

## Light and Sound Musings

A Report on *Music at Mudhol*, a performance initiative to appreciate heritage.  
Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village, Manipal

A new initiative *Music at Mudhol* was launched by Hasta Shilpa Trust on January 20, 2018 at the Hasta Shilpa Heritage Village, Manipal. This is a special experiential tour to increase the public awareness and appreciation of heritage structures through the perspective of the performing arts.

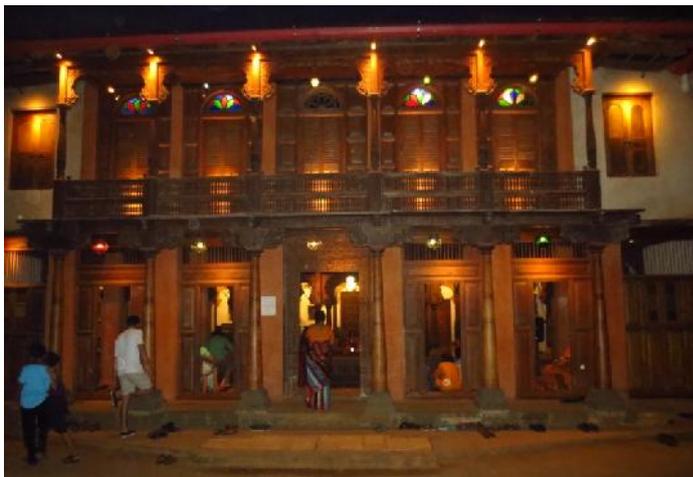
Unlike the popular day tours which focus on conveying information through narratives – historical and anecdotal – this special night tour focused on inviting visitors to experience the heritage structures through illumination and a live music performance. It provided an opportunity to stroll among a select few of the beautifully lit heritage structures and absorb them through a different lens (Lighting Courtesy: Sir Dorabji Tata Trusts and Other Allied Trusts, Mumbai). Texture also came into play: the ground in front of the Mudhol Palace was smoothed with cow dung, as is done in some villages even today, while other parts of the path were rough with coarse gravel.

Time seemed to reverse, and then stood still.

You may ask what the listening of music has to do with the viewing of heritage? The conventional way to link these has been through *Son et Lumiere*, the sound and light shows commonly seen at many tourist and heritage sites, where special lighting and recorded history or music is heard through speakers around the site.

At Heritage Village, the familiar ‘sound track’ of the day tour is the voice of the guide who takes visitors around. Then, there is another sound track – the taped music played as visitors enter the structures, which helps create the ambience for each of them. The founder, Vijayanath Shenoy, had been very particular about which music was to be played for creating a particular mood, and he had personally selected the pieces that are currently played in each of them.

The new initiative, *Music at Mudhol*, adds another dimension to the same idea. Select structures had been lit to enhance the scale and quality of the heritage experience. The gently glowing lighting ironically appeared to be ‘natural’ – seamless parts of the structures themselves, rather than super-imposed, focussed lighting.



**Figure 1: Exterior Lighting of Mudhol Palace**

This constructed nightscape under the dark sky took visitors back in time. At the corner, a small chai angadi was in business, as visitors gathered around, chatted quietly or simply stood and feasted their eyes on the lighted buildings.

Everything was understated, quiet. Even movement appeared to have slowed down to a standstill.

Then, the strains of music could be heard, gently beckoning visitors inside, to sit on chairs or on the ground.

The live classical soundscape qualitatively altered the viewing experience of the heritage structures; sound and light went hand in hand, nudging us into the darker interior of the Durbar Hall of the Mudhol Palace.

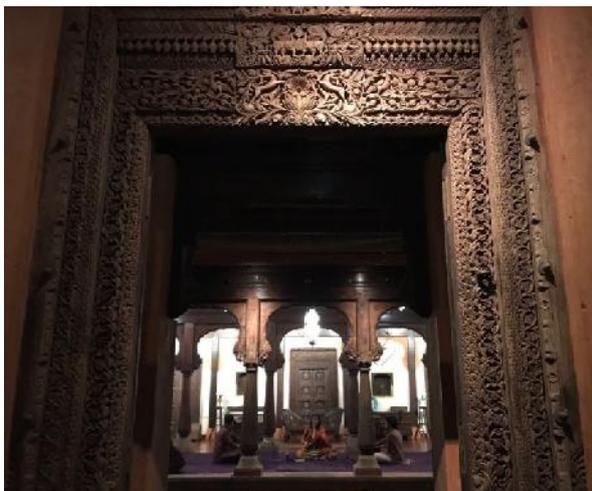
A remnant of a regal palace, the Durbar Hall was built by the Ghorpade Marathas in Bagalkot district about 200 years ago, and was a part of the Mudhol Palace. This was where the raja of Mudhol gave audience to noblemen, military and laity alike. It is the only surviving part of a larger palace, and a beautiful part, with teakwood columns, elaborate arches and lovely double ceiling.



**Figure 2: Interior of Mudhol Palace Durbar Hall**

The overall architecture is pleasing to the eye even though its components are syncretic in design, originating in different cultures. Although built by Hindu rulers, many architectural features were borrowed from buildings of the Mughal dynasty - such as the arches and the spatial arrangement of the columns. With colonisation, additional myriad Occidental influences were appropriated and adapted for Indian conditions. For instance, the central part of the Durbar Hall is open to the sky, allowing warm air to rise up and escape, and drawing fresh air inside from the fully open doors of the Durbar Hall verandah.

A section of the visitors were sitting on chairs under a starry sky, clear in the evening at the tail end of winter in this region. Other visitors were dispersed on the zamakhan spread on the ground in front of the open doors of the verandah, in typical baithak style, leading outdoors where a peaceful calm prevailed, interspersed with the melodies wafting on the clear air. It was a very pleasant and relaxed ambience. Visitors appeared content to listen and muse upon nothing.



**Figure 3: Close-up of open doorway**

The graceful and simple lines of the Durbar Hall structure is beautifully embellished, as could be discerned even in the dim lighting, 'so as to balance substance with texture, and distribute light with shade', in the words of Vijayanath Shenoy.

Several artefacts and spoils of war that the regional satraps may have acquired, were displayed appropriately on the walls, adding to the regal atmosphere of a small principality, two centuries ago.

The singer, Priya Purushothaman, re-created a soundscape appropriate to the period, in Hindustani classical music. Her musical style alluded to the very features of the Durbar Hall, whereby the basic formal structure of classical style is balanced by vocal embellishments influenced by her syncretic training in a variety of forms including Carnatic, Western Classical and Hindustani. Although her renditions were in the Hindustani style, connoisseurs of music may have been able to distinguish several different influences in her renditions.

Priya is the disciple of Aditi Upadhya who was herself trained by her father, the late and incomparable Dinkar Kaikini of the Agra Gharana. She was accompanied by Sagar Bharathraj on the tabla and Prasad Kamath H. on the harmonium.

*Music at Mudhol* was a unique experience – a sound and light show with a time warp built into it. The very mud and wood of which this Durbar Hall was built seemed to get an additional glow, as though revived after long years of somnolence by this wondrous music and light experiential tour. It was veritably a different way to experience heritage.



**Figure 4: Priya Purushothaman in Durbar Hall with Sagar Bharathraj on tabla**