

# KUTCHERI IN THE CLOUDS

## With Webcasting Being More Economical And Convenient, Rasikas Soak In Concerts At Home

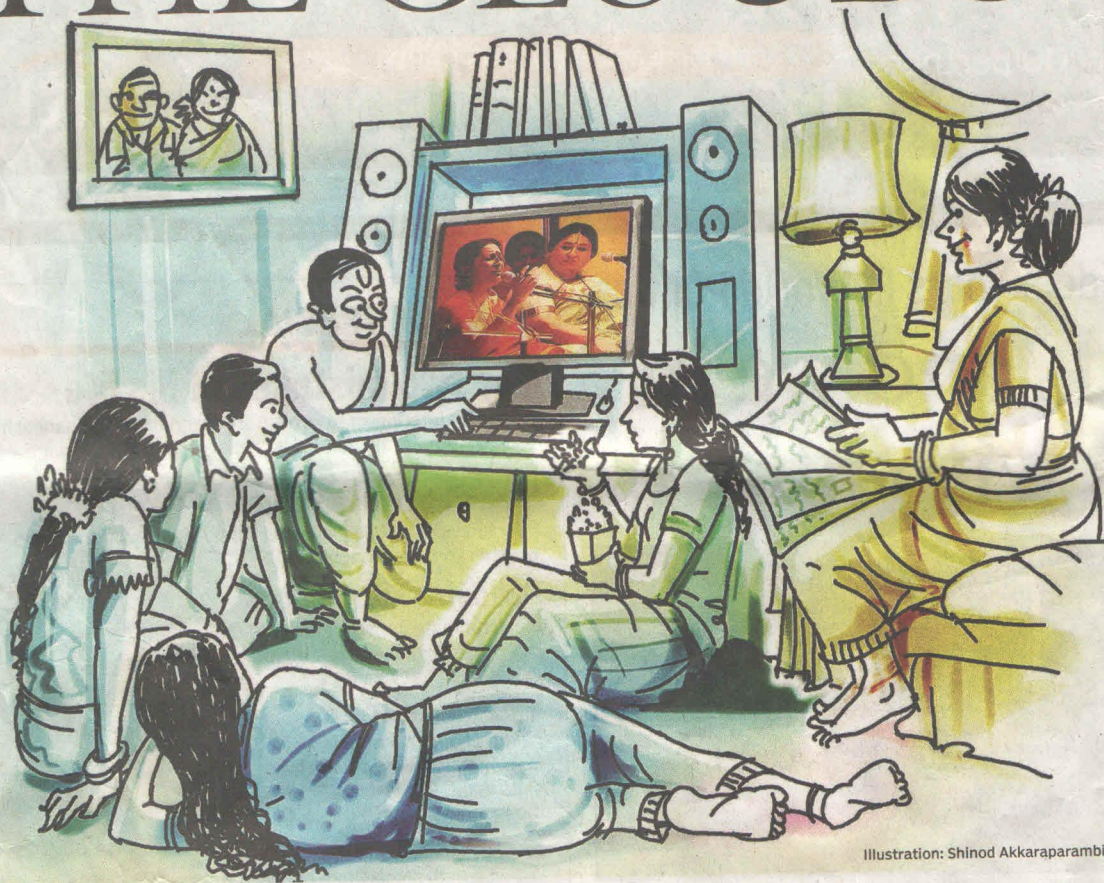


Illustration: Shinod Akkaraparambil

Malini Nair | TNN

**B**anker S Karthiyani lives a stone's throw from the hub of the Margazhi season, in Alwarpet. But a hectic work and home schedule has thwarted her effort year after year to soak in some music and dance at Chennai's yearly culture jamboree.

This year she has found a way out — she has signed up for 20 webcasts of programmes being held by the Kartik Fine Arts club. She and 10 other members of her extended family can watch, at their own time, artistes such as S Sowmya, Rithvik Raja, Ranjani and Gayathri, Sudha Raghunathan, Kadri Gopalnath, TN Seshagopalan and the Malladi brothers performing at the Margazhi music fiesta.

Margazhi purists are bound to sniff at the idea of watching a concert come to life on a small screen. Where is the joy of that spontaneous connect between the musician's genius moment and the rasika's spontaneous 'besh!'? Won't you miss the buzz of

connoisseurs leaning across to verify the raga? What price the thrill of finally locating the ongoing kriti in the ubiquitous little music guide? And what, no excitement over the day's menu at the sabha canteen?

KS Sudhakar, the director of Kalakendra, a portal that deals with all things classical, differs. He says that you can't beat a basket of 20 webcasts at ₹6,000 for sheer convenience. "You could bring out your popcorn and watch at your pace, maybe leave off half way through and resume next morning. No fretting about buying tickets, finding an auto, beating the traffic, not having the time," says Sudhakar.

So far 200 fans have signed up for the deal. Another 100 and it would make for good business. There are music lovers from the US on the list as well as those from Chennai and elsewhere in India. The webcasts began on December 6 and

will go on till January 2, 2014.

The city is teeming with rasikas from across the globe during Margazhi. Carnatic Music Association of North America (CMANA), with 1,500 members, is helping Kalakendra sell the webcast package in the US for \$125. CMANA coordinator Som Sowmyan says an average of 50 families

travel to Chennai every year for the concert season from New Jersey alone. "There is no denying the joy of being in Chennai for the season, but there are a lot of senior citizens in the US who would

find it far more economical and convenient to watch a webcast," says Sowmyan. "We just have to ensure that the audio and video quality is good and the effort is sustained."

This is not the first time the webcast experiment has been tried. Two years ago, vocalist T M Krishna webcast three of his concerts. The

events were priced at \$10 for NRIs and ₹500 for Indians. But Krishna was emphatic — he would not sell the webcasts in Chennai. "I believe the real experience is the best," he had told TOI. Last year, however, he chose not to repeat the effort. "You have to devote a whole lot of time and effort to do webcasts on a commercial basis," points out Sowmyan.

For artists, especially those who are young and looking for the big breakthrough, webcasting is a great way to find a larger audience. "My concert was webcast late November and within days I got responses from the US where I wasn't all that well known," says vocalist Rithvik Raja. "With three cameras focussing on the artists you are unlikely to miss the buzz of live listening. In fact, the music then becomes a much more intimate experience."

But the market for paid-for webcasts has yet to open up in India. Kalakendra's first webcast was of Cho's anniversary celebrations two years ago. The company also webcast some dance and music programmes for free, and also did a few paid ones, in 2011.

"Price point and bandwidth technology are two areas that we need to look at. But this time we are using the Amazon cloud which is the best on the scene and lowers the cost of technology. As for the price, it is cheaper than hiring an auto in Chennai," says Sudhakar.

In recent years, webcasting of events is slowly picking up at institutions that promote culture. It mayn't be taking off as a commercial venture but it certainly is becoming a popular means of making programmes accessible to those who can't attend them. The India International Centre, for instance, has for the last two years, been generously webcasting many of its cultural events. The idea is to reach out to NRIs and non-Delhi members. And for those whose work keeps them tied up in offices during evening hours, it comes as a boon. Most of these webcasts are not just beamed live but also archived for delayed viewing.

There are copyright issues which have to be sorted with artists and, in the case of Margazhi concerts, with the sabhas. Sudhakar has a deal with Kartik Fine Arts this year and all artistes on his list have okayed the webcast. "Advances in technology are making a whole lot of things possible. Why not offer the season bonanza to those who can't make it here for some reason?" asks KM Narasimhan, vice president of the sabha.

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