

IFAASD

Souvenir 2026



Celebrating

- 250th Birthday of the United States of America
- 250th Birthday of Muthuswamy Dikshitar
- 106th Birthday of Bharat Ratna Ravi Shankar
- 100th Birthday of Flute Mali

Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego



A Message from the Secretary

Dear Esteemed Patrons,

It is with great pleasure and pride that I extend a warm welcome to you on the occasion of the 19th Annual Indian Music and Dance Festival presented by the Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego. We are deeply grateful for your continued patronage and unwavering support, which have been instrumental in sustaining and enriching the Academy's mission over the years.

This year's festival is especially momentous as we commemorate two historic milestones: the 250th anniversary of the United States of America and the 250th birth anniversary of the great Carnatic composer Muthuswamy Dikshitar. In keeping with our tradition of honoring artistic excellence and legacy, we also pay tribute to the immortal contributions of Bharat Ratna Pandit Ravi Shankar and the legendary flautist Mali, whose music continues to inspire generations across the globe.

The Academy is honored to recognize several eminent artists for their lifetime achievements and contributions to Indian classical arts, including Guru Malladi Suribabu; Sangita Kalanidhis Dr. S. Sowmya and T.M. Krishna; Vidhushi Vishakha Hari; Vidushi Vidhya Subramanyam; and Jaikishore and

Padmavani Mosalakanti. We are also pleased to confer the Samaja Seva Rathna Awards upon Gomathi Balu, Shubha Narayan, Shankar Ramachandran, Geetha Ramnarayan, and Sai Narain in recognition of their exemplary service and dedication to the promotion of classical arts in North America.

The 2026 festival presents an exceptional array of 25 concerts, lecture-demonstrations, and dance productions. Highlights include a novel Sangita Kalanidhi concert; special concerts by Dr. S. Sowmya, Vidwan Delhi Sunder Rajan and Carnatica Brothers; a Hindustani concert by Padma Bhushan Ajoy Chakrabarty; a sitar recital by Pt. Kartik Seshadri; a violin-shehnai jugalbandhi by VVS Murari and Ashwini Shankar; a bansuri concert by Rakesh Chaurasia; and a grand concluding performance by Vidushi Vishakha Hari. San Diego patrons will also have the privilege of watching two distinguished veterans, Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. T. Bakhavathsalam and Pt. Anindo Chatterjee.

The festival will feature classical dance traditions including Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak, and Odissi, with a special focus on the Vazhuvoor Bani. New initiatives this year include a Carnatic choral presentation by the Sishyakulam ensemble and Thakadimi Thakita, a collaborative dance production by Tiruvarur Vaidyanathan with San Diego gurus and their disciples. We will also present two scholarly lecture-demonstrations—Kshethrams by Revathi Subramanian, and a Vazhuvoor Bani lecdem led by Vidushi Vidhya Subramanyam. A special highlight will be the premiere of a biographical stage production on Bharat Ratna Pandit Ravi Shankar, written and produced by Dr. Gowri Ramnarayan and her team. As always, the participation of 150 young students from San Diego, trained rigorously over five months, remains a cherished and integral part of the festival.

Once again, we extend our warm welcome and wish you a deeply enriching and memorable festival experience.

With respectful regards,

Shekar Viswanathan
President and Secretary
Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego



Sangeeta Acharya

Thiruvaiyaru S.R. Krishnan

Co-Chair of Festival

Sangeeta Acharya Thiruvaiyaru S.R. Krishnan is a Vākgèyakāra, Védic scholar, poet, lyricist, composer, journalist, a story writer, and an operatic playwright. Krishnan was trained in Karṇāṭaka Sangītam by his father Gāna-Bhūshaṇam Brahmasri Kumāramangalam Srinivāsa-Rāghavan (KSR or Rāgasri), and by many other legends of the 20th Century including Maharājapuram Viswanātha Iyer, Madurai Mani Iyer and G.N. Bala Subramanyam. Krishnan has been performing since 1955 in India, Far East Asia, Europe, Great Britain, and the United States, accompanied by well-known artists many of whom are leading names in the Indian Music world. Krishnan is also a celebrated exponent of “Dakshina-sampradaya-Sankeertanam, Abhang-Sankeertan & Hari-Kathā traditions”, performing these divine formats encompassing music from Hindusthāni and Karnataka-Sangeeta traditions of India. His Gurus for these ancient traditions include Brahmasri Rāgasri, Brahmasri Nāthamuni Nārāyaṇa-Iyengar, Abhang Sirónmañi Nārāyaṇa-Sāstri, and Swāmi Haridoss Giri (renowned as ‘Guruji’) with whom Krishnan had performed since 1959 through Guruji’s Jeevan-samadhi in 1990s. Krishnan’s earliest Opera based on three versions of “Rāmāyaṇa”, titled Sitāyāscaritam-Mahat or Triveni-Ramayana” was staged first in 1965, in India. A thespian since youth, Krishnan had performed in the prestigious Kalidas Festivals in Ujjain to play leading roles in many of Kalidas’s famed works. He has hundreds of live recordings and compact discs; some of which are also available, on-line, and also on two YouTube channels (Rāgasri & GuruBhakti).

A disciple of His Holiness Jagadguru Kanchi Paramāchārya (68th Pontiff of the Adi Sankara Order), Krishnan continued training in the Vedas and scriptures in Sanskrit College, Madras under the direct auspices of Paramāchārya. His most recent book, ‘Periyavā Kālaḍiyilirundu’ detailing his personal interactions with HH Paramāchārya, over a 10-year period, is well received.

Krishnan with his wife Radha and his daughters/disciples, Priya, Harini & Subha (aka ‘Krishnan-Sisters’ in the music world) are all involved in several philanthropic & charitable causes. Krishnan’s performances are mostly, if not all of them, fundraisers for Charities and Philanthropy and for temples; those live recordings supplement the Krishnans’ support to charities, Homes for the mentally and physically challenged and hospitals for the underprivileged.

A gold medalist in the 1960s from the University of Madras, India, Krishnan has been a Fellow of the Royal Chartered Institute of Bankers (London) and a Fellow of the Institute of Financial Accountants (London). Krishnan has held top executive positions with several International Banks, in Asia, Europe, Great Britain and the US, and has widely traveled the globe for more than 50 years. He is the founder CEO and Chairmen of several reputed US Fiduciary firms that served as Receivers, Trustees, Regulator, Monitor et al. at the nomination of US Federal and State Agencies, Regulators, Banks, and Foreign Governments. He has served as a United States Trustee and also as the Special Deputy Commissioner of California State for Financial Protection & Innovation.

Guru Bhakti: A Tradition in Flux

Algorithm vs. Ancestry: The Changing Face of the Shishya

Salutations to the Patrons of “Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego” (The ‘IFAA’) and the Readers.

Prologue

A couple of years ago, at the Academy's request, I wrote an article titled “*Karṇāṭaka Saṅgītam as we know (or do not know) Today.*” Having contributed two dozen articles to the Academy's souvenirs since their inception, this specific piece was written at the Academy's request to address the evolving landscape of our musical tradition. Despite the inclusion of candid and truthful critiques, the Academy chose to publish the work in its entirety—unabridged and unedited. The crux of the article explored the delicate balance between **Saṅgītam** (the technical music) and **Bhakti** (devotion) as they are practiced and dispensed in contemporary settings. It examined whether the spiritual essence that defines this art form is being maintained or if it has been sidelined by modern performance pressures.

Introduction

To those who may not know me: I am an octogenarian, a devotee of classical music (both Indian systems), a performer for about seventy years, and a teacher for over sixty. Most of what I have written over the last half-century is the result of interactions with my eminent Gurus, starting with Kanchi Paramacharya (HH Chandrasekharendra Saraswati), my father Gāna-Bhūshaṇam Kumāramangalam Srinivasa Raghavan (Ragasri), and legends such as Maharājapuram Viswanatha Iyer, Madurai Mani Iyer, and G.N. Balasubramanyam, as well as Sankeertana Acharyas like Nathamuni Nāṇāji and Swami Haridoss (Guruji). Having lived and served in four continents and traveled to over seventy countries, I have been learning, over sixty years, to look at conflicting viewpoints with empathy and unbiased understanding.

The Subject of My Angst:

The Transactional Teacher and the disinterested student

One subject fleetingly mentioned in my 2024 article (on Karnataka Saṅgītam) is the slow disappearance of serious ‘Gurus’ and the exponential emergence of online, transactional teachers. The flipside of this phenomenon is the progressive decline in the reverence due to a ‘Guru’ from students and parents.

This article has turned out to be a “tough love” critique. It does, nevertheless, validate the logistical difficulties of the diaspora (the “simple mathematics” of student-to-teacher ratios in the US) but insists that the solution for course-correction lies in slowing down and prioritizing artistic integrity over academic or social milestones.

Hindu scriptures, including the *Upanishads* and *Puranas*, describe **Guru Bhakti** (pure devotion to the teacher) as a foundational necessity for all learning, often equating the Guru with the Divine. **The Guru Gita** embedded in the *Skanda Purana* describes this vividly. An oft repeated slokam from that:

“गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः। गुरुः साक्षात् परब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः॥

gururbrahmā gururviṣṇuḥ gururdevo mahēśvaraḥ| guruḥ sāksāt parabrahma tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ||

The Guru creates, sustains knowledge, and destroys the weeds of ignorance. This implies unwavering obedience and selfless service (*seva*), leading to enlightenment.

The *Śvetāśvatāra Upanishad* (6.23) further states that highest devotion must be given to the Guru just as to the Divine, for only then are truths illuminated.

The Modern Shift

The traditional *Guru-Shishya Parampara* in Karṇāṭaka Sangītam is undergoing a generational shift—often conceded as a deterioration. The relationship is becoming a service-provider/consumer model rather than a sacred bond. Several causes contribute to this:

- **Digital Dilution:** Technology is always welcome; but the rise of YouTube and Zoom has diluted the immersive, in-person training that fosters deep respect. Both the Gurus and students bear responsibility for the dilution of Trust. The non-verbal cues and spontaneous interactions that foster deep respect between teachers and students can be challenging to replicate in a digital environment.
- **Generational Values:** Younger generations, exposed to egalitarian or career-oriented education, may struggle with the total obedience required by the ancient system, since many learners add music or dance as another subject of their education!
- **The "Shortcut" Culture:** Pressure for quick success leads students to seek rapid mastery rather than long-term, patient learning. We are producing "performers" rather than "seekers."
- **The Pressure of the "Arangetram":** In the West especially, many parents often impose a "due date" for a debut (Arangetram) to accommodate high school graduation or college résumés. This imposition results in hasty ascendancy to the Stage before the required proficiency is reached.

The Consequences

The above stated pressures result in the erosion of spiritual tradition and a **loss of nuance**. The subtle "tacit knowledge" and practical *manódharma* (improvisation) are difficult to transfer via crash courses. We risk the **pedestrianization of art**, producing copy-cats and "musical mathematicians" rather than consummate musicians with an emotional understanding of the tradition.

Suggestions for Course Correction

As is my habit, I offer my "two cents" *sine ira et studio* (without anger or bias):

Despite these challenges, many seem to assert that the core of the system is adapting. I would very much love to believe that. It is my hope that by addressing these "omissions and commissions," we can strike a balance that preserves the soul of our music for generations to come.

1. The Tripartite Dialogue

While I believe that it may be happening here and there, there must be a **regular and serious** "open and honest dialogue" between **students, parents, and teachers**. This isn't just about scheduling, but about assessing four specific factors:

- The actual capacity and interest of the student.
- The seriousness of the learning process (moving away from "due dates").

- Ensuring the student actually enjoys the music.
- The teacher's genuine satisfaction with the student's progress.

2. Quality Over Quantity (The "Unwanted" Suggestion)

It is my long-held view that Teachers should:

- **Tailor methods of their teaching** to individual student abilities rather than using a cookie-cutter curriculum.
- **Limit student intake** to manageable levels to ensure they are producing "genuine musicians" rather than just students prepped to passing exams.

3. Teacher Accountability and Integrity

The final correction is aimed at the educators/teachers/Gurus themselves:

- **Continuous Learning:** Teachers must augment their own prowess rather than stagnating.
- **The Power of 'No':** Teachers must find the courage to refuse parental pressure to set performance dates (like *arangetrams*) before a student has reached minimum proficiency.

4. Restoring the Guru-Shishya Ethos, and Trust

- There is a call for students to move away from viewing teachers/Gurus as "on-line AI tools" or "crash-course machines." The suggested course-correction is a return to trusting the **Acharya**, where the teacher's word is final regarding when a student is actually ready for the stage.
- The student must trust the teacher wholeheartedly, viewing the Guru not as an AI tool or a machine, but as an 'Acharya' whose word on their progress is final. The result is 'Guru Bhakti.' A significant aspect of the 'Gurukula' system is its emphasis on experiential and hands-on learning. Students learn through direct experience, observation, and practical application of knowledge, which enhances comprehension and retention. This may mostly be lost in online learning.

The Evolution of the Guru-Shishya Bond: From Devotion to Dissent

Some parents or students may read this article with a sense of dissent, noting that I have not yet addressed one of the primary causes for students "dropping out": the unusual (or unbecoming) demands made by a small number of teachers of music and dance, both in India and overseas. I have certainly been made aware of such instances and aberrations over my 45 years of living abroad. However, before I offer my views on these modern grievances, let us look at the historical and scriptural background of this relationship.

Lessons from the Epics

The *Mahabharata*, one of the two unparalleled epics of Bharat (India), describes the triumph of "Good" over "Evil" through thousands of anecdotes. Even the most faithful followers of *Sanatana Dharma* often struggle to reconcile with some of these stories, yet they remain relevant today.

One such anecdote is that of **Ekalavya**, a tribal boy. Acharya Drona refused to accept him as a student, citing his birth and class. Undeterred, Ekalavya revered Drona as his Acharya, nonetheless. By practicing archery before a clay statue of Drona, he became a master, eventually surpassing Arjuna, Drona's favorite student. Tragically, when Drona demanded Ekalavya's right thumb as *Guru-Dakshina* to protect Arjuna's supremacy, Ekalavya complied without hesitation, sacrificing his skill. While complex, this story underscores a depth of reverence where the Guru's authority is honored even at significant personal cost. Many such anecdotes in our scriptures highlight a *Guru-Bhakti* that persists even when demands seem unfair.

A Century of Rigor in Indian Music

The last century of Indian music history is filled with anecdotes of overzealous, and sometimes abusive, teachers who pushed students toward perfection under the banner of discipline. This is often tied to the *guru-shishya paramparā*, the centuries-old tradition of oral instruction.

- **Alladiya Khan**, the doyen of the Atrauli gharana, reportedly forbade the great Kesarbai Kerkar from having children if she wished to continue her training after marriage.
- **Baba Alauddin Khan** was so unrelenting with his demands for *Riyaz* (practice) that his son, Ali Akbar Khan, ran away to Mumbai in his teens to seek independence.
- **Pt. Bhimsen Joshi** famously performed menial tasks, such as washing the clothes of his Guru's entire household, before being allowed to sit for his *Riyaz* with Sawai Gandharva.

While such anecdotes were common among the luminaries of the Karnataka and Hindustani Sangita traditions, such incidents are rare today. Attitudes have shifted drastically, and students now have numerous options to choose, change, or leave a teacher at any time without assigning a reason.

The Global Context: Perfection through Fear

Interestingly, this intensity is not unique to India. The Oscar-winning movie *Whiplash* (2014) depicted a jazz teacher, Terence Fletcher, who believed that "great art is a product of great fear, sacrifice, and total surrender." In one visceral scene, Fletcher hurls a chair at a student and uses physical and verbal abuse to push him toward perfection.

In a discussion with friends of various nationalities, I argued that while such extreme pressure might occasionally produce one "perfect" student, it cannot be the yardstick for education. It is an exception, not a sustainable rule.

The Ideal of Sincerity

Conversely, the *Chāndogya Upanishad* offers a heartwarming contrast in the story of **Satyakāma**. Despite his unknown lineage, his honesty earned him the acceptance of the sage Gautama. Tasked with the menial duty of tending cattle, Satyakāmā's unwavering devotion allowed him to acquire profound spiritual truths from nature itself. His story proves that a student's total faith and humility can unlock ultimate wisdom without the need for brutality.

The Universal Value of Mentorship

This reverence transcends culture. Modern Western scientists often credit their success to the encouragement of their educators; here are just a couple of examples:

Jennifer Doudna (2020 Nobel Prize winner for CRISPR) credited her high school teachers in Hawaii for fostering the resilience she needed to take scientific risks.

Stephen Hawking credited his mathematics teacher, Dikran Tahta, for igniting his passion at age 14. Even after receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009, Hawking continued to acknowledge the teacher who set him on his path.

The Flipside: The Modern Dilemma

However, in recent decades, we see a different kind of injustice—this time directed toward the Gurus. It is now common for parents to bring their children to a Guru, endure years of foundational training, and then, immediately after the student's *arangetram* (debut performance), "dump" the teacher. They then seek out "famous" or "popular" Gurus for "advanced training," often simply to burnish a résumé.

Sadly, if these foundational Gurus are economically underprivileged, they have little power to hold these families to account. They are forced to stomach the insult and move on, watching their years of arduous effort be credited to a more "marketable" name.

Epilogue:

The Cycle of Mentorship: From Student to Guru

Students of today will become responsible adults soon, and there will be none to influence but themselves for all such decisions and behavior.

The Path of the Music Student

Many music students are likely to become performers and teachers entrusted with teaching and grooming future generational musicians. If that thought remains in their minds from today, the Guru-Shishya relationship and reverence will grow to benefit both parties mutually.

The Responsibility of the Mentor

Gurus also have an equal, if not greater, responsibility to be selfless. Their mission is to create a new generation of responsible and respectable Gurus, ensuring the integrity of the art form remains intact.

The Lord Supreme as the Universal Teacher Krishna, advises Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4.34):

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः

"Acquire knowledge by approaching a teacher with humility, inquiry, and service. The wise, who have seen the truth, will instruct you in wisdom."

Ultimately, the cycle of mentorship ensures that the lamp of wisdom never flickers out but is passed from hand to hand with increasing brilliance. As today's students step into the role of tomorrow's teachers, they do more than preserve an art form—they honor the timeless heartbeat of the Guru-Shishya tradition.

Thiruvaiyaru S R Krishnan

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for any name
we might have
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Thank you

*I*ndian Fine Arts Academy honors all those whose gifts of time, creativity and kindness have contributed to the success of our festival.

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IFAASD would like to thank all the families who are hosting the artists during this festival. We sincerely appreciate your generous gesture during our time of need.

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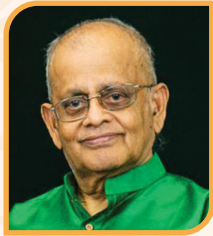
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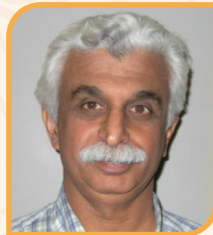
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