

Sangam and Shakespeare

I was delighted to read Prof. Indira Parthasarathy's article on theatre. His comparison of Shakespeare's sonnets with *Aha naanooru* and *Pura naanooru* is so interesting for many of us who have read Shakespeare, but are not that familiar with his sonnets and have heard about our own 'naanoorus' which we don't seem to know enough to appreciate the beauty of Sangam literature.

Indira Parthasarathy has made us feel like reading not only Shakespeare's sonnets, but also our own Bharati's prose and understand our Tamil culture during the Sangam period through Sangam literature.

P. Hari Krishnan
Chennai

What is the criterion?

I recently advised one of my good students to apply for the NCERT scholarship for those between the age of 19 to 30 category. Academically a brilliant student, who has done engineering and has proved to be a very good dancer, she also sings and does nattuvangam for others. She has passed her Proficiency grade exam in the first class. A diligent student who after her debut performs in all our programmes in spite of her career deserves all encouragement and opportunities.

I pursue the Mysore school of Bharatanatyam and my institution is 40 years old. We have performed all over the country and abroad.

It is a pity that a good student was

not even called for an audition after submitting all the required credentials. If we do not stand a chance to perform in front of the audition panel of NCERT or ICCR, how do we progress? There should be available chances to every aspiring artist in the country. It is very disheartening indeed after dedicating our entire life for the art.

Dr. Lalitha Srinivasan
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**Inspiration for
Tillana Mohanambal**

As a teenager I was one of the million fans of Kothamangalam Subbu's novel *Tillana Mohanambal*, serialised in *Ananda Vikatan*. My parents loved the serial too and it was a tussle among the three of us to lay our hands on the magazine first when it arrived every week. My father Sadagopan was convinced that the character of the hero Shanmugasundaram, the nagaswara vidwan, was inspired by the maestro T.N. Rajarathnam Pillai. He had listened to him in person and would savour every description of the hero's music. My mother Ananthalakshmi concurred with him and I often listened to them both reminiscing over the Todi and Kambhoji still ringing in their ears.

For a fledgling dancer going through the adavus and the first few items of the Bharatanatyam repertoire, Mohanambal became my dream heroine and I was sure that the author must have been inspired by a great artist like her. I tried to pick up information about great dancers of the thirties and forties. One name came

up again and again—Pandanallur Jayalakshmi.

My music teacher Sundararajan hailed from Ramanathapuram and went into raptures over her dance when I asked him about her. He also put an end to my hopes of watching her perform. "*Enga Raja avaalai aikyam panninduttaare*" (Our king has made her his own).

In the next decades I heard about her from several resources, dancers, natyacharyas, connoisseurs and lay rasikas. The response was the same dreamy eyed reverie as each one tried to describe the greatness of her art. Both her nritta and abhinaya came in for high praise.

Sometime in the nineties I attended a talk on the novel at Amethyst. I met Viswanathan, son of Kothamangalam Subbu, and asked him point blank whether Jayalakshmi was Mohana. He and another gentleman, who was present, affirmed that she was.

Some years ago, I tried to find a photograph of Jayalakshmi for the cover of the Music Academy's Dance Festival brochure. While photographs of her contemporaries were available in plenty I was surprised that not a single photo of hers existed anywhere. I went to the *Ananda Vikatan* archives and other sources, looking for the photo and drew a blank everywhere. At last Ashish Khokar listened to my lament and sent me a rare photo of her as a child dancer, from the Mohan Khokar collection.

I tried to meet her when I came to know that she was a resident of Chennai and was informed that she



Jayalakshmi

did not meet anyone. Disappointed, I surely was. But then I realised that she is and will be dancing in all glory for me and generations to come, immortalised by Kothamangalam Subbu, the rasika non pareil. I was indeed happy to read about Pandanallur Jayalakshmi in *Sruti*.

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan
Chennai

Violin for Hindustani music

Traditionally Hindustani music has been using the dilruba and sarangi as accompanying instruments. In recent years, the harmonium is used more often as it is said that dilruba and sarangi players are not easily available.

Instruments like the harmonium and

keyboard cannot produce minute microtones effectively. A few proficient harmonium players could coax their instruments so to say to bring out the effects. But it is not always easy on the harmonium, as it has its limitations. Because of this, the AIR stations in the southern regions have given up using the harmonium for Carnatic music concerts, except for light music and bhajans.

The violin has been in use as an accompanying instrument for over a century in Carnatic music. Carnatic musicians have successfully used the violin both for solo performances and for accompaniment. Its versatility is unquestionable. So it could well be adapted to Hindustani music for accompaniment.

For instance, M.S. Gopalakrishnan, who was adept in playing both Carnatic and Hindustani music on his violin accompanied a few noted Hindustani vocalists like Omkarnath Thakur and Dattatreya Vishnu Paluskar. Another well known Hindustani violinist N. Rajam accompanied her mentor Omkarnath Thakur.

Ashok Madhav
by email

Rare ragas and kritis

I am 75. I have listened to great vidwans of yesteryear and continue to listen to many vidwans of today.

I find that depth is lacking in today's music. Most vidwans and vidushis do not take the trouble to present less known ragas and unheard kritis, but sing the same ragas and the usual kritis. Serious rasikas who come to learn something from them are alas disappointed. If musicians can take up at least one rare raga and one rare kriti in every concert, they will be doing a great service to Carnatic music.

Another point is the overdoing of the Tyagaraja aradhana every year. Is it not enough if it is conducted only at Tiruvaiyaru? There is no need for further aradhanas anywhere. Moreover, it has always pained me that no such grand aradhana is held for Muttuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastry.

R. Ranganathan
Bengaluru

Obituary

Leela (74), wife of S. Sankaranarayanan, a long term associate of *Sruti* and the author of the iconic series STAMPS, passed away on 8 April 2018 in Chennai.

Anne-Marie Gaston (Anjali), a dancer trained in several classical styles, scholar and author of many books on music and dance, passed away on 5 April 2018.



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