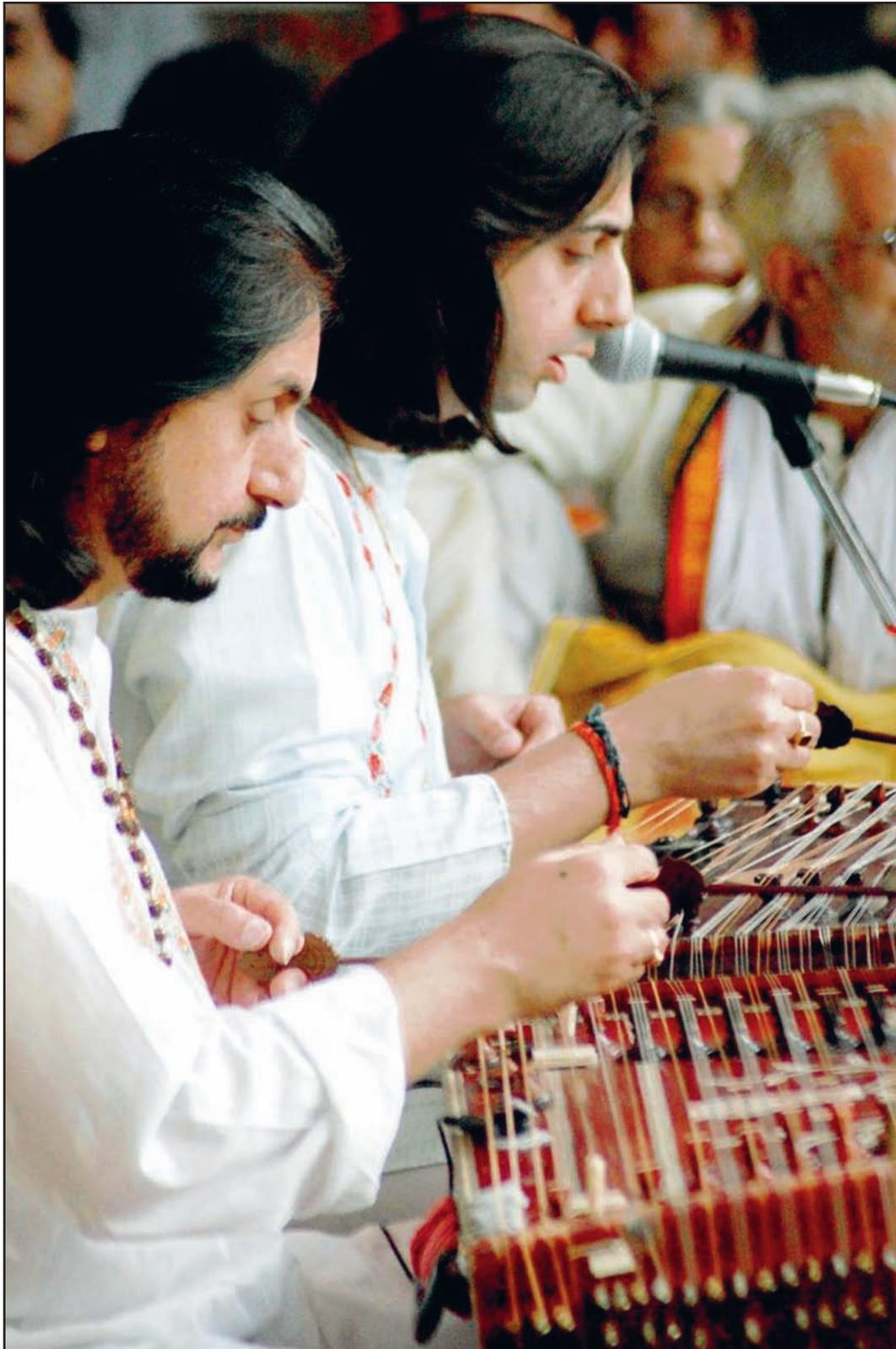
realized that in the first phase folk numbers from the Sufi tradition had been buoyant on the shoulders of a nostalgic wave, but if the music was to be sustained then fresh ground had to be broken. 'The problem with these compositions, Panditji had realized, was their singing technique, which allowed for little or no variation.

To be appealing among an audience unacquainted with the meaning or the words of the numbers, this drawback was a sure way of petering out audiences at concerts. But tunes and styles had a certain fixed outlay for generations and innovation he realized had to be made through fresh inputs rather than by rocking the core number. Having returned fresh from a trip to America and as a newly appointed executive at All India Radio, Panditji Bhajan Sopori explored the possibilities of orchestration, a field where research was still in its infancy. A singing choir was introduced, together with additional instruments into the orchestra ensemble at the radio. The santoor,

Kashmir's signature contribution to the world of Indian music, was brought on stage for the first time as orchestral accompaniment and in 1954, listeners were privy to the first santoor concert over AIR by Pandit Bhajan Sopori.

For the Kashmiri musician this instrument was no stranger. Known as the shatatantri veena in the region, it was a household instrument in Sopor homes but through the ravages of time, across the several occasions of atrocities and conversions that the land had suffered, finer things like veenas by whatever name was driven off the radar. What survived such onslaughts of course surfaced at the first opportunity but alas, much more needed to be done. Ragas such as Jihinjhoti, Jog, were traced to their Kashmiri beginnings and Pandit Bhajan Sopori played them before his audiences in a tellingly Kashmiri style.

The next step forward for these traditions to remain actively engaging has now fallen on the young



Abhay with father Pandit Bhajan Sopori



Abhay Rustum Sopori

shoulders of Abhay Sopori. That he has ably matured to his role was demonstrated by his Orchestra. Through the contacts that the family have assiduously maintained and encouraged, Maestro Abhay was able to invite a group of rabab players, tabla artists and drummers to play his specially created composition under his baton, a feat that none had either conceived or brought to fruition on the musical stage of Srinagar or elsewhere. Then in a balmy September afternoon, these upholders of an age-old tradition, clad in their traditional garb of kurta and pyjama, seated in atypical crouching positions, familiar in these parts, strummed out the sounds and beats of the centuries with a rare confidence, a confidence that had been guided by generations of singers and musicians before them, guided by a tradition where numbers such as Rinde Poshmal, is heard on every lip as they run across the paddy fields or fruit orchards, playing their boyhood games. It all came together on

that memorable stage in the Shalimar Bagh under the conductorship of this, their very own, third-generation musician of the Sopori clan.

Naturally there have been lessons learnt from his unique experience for the young maestro. Though he acknowledges the morale boosting advantage that this concert has provided, it is the future sustainability of such an experience that he is now concerned about. 'There should be ensembles of musicians, Indian and foreign, several times in the year with rehearsals being conducted round the year and on a regular basis,' he surmises. But more central to his concern is the subtle requirement of a change in mindsets. Of crucial importance he says is the need for government support so that musicians do not have to abandon their art for fear of having to live in penury in the pursuit of their musical dreams. Job opportunities for musicians to secure their future



Abhay Rustum Sopori



Kashmir - Abhay with maestro Mr. Zubin Mehta - with Bavarian State Orchestra and Sopori's Soz-o-Saaz ensemble

and give them the pride and confidence that the profession entails is needed to draw youngsters from musician households in Kashmir back into the fold.

Knowing fully well that part of the responsibility of ongoing musical revival has to involve personal commitment to the campaign, the Sopori duo of father and son launched the Sa ma Pa Association. This platform promotes genuine innovations, offers platforms to lesser known talented younger musicians and generally introduces itself as a platform that looks at classical music from a all-inclusive angle. Realising that recognition is incomplete with a one-night concert appearance, the organization has a rigorous system of awarding musicians and afficianados for their outstanding contributions to music. So far, the organization has acknowledged the contributions of maestros like the Dagers, Shanno Khurana, Ustad Asad Ali Khan, Kartik Kumar and musical elders such as U Halim Jaffar Khan and more recently, His Excellency, the Ambassador of Germany to India...

Alas! the moment on stage is but a momentary thrill. But on the larger canvas, according to Abhay Sopori, is the need for more 'subtle' ways to recognize the great potential of these artists from Kashmir. 'Long periods of persistent neglect has eroded not just quality but also the urge to give back the lost respect to the elder musicians as also provide avenues to preserve the youthful component of this art. The once popular youth festivals of music need to be recalled so that aspirations for following a career in music are once again a throbbing force,' continues the young maestro. "The collaborative concert at Srinagar was a great discovery, not only for my team of musician-performers but also for me. It made the world realize the caliber of Kashmiri music and definitely sparked off that restive spark for music in many a heart, as they sat back and soaked in the joys of the popular folk number as also feasted their eyes on the sight of two conductors, on the same stage, giving to a homely folk number its just status on the stage of world music."

# Choral Singing of Classical Music

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Sukanya Banerjee

There are times when to look back in time is to look forward. Nowhere is this paradox so relevant than in the case of the choral singing of classical numbers. Such upheavals are evident when there is a growing restlessness, calling for a change, a desire for innovation and definitely a breaking away from the prevailing. While the singing of classical music in accordance with gharana tenets has been the age old system, the gradual erosion of the gharana and the emergence of new-age artists who have forged significant paths on their own steam, is still the bastion of Hindustani classical performances. Yet somewhere on its flanks there is a growing desire for a breakaway

from the traditional diktat into something more formative and yet abiding by the free spiritedness of our classical compositions.

Poised along these lines of integration with our heritage and yet keeping an identity that is distinctly contrary to the past, there has grown among collegiate circles the trendy and catchy thrill of singing Hindustani classical bandishes in choral formations. These college choruses, powered by young minds ever ready to launch into innovative ideas, had felt piqued when they realised that among their peer group, the term 'innovative' was synonymous with





being equated with metal and rock instead of their own heritage music. It was all a riotous display of fast beats, belting out gimmicky sounds on raucous guitars, often out of tune, amplified till the very ceiling of the college hall throbbed into a quivering unsteadiness. The concessional “Hindi” music accommodated by way of innovation, was based on the latest Bollywood numbers belched out in competitive chagrin, much to the delight of the collegiate audience.

Yet the prospect of wrenching the next year’s music trophy from one’s competitors could not be guaranteed with these neo-western borrowings in desi makeovers. Individual students had begun to realise the need for a different role to fill up the vacuum; a need that called for direct engagement with one’s classmates as well as making music using the tools of our ancient collective experience. It also needed to be a form of presentation that welcomed the swelling in numbers rather than remaining a linear chamber music orientation of the traditional khayal singing of classical music. The most acceptable way seemed to form a choir group and then train them to sing. But sing what?

In the past, choir singing had received encomiums far and wide. One of the best groups was the Gandharv Choir of Delhi with its members trained according to a classical curricula comprising a group who had not yet acquired the confidence or the imaginative outlay to present a complete concert, but whose voices were adequate for merging into the choir, albeit in a minor capacity as yet. A more professional pioneering chorus group that had coincided with the late Pandit Ravi Shankar’s association with the AIR Vadya Vrinda, was an important trend setter in the nascent years. The AIR had been broadcasting orchestral music from its studios, particularly its Tamil unit, after the AIR Madras station had been launched. With legendary stalwarts like Pandit Ravi Shankar and music directors of the calibre of Roshan Lal Nagrath it had enjoyed tremendous listener appeal, and families across the country made it a point to tune their sets for this after-dinner national broadcast of orchestral choruses with specially composed music, under the baton of these doyens of the yesteryears.

But the choral compositions of today’s music centres of higher learning, are not the handiwork of maestros of yore. More often that not, they are the by-



products of sheer necessity. With the mushrooming of college fests and the growing urge to bring back trophies as souvenirs from these events, college music departments were found turning to the faculty for ideas. Thus came the beginnings of student groups of enthusiastic singers, undergraduates who were studying music as a subject, and who had basic knowledge of the theory and practice of Hindustani music and yet were not capable of singing solo. The Delhi University colleges such as Sri Venkateswara, Lady Shri Ram, Kirorimal, Hansraj, Miranda House, Jesus and Mary College, Kamala Nehru College have come to the fore as the trend setters and have already a sizeable number of trophies under their belt. Elsewhere the choral fever has touched student groups as far off as my college in Hyderabad, where preparations are a round-the-year exercise because competitions are held at colleges pan India.

Within a time span of just eight years or so, this form of singing has galvanised into a cultural identity with a few distinctive parameters. At any given point of time there are at least 13-15 such groups participating in the event and students flock to them, attracted by the intrinsic draw of this music as well as its novelty quotient. A typical choral concert is distinguished by a few yardsticks of preparedness. Primarily these

choral groups are not hard core choral classical groups of classicism in that they welcome in their fold any enthusiast with a yen for music rather than a learner who has spent a decade with a tanpura. Hence it has become a popular outlet for budding musical minds. The numbers that are chosen, are not rare finds or gharana treasures. They are simple compositions many of which have been sourced by the students themselves from the bandish taught to them as novice practitioners and which now serve as the basis for the choral improvisations. Thus a disciplined learner in the group can acquire mastery over it with doable ease. The tune is straightforward, meshed into the raga format but not made intricate with glides, tremulations or complicated beats, so that choir members of various shades of competence can gel into a composite body of singers rather than stand out as a gawky beginner.

That it is a very youth-driven development is obvious from the fact that the faculty from these music colleges are not much enthused by this trend. In fact, the Faculty of Music and Fine Arts seldom participate as competitors. Students from these faculties club together and take the initiative in finding where the next competition is to be held, correspond with the organisers and send in their entries. Rehearsals

are held on the college premises off lecture hours or in between times, purely as a recreational release but with a deadly seriousness, for over the years, the quality of participation has seen tremendous growth and each year the competing batches coming forth bring on stage polished, well rehearsed and highly innovative approaches to the classical genre. The secret behind this collegiate story is easy to decipher. Various students, who learn classical music privately, are deeply involved in the compositional process of these songs and guide their respective colleges both as students and alumni during the composition phase.

Not only have the college music faculty turned a Nelson's eye to these student efforts, even the competition organisers were sceptical of this singing style till just about eight years ago. In the early years, the classical chorus was an entry in the choral segment of the competition, but when the choruses

came forth with classical bandish singing in the chorus style, complete with harmonisation and voice levels, then judges were hard put to assess these numbers. Clearly a new category was called for and thus was born the now popular category of choral compositions in the classical style.

The private participation in this competition is also because several of the competing groups come from colleges where there are no music faculties. That means the students representing the college group are drawn from among students who learn music from a private place and are thus genuinely fond of the art. They are also more open to trying out new things and do not consider classical music sacrosanct and unchangeable. They have thus enlivened the classical scene with their versatility and fuelled the idea that classical music also has crowd pulling qualities. This is not to denigrate such choruses as titillations begging to be retained in the classical limelight.



The long-term allure of such singing is another of its plus points. When the college years are over and choral groups have to part ways, the links are refashioned in other ways. Thus many members of its alumni bond with each other through forming fusion bands. These bands then draw crowds to their ticketed shows, their charity performances and at club soiries, getting them the media attention that has been missing so far for their efforts at the college level. Thus the public come to know of this newest surge of classical make, through alumni bands such as the Advaita and Fire Exit bands, whose members cut their musical teeth on the stage of their college competitions where they were members of the classical choral group.

With the swelling of competition groups, it has now become easier to draw up a few generalisations about their formation. In general, a typical choral group singing classical numbers, has a major quota of trained classical singers, with a few sprinklings of enthusiasts who are drawn into it for the sheer love

of it. Generally, a rounded number of 15 participants makes for an ideal choral strength. This group then makes out time for rehearsals during off time and at a designated college spaces. Of course rehearsals are taken very seriously by the group for not only does it help them hone their skills for the competition, but also gives them a platform to criticise each other and try out classical styles, choosing their music purely on a hands-on, trial and error methodology. While no novel aspects have been discovered in the course of these rehearsals, what it has definitely kept at bay is the ogre of populist elements infused into the music, detracting from its classical core. As students are drawn from private backgrounds, they have no qualms about sharing their learning with the group, unlike the close-knit gharana music, where disciples are sometimes bound to keep their gharana learning within their confines and not give it a broad-based acceptance by one and all. Thus the purist musicians who come to these shows, either as judges or as





listeners, find snatches of several gharanas being mingled and merged charmingly in the work of these young pioneers.

Another subtle change that this type of singing has brought to the fore is the blurring of boundaries between the classical content of northern classical and southern carnatic classical. As students freely accept and perfect both Hindustani and Carnatic musical styles as the framework of their presentation, there is a growing belief, that anything classical has an intrinsic appeal, whether from the north or the south. Also, the composers for these choral groups surmise that it is equally fascinating and satisfying to work at compositions in both styles and are hard put to assess which of these two groups is better suited to their compositional needs. However the simple hawaian guitar and the synthesiser are concessions that most judges concede to and students thus find that instead of taking an entire instrumental accompaniment in tow, a compact synthesiser becomes an answer to their instrumentation accompaniment. Others of course, prefer to stick to the age-old tabla-tanpura-harmonium triad and comfortably adjust their voices in tune with their droning and musical elements.

Followers of the northern classical genre have even experimented with the qawwali format of group presentation and come up with interesting as well as arresting finds in the course of their work. Going beyond the hand clapping, they have incorporated poetry and dialogue, and emphasised the refrain of the song, in the typical traditions of the qawwali number. Of course lines have been drawn about the incorporation of western elements into the choral framework, so heavy drum beats, or guitar strums in the style of the western pop artist would disqualify a team on this platform.

But then, there are innovations aplenty despite these boundary lines. As there is no time cycle restriction in the choice of ragas, the groups choose the raga of their compositions on other criteria. In fact, one of the most popular draws from our institution has been a composition in the raga Shree a raga regarded as a serious and complicated presentation requiring a mature music sense to relate to its musical depth. We chose this raga for its serene effect as the notes are in the komal scale emphasising the Rishab, a note in the lower octave and easy to sing, for even an amateur. To imbibe its essential serenity, the raga's



distinguishing feature, we preferred to go with a traditional bandish rather than compose an entirely new one ourselves. Thus the development of the raga became well conceptualised and thereafter, we could concentrate our efforts in choosing the right elements of accessorisation to embellish our presentation.

Another plus point in our favour was the relative infrequency of this choice. Most groups choose the melodious ragas such as Bihaag, Des, Kamod and the like, drawing comparisons to themselves by their choice. Others prefer to exhibit their efforts through the choice of rhythm for the music or the complexity of the composition and the rhythm to which it has to be sung. For others, it is the instrumental accompaniment that becomes their trump card in a bid to reach the victory stand. Yet a lot of them prefer to travel the well trodden path and present a well rehearsed number, following the rules of classicism to the best of their ability. Such entries often get an approving nod from the judges if they are sincerely rehearsed, thoughtfully composed and seriously coordinated.

What then are the classical elements of a typical choral number? As is wont, in a classical presentation by a

soloist, the introductory alap forms the cornerstone to the onward unfolding of the music. In a choral group, the alap is the time when singers are put in the right frame of mind and begin to concentrate on the musical journey. Thus it is a serene passage sung to a slow timing, evoking a calming effect on the mind. Thereafter the pace of the singing catches up and the group sing the main bandish as a song number. In this part, there are snippets of harmonisation, experiments with voice levels and division of the verses into shorter phrases to catch listener attention to the mood of the music. Following this presentation of the song number and its emotional meaning, through piquant versification, the group begins to show their classical prowess using the exercises of voice training and singing that bring forth a singer's capacity to present the raga according to a gamut of improvisations. In the case of a choral group, these improvisations are not left to the individual singer to improvise on the spur of the moment; rather, these inclusions are rehearsed and sung in unison as bol baant or division of the wordings, behlawa or variations of the song's musical score and of course a series of taans or syllabic utterances at a faster paced rhythm to bring the singing to a crescendo. At times, a competent

singer is also given a solo passage of short duration, with the chorus pitching in later, swelling the music's emotive appeal several notches higher. Also, the tabla and other instruments are given space for snippets of solo parts creating variety and arresting listener appeal thereby.

Alas! time is a great spoilsport in these times. Since the numbers are presented at a music competition, had the items on stage have to adhere to a strict time limit. Thus it is only the secondary numbers, or the drut khayal, sung after the slower tempo number has been sung out elaborating all the essentials of the raga. The true connoisseur therefore comes away slightly peeved at this shortcut alternative. Like musicians of yore they can even combine two ragas in a manner of their choice or deliberately create a new raga, if among them a talented one is inclined to do so. Even the instrumentalists are gamely accommodated within the choral fold and many a time, a solo passage on the veena or sarangi or sitar, gives way to just vocal sounds, making for a welcome change in the singing. In short, the compositions are conceptualised keeping in mind the available talent pool.

Stepping off stage one would like to ask how would this music be taken forward by these young enthusiasts? Is there a vision in sight? Such moments of introspection are specially piquant following an appearance on stage and at the end of the competition, when members of music faculties and even the competition judges come forward to air their views about student efforts. Most of them have constructive suggestions to make, Such words of wisdom go down well with the student community who are eager to garner any information that they can, concerning their efforts. Suggestions therefore are closely pondered over and many a time these find their way into the music compositions thereafter. Also, errors and flaws pointed out by caring judges are carefully noted and the group is made aware of them.

Among the participants, the foremost item on their wish list for their group is the luxury of being able to include instrumental segments into the singing. This will make listeners realise that instruments are not the proverbial second fiddles to vocal singing but can stand on their own feet and contribute to





the richness of a presentation. Above all, the broad based approach to this music should be its strongest selling point. In the past, classical music has earned bad press as an exclusive genre meant for the connoisseur and the elitist. This attitude has shunned away many an enthusiast from its fold. With choral numbers accepting the amateur and the knower with open arms, the barriers are crumbling. An increasing number of participants are fired by self-confidence and have shaken off an unnatural fear of not being able to sing, through the strength of numbers that group singing intrinsically provides.

This music despite all odds is bound to grow and multiply. In fact it is through this innovation, I think, that we will win back audiences towards the

understanding and appreciation of our heritage. Generally speaking in many households children are given the training of Classical Music since childhood to inculcate Indian traditions in them. However due to better employment opportunities this creative training takes a back seat when they grow older and students are finally forced to leave their creative pursuits. The choral format in the classical is a huge attraction for such music performers, who find the singing a way of bonding, where their talents are utilised and where their limited knowledge of the art is exploited to its fullest capacity. Thus their limitations are glossed over. Due to the versatility of this musical form, ranging from composition to improvisation, therefore choral singing of classical numbers is the direction of the future.

# Mother, Haridwar

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Sitakant Mahapatra

Eight years ago  
we consigned  
your frail bird-like body  
to the hands of the God of Fire, and  
borrowed from him  
a tiny relic  
to treasure as a memorial.

Since then, the summer, rains  
winter and spring  
have come and gone  
eight times;  
the unborn grand-children  
are becoming naughtier by the day.  
Impatient as ever, your younger son  
has run away to you, and  
your sons and daughters who remain here  
have got the smell of the land  
where you are now.

Everyday we offered a little bit of food  
at your memorial underneath the soil  
just as everyday you lit the evening lamp

before the tulsi chaura  
you remain only a portrait on the wall  
looking on at our happiness and tragedies.

Carrying that memorial  
I started on a long journey  
all the while on the way  
feeling the soft caress of your palm.  
I felt your words, your blessings,  
your prayers beside my sickbed  
had turned into the relic  
which I offered to the waves  
of the cold Ganges waters  
along with my tears.

The touch of the water  
felt as Chitrotpola's waters of my childhood  
and the touch of the sea  
as I entered after lighting  
father's funeral pyre at Swargadwar.

From now on, you are fully disembodied,  
forever a shadow in our grieving hearts.

# Solicitations

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Sitakant Mahapatra

Once I met him  
at the streetside pan shop  
a bent-over old man  
huddled as a basket.  
He lit a beedi  
and before taking a puff  
first offered it to some one in prayer.

Another day I found him  
at the same place  
sitting on the pavement  
before his lips touched the tiny glass of tea  
he seemed to first make  
an offering to someone.

Whoever that unseen person  
what might the old man be begging of him?  
May the tea not taste as water  
with hardly any sugar in it;  
may the beedi be like  
the Haider beedi of yesteryears.

Once I met the temple priest  
before the same shop.  
Often I had met him on the way:

saffron gamcha on his shoulders  
puja offerings in a brass pot in his hand  
and the same quick pace.

He had narrated his heavy burden  
looking after five Gods in small temples.  
I had joked  
what else do we do  
with 330 million Gods to be looked after.

He had asked of the shopkeeper  
a quick cup of tea.  
By then there was a crowd  
before the shop to be catered to.

With every minute's delay  
his annoyance seemed to increase  
I thought he must be  
telling the Gods – my Lord  
please wait a bit  
You are in everybody's heart  
and must have seen it is not  
my fault; but entirely that  
of the ignorant shopkeeper.

# The Man Had A Strange Belief

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Sitakant Mahapatra

The man had a strange belief:  
if only he offered his words skyward  
as objects of worship  
surely someone behind the clouds  
will listen and understand their anguish.

His throne may not be shaken  
but at least the cry of his words  
will reach his ears;  
and then through the chinks  
of the blue door of the sky  
blessings will reach him  
either through white wind or cold rain.

So much time flew away and  
old age arrived  
only to understand this little:  
that from the forest of stars  
our sorrows and joys  
our smiles and tears  
may appear ridiculous.

All these tears and grief  
the tide of anguish in the chest  
the worms in the pot of nectar  
the extending of hands and face  
towards infinity in vain  
finally the words will mean nothing;  
for prayer's another name  
for half-understood grief.

Now the man is able to recognize  
the darkness and fog

outside his window:  
now he understands  
that the remembered days and nights  
are only stairways  
from one darkness to another darkness.

Occasionally he thinks  
words themselves  
are the boundless blue sky;  
may be a divine presence in his soul  
would tell him the meaning of  
why he is walking day and night  
in this dust and smoke  
why his prayer is to understand  
even a tiny bit of the meaning  
of his tears and the soul's anguish  
of the fog and darkness all around.

Sometimes he gets startled:  
did some one call him  
in a secret voice  
from behind the words?  
When the vermillion sun  
was setting and  
the moon appeared in the sky  
as a thin sickle of silver.

Now he understands a bit  
of the language in which  
death summons.  
The language in which  
the stars and the wind  
call out to him:

all his toys of words  
are clasped to their chest  
the dead nights and days.

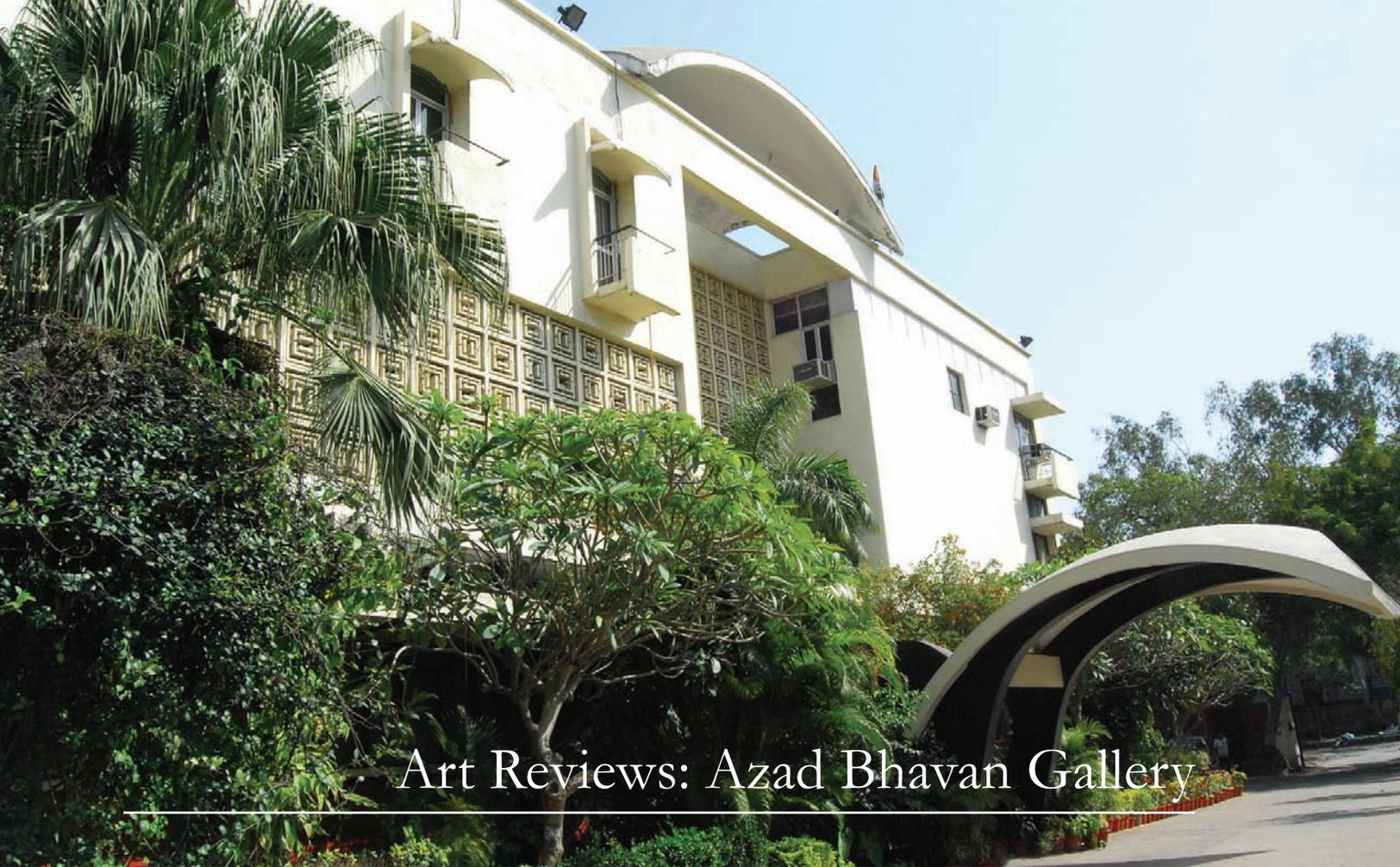
Maybe the man now realizes  
that here nothing  
is like anything else;  
words are not like objects  
objects are not like  
relationship and feelings  
words are not like  
love and anger  
like dharma, artha, kama & moksha;  
objects are not like  
his ideas and desires  
the void and the cravings inside.

Now he understands  
words are the void  
which they have built  
words themselves are the sky

the cloud  
the pure invocation of  
the final void.

Once he utters a word  
his heart tells him  
what have you done?  
Did you ever want  
to utter such trash;  
let this be the  
end of speaking and understanding  
let all unspoken grief  
rot within me.

And these half dead  
days and nights  
are only memorial  
to the dead words  
the endless void left  
by them.

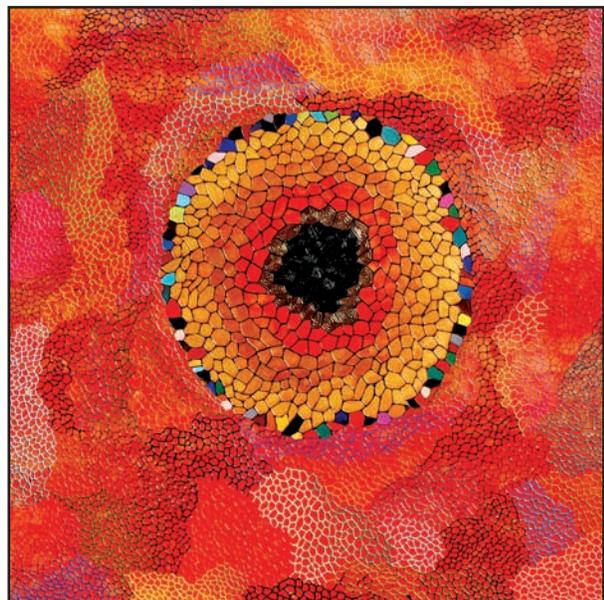


## Art Reviews: Azad Bhavan Gallery

Come winter and the art scene livens up with vibrant jubilation. On the one hand the stage performances ingest a fresh selection of shows that are debuted for the first time during this season, and on the other, the art galleries, encash on this hunger for novelty in their round-up of offerings. Invariably the season rings in a mix of masters and amateurs, all of which advertise themselves as showcasing the latest and the best. At the Azad Bhavan Gallery too, this quarter, reflects this mood in a unique way as works on display bring together a fruition of the psychological and the technical, with artists garnering the right attitudes to give shape and form to their art visions.

Another novelty which in effect has come up with the artworks displayed in this quarter is their timing. While the capital has been privy to watching and viewing a mega art event starring the big names and the outstanding innovators in this field, the exhibits at the Azad Bhavan have been chosen to emphasise that even in the efforts of the lesser known but

equally dedicated, there is pleasure to be had, and competence to be discovered. These exhibits have brought forth the lesson that coalescing art ideas simply at one level, namely at the highest level, is incomplete unless one also has an exposure on view





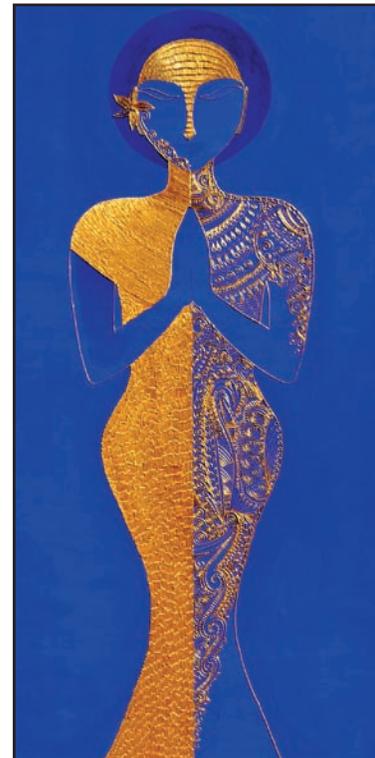
Origin of Divine Soul, acrylic on canvas: 36x36 inches

of the other side of our artistic roots. This balance of duality helps to reflect the genuine trends and growth status of our art. While these mega shows are a cluttering of art acquisitions under a single roof, the select shows at Azad Bhavan are the articulations of self-expression, so necessary in our understanding of human nature.

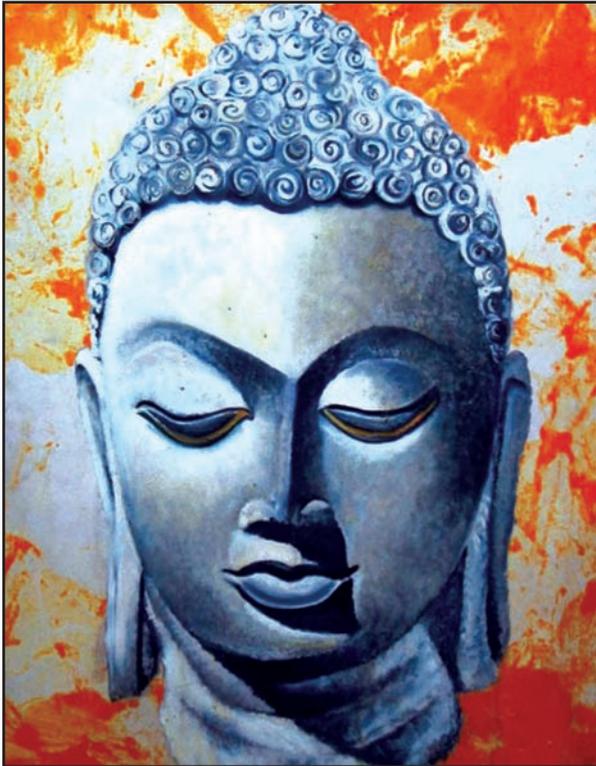
A pertinent pointer towards the understanding of the role of self-expression in art was seen in the works of artist **Neetu Singhal Surekha**. Her exhibition titled '*The Infinite Dimensions*' based on a series of abstract works had a gripping magnetism in them. They enticed the viewer to look deeper and more intently and thereby understand the aim of the artist in taking up the brush. "My simple goal in presenting this work was to let the viewer feel the meditative vibrations with their peaceful look." Ranging from a sprawling colour panorama in her work titled 'Happiness' to the more inward looking, and consciously refined constructed work, 'The Blue Ray of Light' the artist has unwaveringly kept her viewers engaged in that inner search that her works are intended to express. To help her viewers along, the artist places a few 'landmarks' such as her belief that after looking at her works one should not only experience the vigour

of her strong colour choices but also feel a positive energy vibration coursing through the mind through her meditative wielding of her brush.

Stepping beyond the search for the surreal and the other worldly, there is also an allure of getting closer to the canvas to decipher her treatment of her background. At one time, the mosaic like surface in them appears to slither with the rhythm of a snake in motion, while at other times it reminds one of a tile patterning, used to lay floors from the ancient Roman times. Also, there is a sense of playfulness suffused all over the work making them into fairy tale pleasantries with stories of yore held close to their chests. The space on view is beautifully merged into a holist presentation so that the foreground and backdrop are not severe compartments of visionary differentiation, but a completeness of artistic language all the artist's very own. That may be subjective in its making but nevertheless, it provides a powerful means of communication between her ideas and her art as well as her viewers and their approach.



Innergia-Goddess of Golden Light, acrylic on canvas: 72x36 inches



Head of Buddha, Sarnath, 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> century

In yet another imaginative understanding of ourselves and our environment, artist **Shalan Murgod** takes us back in time and historicity to a selection of signposts that are etched in Indian memories since our schooldays. In her works there is an interpretation of the Indus Valley Dancing Girl, the couples of Khajuraho, a serene Buddha head as well as the iconic lady writing a letter, and other milestones that rustle up memories of our heritage. As part of the art parcel, these reminders have other reasons to recommend their inclusion. While the images are easily recognizable their placements and arrangements are not. Even the true colour of stone and the patina of bronze is missing from these works for they wear an intrinsic smoothness. Their stellar presence is set against backdrops of colour washes that carry a measure of playfulness drawing an aesthetic allurement into their familiarity.

Although these subjects appear to be routine and elementary at the first glance, they merit a re-look

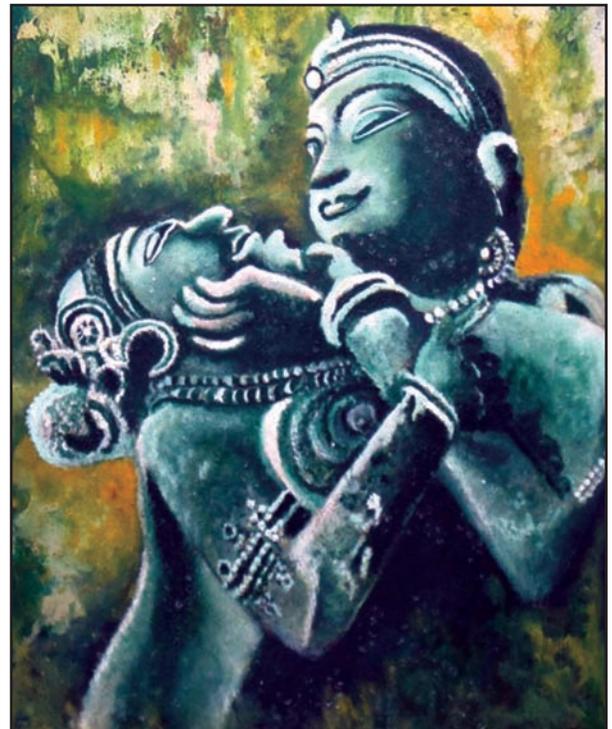


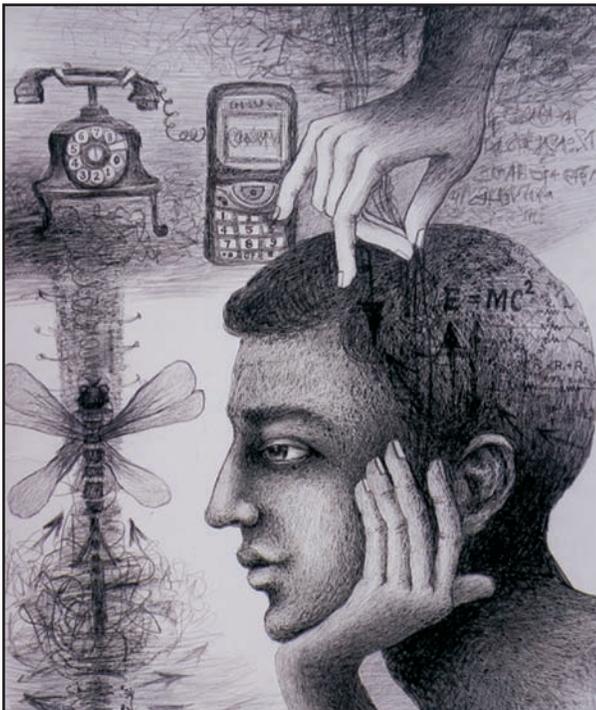
Bodhisatva Padmapani, 12<sup>th</sup> century: 24x60 inches



The Chamunda Bull, 12<sup>th</sup> century

for their attractiveness as artistic likenesses instead of mere photographic takes of exact duplication. Through the choice of paints and brush this artist has proved that there is a deeply layered identity concealed in these works that Murgod has brought forth in her own language. These works also examine the interdisciplinary nature of our art, where an ancient sculpture can be a source of inspiration to a contemporary artist in much the same way as it must have inspired the artists of the era of their origins. The treatment of the sculptures in art encompasses a wider horizon of subjects for painting, which can neither be categorized as hard core portraiture nor abstract interpretations of the environment. Also, the artist's comfort with the colour blue, a choice she makes to depict a major part of her stone portraits, combines the interdisciplinary ambit of a basalt sculpture and the paint box. Thus the works depict an introspective essence on the one hand and an instantly recognizable quality of commonality on the other, with both these aspects collectively arranged on her canvases.





Ancient vs Modern, mixed media: 53x40 cms

Yet ask a viewer about what makes an art stick and the answer invariably would be it is the kind of art that is created to go beyond the canvas. This can be achieved in their own individual ways and for artist

Rakhi Kumar, it means a brooding contemplation using drawings, charcoal, mixed media and a variety of seemingly maverick forms. Thus her spaces are a gathering of a central figure in a surround of feathers, bird forms, honey bees and instruments of communication like a mobile or telephone that collectively speak to the viewer on their own terms. Her works therefore, open up to a variety of interpretations but once the code of conversation with the art has been cracked, a thin thread of interconnectivity runs through the lot. For one, there is the suffusion of a sense of contemplation, where the birds are avenues of breakaway but which remain grounded with their strings held in the hands of the protagonist. Elsewhere the human head is wired to a mechanical world, where the dragon fly, a symbolic avenue of imaginative freedom remains entangled in the mesh of mechanical wiring.

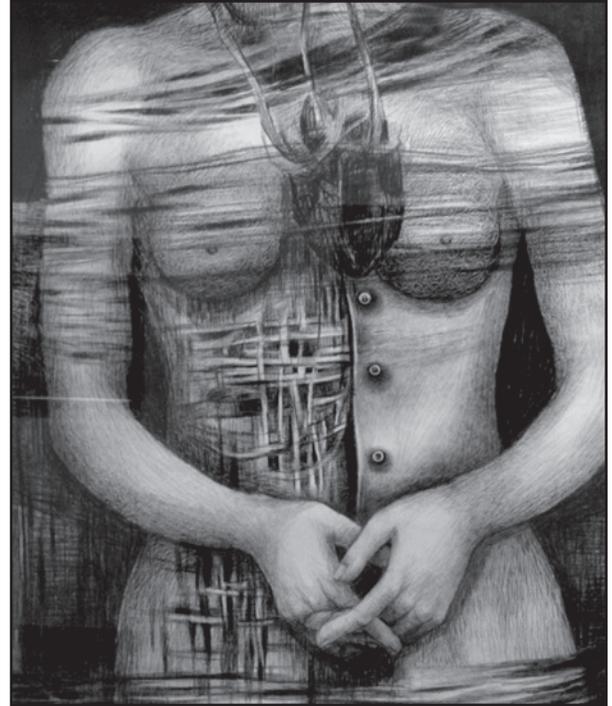
The spillover from the inner being into the apparent one is delicately portrayed as a stitched part held against socially recognizable feminine forms. The clearly visible stitchery running down the two seams lays emphasis on the melancholic side of



Liberty, acrylic on canvas: 75x60 cms



Unsolved venture 51, mixed media: 72x56 cms

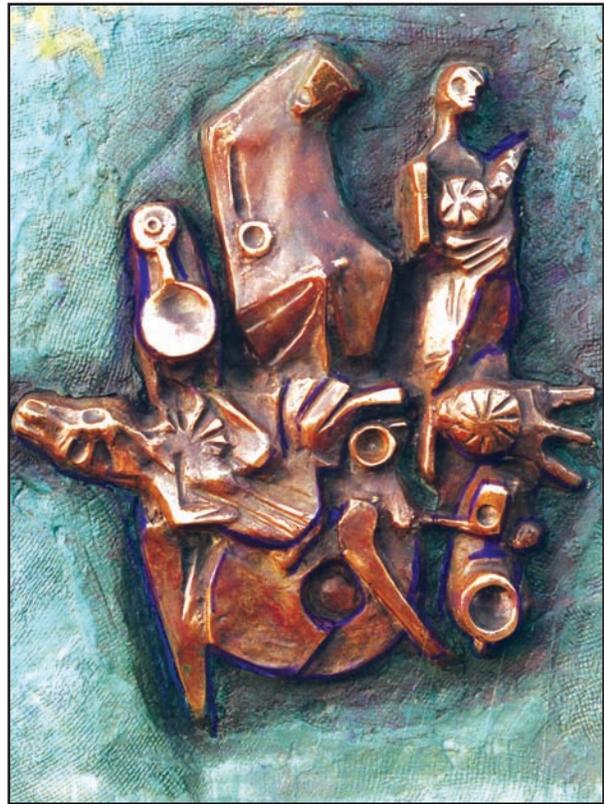


Unsolved venture 09, mixed media: 72x56 cms

the individual, the side that her forms deals with in their moments of silence. The graphic nature of her outlines give the work a further edge of neatness and finish, making the painting appear complete and consistent. The use of mixed media and charcoal, works best to bring out these emotions in her works as the depth of the eye and the light play on the facial features gives her works their instant recognition. Even when colours are used, the palette is bright and primal and reflects the layered language of inner and outer visages with equal competence. In the pencil and charcoal works, the meticulous arrangement of fantastical imagery incites the imagination to piece together the dissimilarities into a cohesive story of human life. The invariable presence of swans, parrots and other folkloric symbols of romance and a conduit for messaging among lovers, is well balanced with the presence of a pair of hands, playing a child's game of creating a thread maze by twisting the fingers. These are familiar points of communication and amplify the horizon of her art vocabulary, making her works a circuitry for linking the viewer and the artist on several planes.

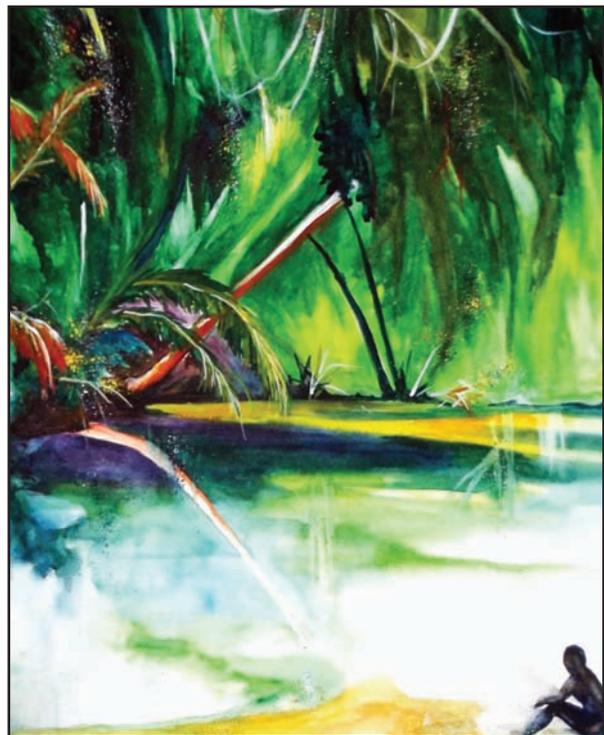


Steel Band Man by Anita Chandradath Singh

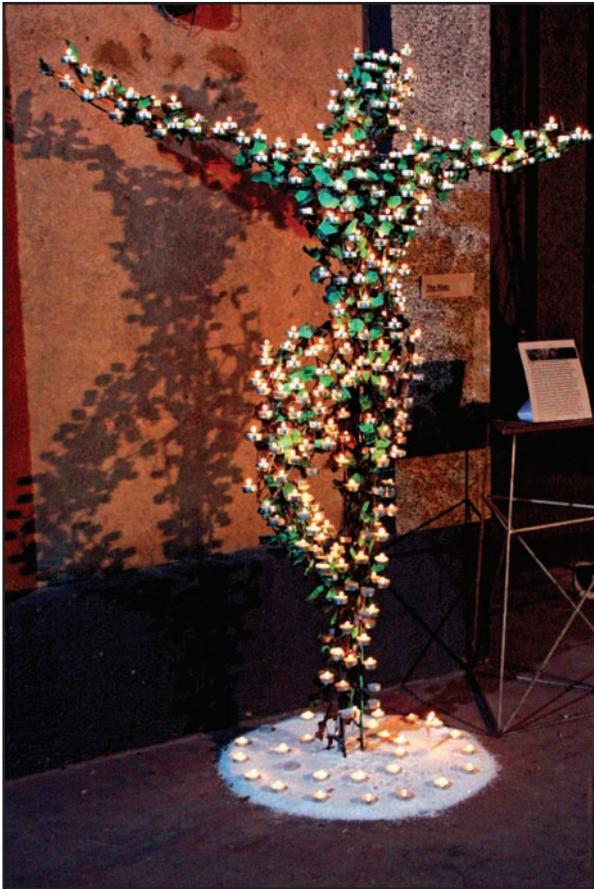


Life in Trinidad By B.K. Guru

Trying to immerse oneself with the artwork, is one of the exercises that viewership demands. It is amazing how the boundaries of geography have very little to do with understanding works of art. Thus the exhibition titled '*Milap*', (The Embrace) by four artists from Trinidad and Tobago, has worked amazingly well with viewers in India. Perhaps it is the subject of their art, celebrating the deep cultural ties within the two nations, that goes back centuries, that has a part to play in this experience. With a vibrant palette added to this intrinsic starting point of commonality, the end result is a fantastic imagery filled with enjoyment and attractiveness. Surprisingly, while the four of them have common links with India, their art is wide apart in terms of materials used, forms depicted and even the techniques employed. The key to the versatility of artist Anita Chandranath Singh is not just the cultural religious and ethnic lines of her country of origin but also her dance lessons from India. As an Odissi dancer and musician, her sculpted figures are



Damian's Bay River by Ms. Tessa Alexander



The Rise By Pankaj Guru

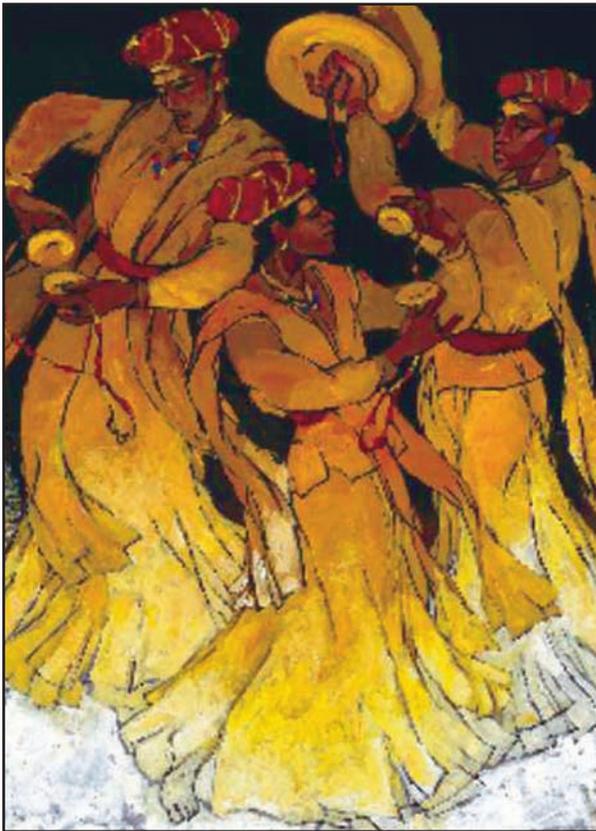
immersed in the rhythm of the dance swirl and a longer look seems to make her forms turn and twist to that inaudible but certain musical quality becomes the funnel for speaking out to her viewers. The steel and bronze medium for her constructs, commands an instant audience under the arc lights of the gallery

Other artists of the group, once again steal the show with their choice of art mediums for expressing their creativity. The solid and metallic look of the works of artist B K Guru show an organized assignment of forms into a neat rubric, where the metallic parts fit like a completed jigsaw puzzle. Another striking part of his art parcel is his use of the brush to texturise his canvas into a finery of designs exposing a multiplicity of strokes and dabbles, making an intricate inlay of deft patterning. The work of artist Pankaj comprising a highlighted outline of a dancer's form, arms

outstretched and yet inviting and encompassing, attracts by the lightness of the form and the poise of the figure. On another plane it reminds one of the lissomeness of a ballerina while on the other hand the outstretched hands have a faint resemblance with the Christian image of The Cross. Veering away from the sombre to the joyous, in terms of colours are the works of artist Tessa Alexander whose works depict the landscape from her country. In her sweep of colour spreads one can drift into bleached and pristine sea beaches bordered by unspoilt tropical foliage, a single figure overseeing this panorama. Elsewhere there are men going about their daily task of working on the oil riddums, reflecting a very local aspect of their lives. This visual archive of things local yet understandably universal, makes the display both familiar and dissimilar, peeping through the chinks of every canvas on the walls.



Labourer By B. K. Guru

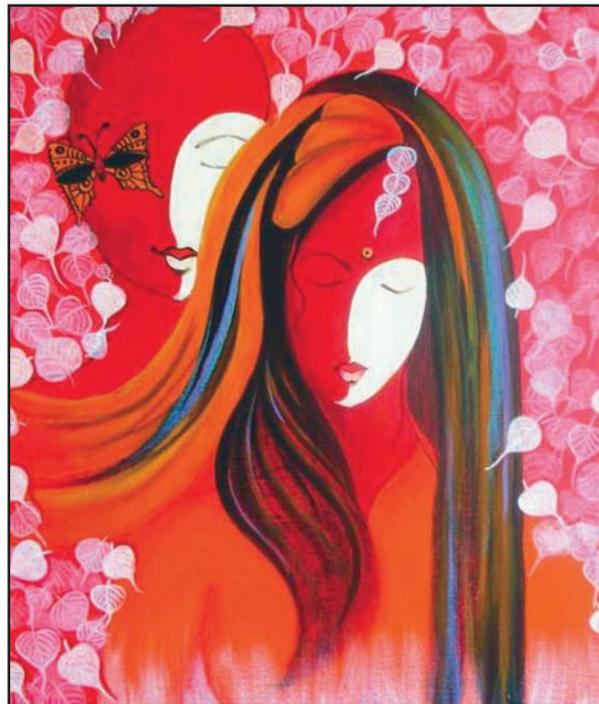


Keertan, acrylic on canvas: 48x36 inches

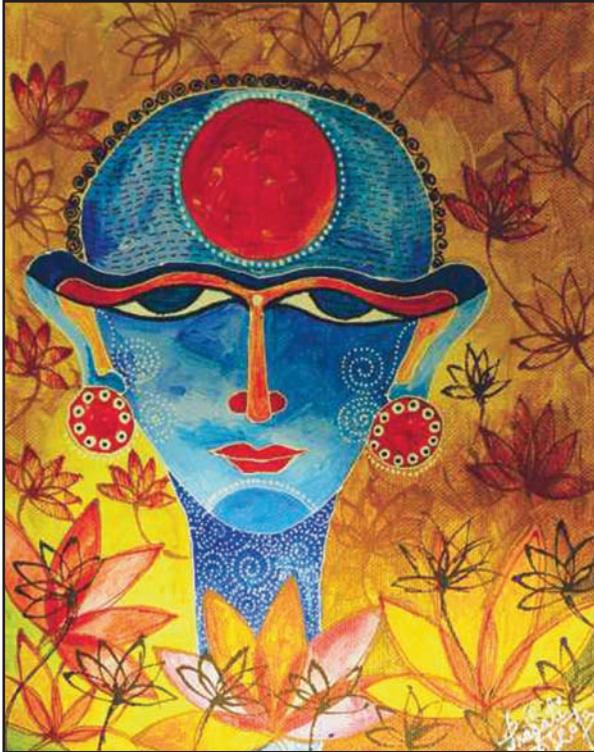


Bihu, acrylic on canvas: 48x36 inches

Another riotous take on art, celebrating the spirit of dance this time was captured with exhibits on canvas under the auspices of *Vibgyor*, curated by **Mithu Basu** of Dolna. This artistic body has been striving to develop a unique creative initiative through patrons and partnerships to help artists find their own idiom, while exposing their works to newer segments of society, thereby broadening the horizon of art, artists and audiences. Choosing a handful of seven practitioners with diverse talents and multifarious forms of expression, this exhibition scored high ratings on the viewership count. Ranging from a self-taught artist like Devyani Parikh whose current series on Buddha merges brush styles, textures and media to emanate a spirituality through her works, there was the legacy of the late Dinesh Gain, who concentrates on a blend of flora, fauna and essential human figures that form a tapestry of his signature style of paintings. Confluences and performances found a unique blending in the works



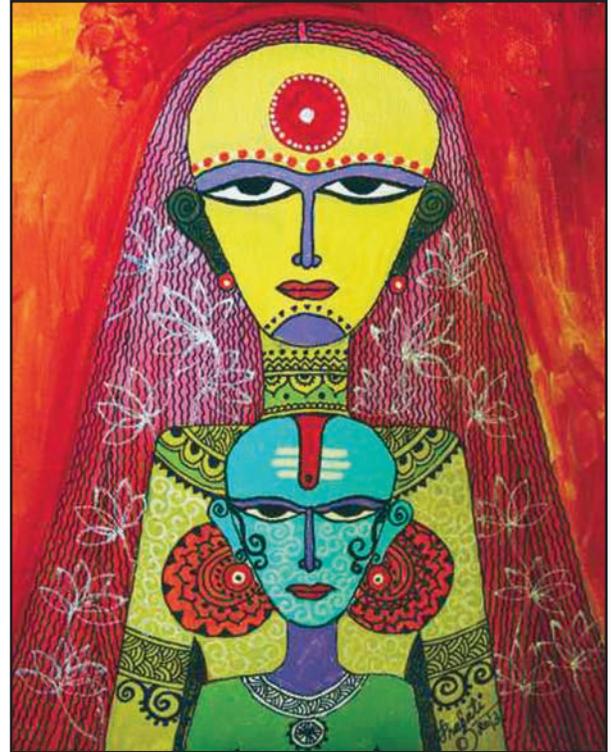
A couple, acrylic on canvas: 24x24 inches



Raas\_3, acrylic on canvas: 8x10 inches

of artist Subodh Poddar, who has developed his style around the arena of dance performance. Thus his works seem to freeze those spontaneous moments of performance in the two realms into a moment of passionate concentration that suffuses the senses with their magical spontaneity and exquisite power of interdisciplinary convergence.

Others in the group depicted their personal takes on nature that wafted an almost subliminal air. Rajat Subhra Bandopadhyay captured this essence through his characteristic brushstrokes that imparted a sense of freedom to the human spirit. Vallery Puri on the other hand preferred a take on nature much like a still frame held up to its familiar components – trees, leaves, branches, flowers, growing with uncontrollable exuberance in a canvas that through their fine detailing, their random yet strictly patterned placement resulting in a leitmotif of natural studies—which were the artist's very own. For Pragati Sharma Mohanty, on



Raas\_3, acrylic on canvas: 8x10 inches

the other hand, the higher the reach out of her art the closer was her ties with her roots. Taking inspiration from the great epics she imbued fine detailing as her personal contribution to the age-old concepts. Similarly for Purna Kewalramani, it was the energy of nature and the universe that bolstered her creativity. By using vibrant and dynamic colours in the bargain, she offered up paintings that were abstract visually but which vibrated with an energy that went far beyond any colour, or pictorial reference. In the final take, while stepping out of the gallery, after viewing this exhibition, what continued to show up on the mind's eye was not the specifics of colour, form or imagery, but a feeling of diligent seriousness in the each artist's pursuit and the ability to take their cue from nature but to vocalise it in a language that was light ears away from that of their fellow exhibitors. It is this individual uniqueness which made a group exhibition of this caliber scale new heights, both in terms of content and presentation.



Frozen



Frozen

While the gallery has encouraged groups to bring forth their joint efforts in a single exhibition, the status of the solo exhibition continues to be supreme. One such show was the exhibition of bronze sculptures by Banasri Khan of Kolkata. Her miniature bronze exhibits had clean lines, powerful expressiveness and spruced formulations. Her adherence to the bronze medium helped viewers discover the malleability of this metal in the hands of this creator and her choice of subjects and inspirational output gave a new language to the medium, when in her hands. Take for instance her work titled 'Moksha' wherein the Japanese belief of the triangular placement of heaven, earth and man, has been used as the basis for positioning her seated figures, has simulated the overall impression of suspended spirituality when Man neither touches earth nor the heavens but appears to be the conduit linking the positions of earth and sky in terms both physical and spiritual.

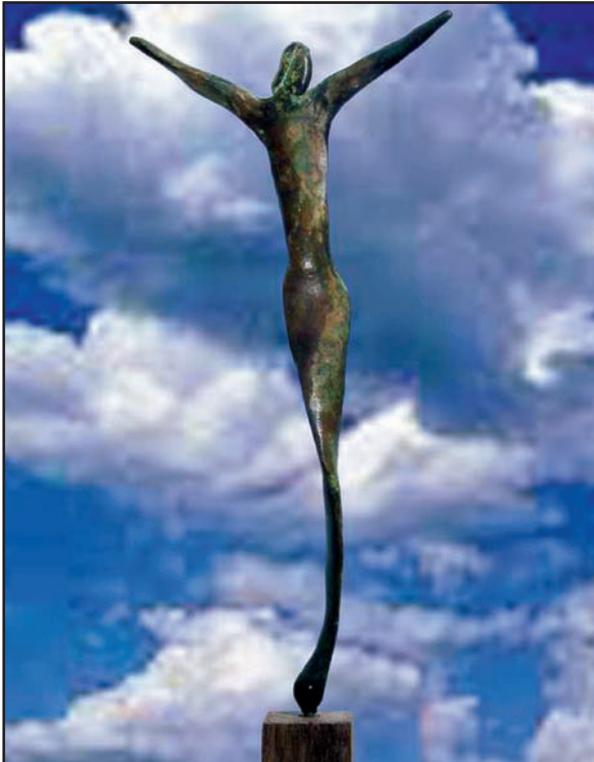
Besides her choice of subjects, it is the linearity of her constructs that commands attention. Her work titled 'Frozen' which is a distant recall of the Crucifixion,



Frozen



Frozen



Frozen

overarches into a spatial envisioning where the figure seems to envelop the entire universe and yet remains unshackled by this task. Turning to more familiar themes, such as 'Couple' or her depictions of mythological concepts such as Devi or Chandi, one finds a tendency to deviate beyond the beaten track and present these themes in a highly personalized format. The Ganesha piece for instance, has the central figure emerging from a scaffolding of metal rods simulating a bamboo frame, a sort of preliminary construct of these images when fashioned of the humbler clay. The difference in the patina of the bronze between the figurine and the backdrop adds a further dimension to the viewing. The wisdom behind creating a lissome 'devi' form gracefully wielding her sacrificial spear has the elegance of a prima donna rather than the supreme strength of the god mother and thus makes viewers exercise a re-think into the alternate possibilities of our mythology.



Kaal Chakra

When people think of the concept of '*Sunyata*' the immediate answer that pops up is that it is a synonym for emptiness. Yet when **Suniyata Khanna** chose to exhibit a series titled so, the verdict was instantly reversed. The perception that emerged was that of endless depth, which could not be contained within a physical confinement and thus deserved to be unshackled into a formless existence sans all boundaries. Also, the framework of the works defied



Antar-Bahih-Prakashaya

the conventional approach of a work to be constructed within a square or a rectangular frame, abiding by the rule of physical containment. For this artist then, the canvas frame was a circular one, with no sharp edges, and no beginning nor end demarcated by the outline. Proceeding to her colour choices too, we find the idea of a choice of palette with blends, where no colour has predominance extending her concept of sunyata a notch higher. The scholarly approach to a colour cycle has been long forgotten and instead one finds a coagulation and flow of colour patterns faintly reminiscent of an oil splurge on a watery surface. In between these swirls, which pertinently have graphic boundaries that give the works a pictorial finesse, there are the soft contours of facial forms, their dreamy-eyed looks adding further content to the drama of unlimited depth.



Kaal Chakra

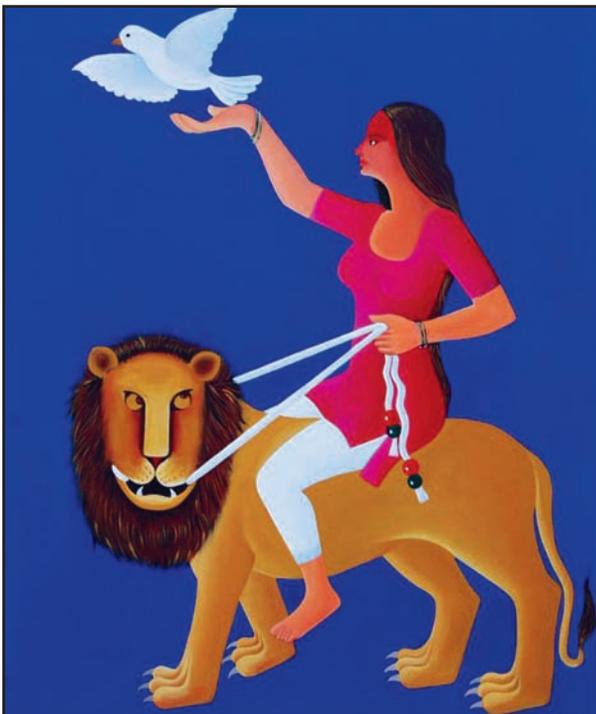
Paradoxically though, the works relate well to metaphysical ideas of time demarcation as the ever present, the current and the endless, as depicted in her work titled '*Adi-Bhutaya-Anantaya*'. Even more attractive is her depiction of the inner self as a mysterious '*bahi*' or book, wherein the eye can feast on a variety of imagery, each one a deeper funnel to traverse the depths of the human mind. Celebrating



Hiranyagarbha

in depth even more complex philosophies in the light of her personal understanding of them, this artist has explored space utilization in a highly innovative way. Even when the canvases have an irregular outline, as in the case of the work titled 'Bhanave' there is a coherence achieved despite the crowded surface

of the canvas, through her spatial skillfulness and pertinent placement of the forms. The many figures, that float about the surface do not appear disjointed and irrelevant but together seem to document a personal history that is interlinked with the world's greatest thought processes.



Durga 1, acrylic on canvas: 48x36 inches

Elsewhere in the case of the works of artist **Manish Upadhyay**, the overall view of his display titled 'Rhythm of Life' translates into a canvas with minimalist intrusions. The backdrop is smoothed to the point of severity and cleanliness, while the figures in the foreground are a close reminder of the handiwork of the late Manjit Bawa whose striking canvases were enriched by their stark mandate. Beyond this visual similarity, the grammar of Upadhyay's art envisions a different take. Each of his works seem to narrate an interpretation of the life and times we live in, in the vocabulary of this art maker. Thus his goat is tied with a rope that is actually a string comprising the English alphabet, moulding the shackling of our psyche to the competence which we can rustle up, by dint of our fluency in this alien tongue. Similarly, the figure on the lion mount, titled 'Durga' is attired in a kurta-churidar outfit and releases a snow-white dove, leaving viewers to make sense of this evidently maverick take on the goddess.



Innocent 4, acrylic on canvas: 36x48 inches



Innocent 9, acrylic on canvas: 36x48 inches

An eye catching aspect of these works is the artist's command over the use of cobalt blue. In his hands it is a malleable colour scheme, which through a subtle

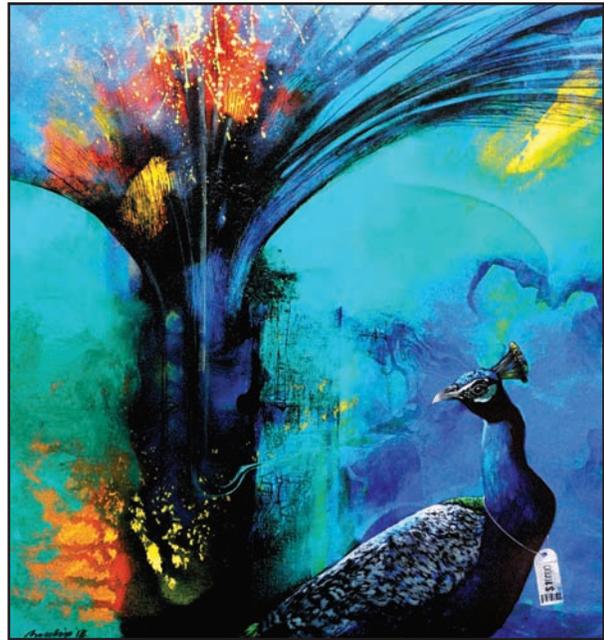
variation of tint can outline a male nude against a backdrop of a similar hue, with the colours holding their distinct sensitivity in the bargain. Also the coiled snake, in the work titled 'Innocent' is a dramatic play of light, in a manner that is both raw and rich. What is remarkable about his works is the ability to exploit a concise range of forms, colours and themes and yet make every canvas emerge from the process a final effect of novelty and originality extraordinaire. It is obvious from this striking output that behind every single application of colour on the canvas there is an equally, if not longer, effort placed behind conceiving and mentally figuring out the final outcome so that when the actual process of painting begins to take shape, it is merely a resurgence of a nebulous idea that has long been nurtured in the depths of his artistic mind.



Sweet Grapes, 48x48 inches

Another attractive exhibition at the gallery was created within the works of artist **Pradip Sengupta**. Marrying sensitivity with scale and colour with contemplation, his works speak to every viewer on their own terms as the final outcome before one's eyes lends itself to a myriad interpretations. That is an uncanny skill that this artist has managed to convey so that his canvases wear a timeless quality in their overall arrangement. Also, scale and form

have a novel relationship as is evident in the work where a lonely goat is seen amidst a vast chasm, its diminutive size a direct reflection of its helpless state amidst nature's enormity. The fiery hues of red contrasted with somber black tones reflect the capacity of the artist to highlight the sound of silence in the ephemeral and eternal.



More Beautiful, 24x24 inches



Lakshya, 48x48 inches

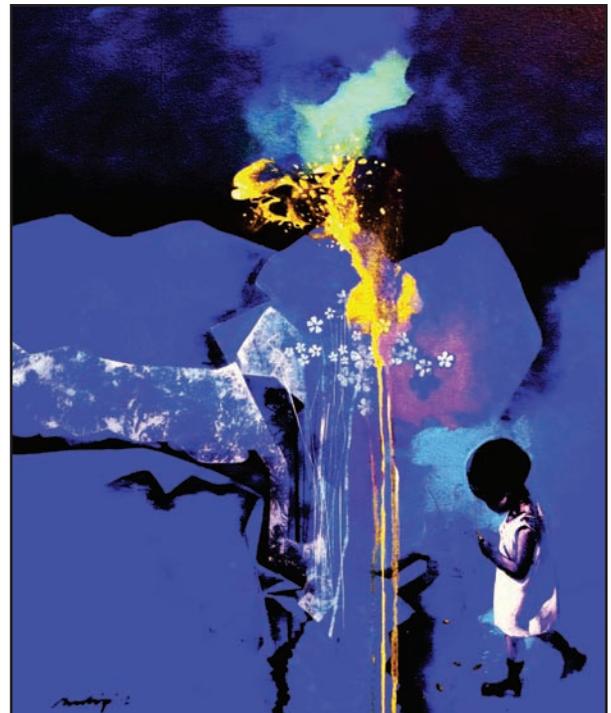


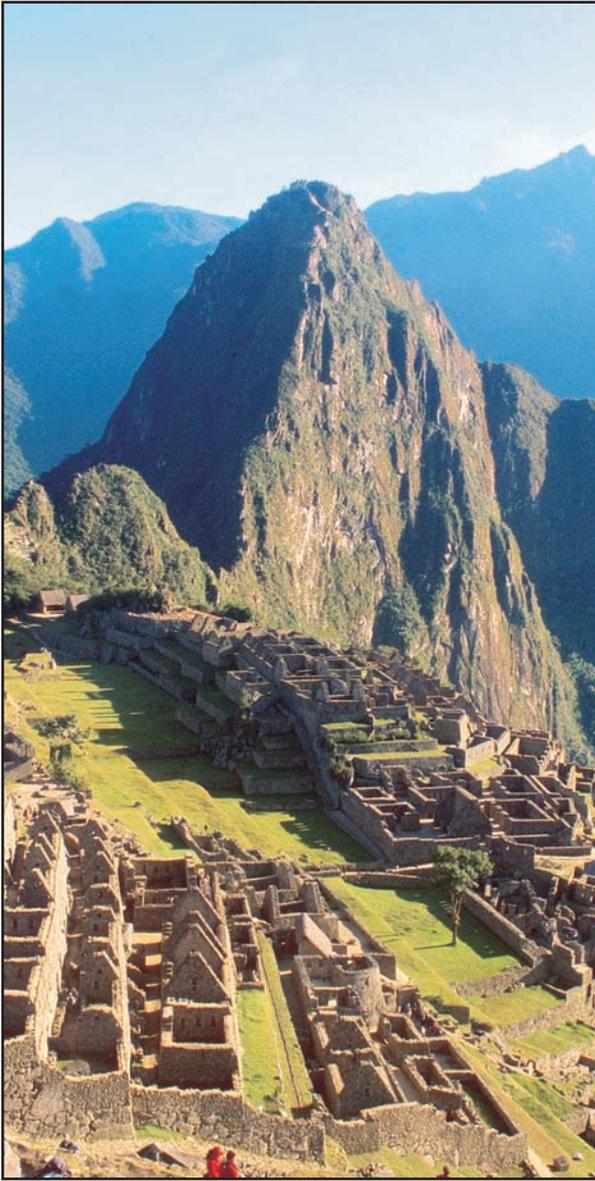
It's my choice, 48x48 inches

The rawness of his creative ability is not the furious and aggressive demonstration of ideals. Rather, it depicts a bemused tenderness as can be fathomed from the colour bleeds free flowing down the canvas in the work titled 'Sweet Grapes', a title providing a direct antonym to the more familiar reference to sour grapes. Once again it is the freedom of colour applications that defines the content of the work where the barely visible facial form, carries within it the core message of the painting. The hidden depths of the work becomes the compelling metaphor to express its creative source there by becoming a commentary of our times.

Walking ahead and onto another set of images on the walls, one finds that the artist has used the bird form rather effectively. Having chosen the brightest choices from the stock of avian possibilities seems to suggest that nature's colours are nothing more than mere imitations of the plumage of the peacock and the kingfisher, whose ochre and blue tones set against architectural towers and a silent water body, become a visual archive documenting a moment in time that is both familiar and yet effusive.

Another aspect of Sengupta's art is his use of reflected surfaces such as water bodies and their surreal magic. The work titled 'It's my Choice' is bespoke with the shimmering effect of solid forms melting into slippery and waving delicacies through this means. Elsewhere in the work 'Searching for the Brightest One' the figure of the child engrossed in this mysterious search brings out the many interpretations that come to mind when a surface leaves leeway for imaginative freedom. Again it is the changing patterns of the strokes the suggestive power of his lines and the strength of the overall composition that makes the work command a second look. It is this commandeering grip of his forms, set in a vast panoramic sprawl with little or no constrictions around them, that makes his works marry sensitivity with grandeur of scale, resulting in an eponymous depiction of the precious nature of human freedom in our world of turmoil, slavery, forced control and an obsessive tendency to enclose the world into a global bind that is passed off as global togetherness.

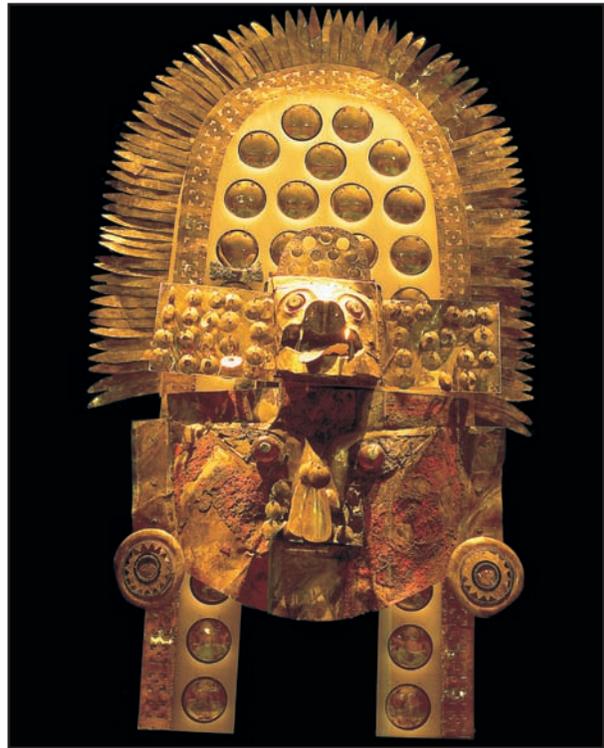




Of course no quarterly display of exhibitions at the Gallery can be complete without a look at what goes on behind the lens eye. This time, the regular photographic show was from abroad, depicting a half century of diplomatic ties between India and Peru. This photographic testimonial merited inclusion not because of its official significance but also for its quality of production. Also, there was a tinge of nostalgia that gripped the sense as one re-lived the times gone by, a time when the first Peruvian envoy to India H.E., Minister Eduardo Sarmiento Calmet



The Prime Minister of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, with the President of Peru, Dr. Alan García Pérez, during the latest State Visit to India, New Delhi, January 1987 (Photo Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India)



Sican Culture funerary mas, Lambayeque (© Magaly Del Solar/ PromPerú)

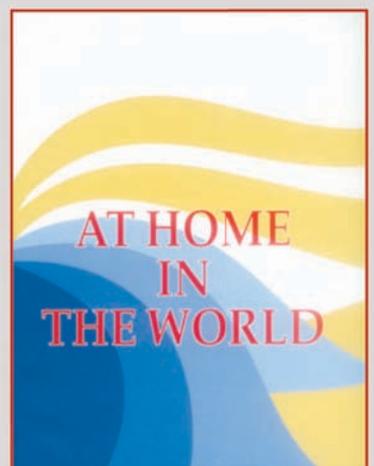
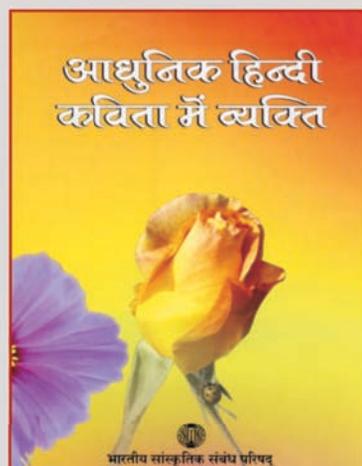
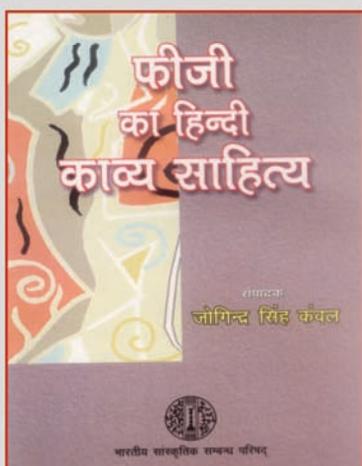
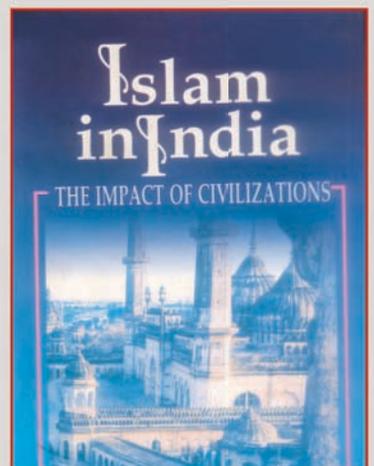
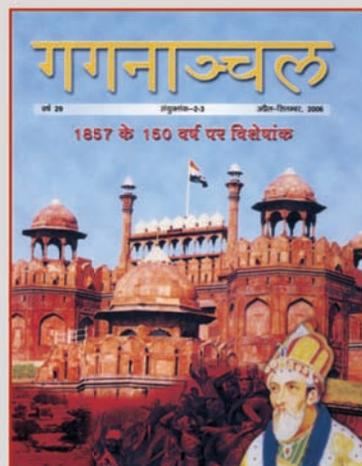
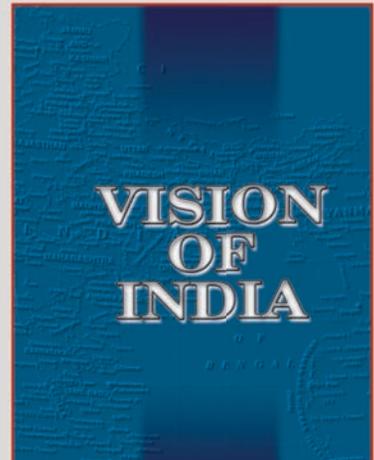
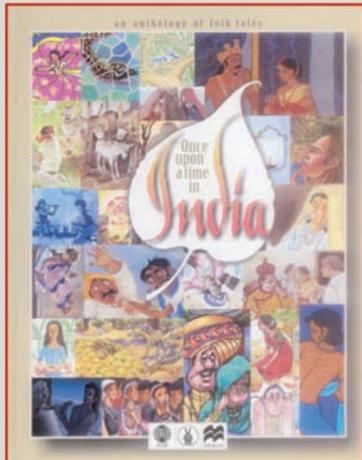


The Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, with the United Nations Secretary General, Peruvian Ambassador Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, September 1983 (Photo Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting India)

had presented his credentials to the then President of India Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. According to the exhibitors the show had other reasons to commend its display as the "the aim of the exhibition is not only to remember past achievements but also to represent the future; the firm decision of Peru and India to continue strengthening the political, economic, and cultural ties between both countries in order to attain the objectives of progress and social inclusion for their people." Thus the aim of this exhibition set the mood for the celebration of the fiftieth year of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Other reminders of this close tie included photographs of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi being presented the UN Population Award of 1983, and the visit of the Prime Minister to the Peruvian pavilion at the exhibition at Delhi's Pragati Maidan.

These official cameos aside, there is also a historic and iconic image of Peru's richest treasure, the citadel of Machu Pichu when the late President of

India Shri K R Narayanan had visited the site in May 1998. Elsewhere there were photographs of visits of Peruvian dignitaries to India, such as the Vice Minister for External Relations when he called on The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shri E Ahamed, during his official visit to India in July 2012. The signing of an agreement with Peru during the first official visit of the then Minister of State for Foreign Affairs during his first official visit to Peru, is another historic take that found much attention on the walls of the gallery. Rounding off this milieu of the official, the personal and the diplomatic, in photographs, is the panoramic view of the Machi Pichu site that commanded much attention during the exhibition days. The colours of the sky contrasting with the ochre tints of the ancient bricks held a symbolic feel in them bringing to mind the journey of collective histories and historic memories within a technical ambit, resulting in a journey of the spirit and the enjoyment of the senses on an equal plane.



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