

# NARI SHAKTI

Unveiling the untold stories  
of women

A Kathak Show



ANAYA SHETH

# Table of Contents

NARI SHAKTI

- 01 Vijay Bhava: An ode to Jhansi ki Rani
- 02 Dholida: Remembering Gangubai
- 03 Lukka Chuppi: Honoring Lata Mangeshkar
- 04 Durga Maa: Feminist Divinity
- 05 Bharat ki Beti: Daughters of India

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## THE PURPOSE

Kathak can be described simply as the art of story-telling. Its various elements: intricate mudras (hand gestures), euphonic rhythms and facial expressions each coalesce to convey a unique tale.

Ever since I was introduced to the concept of stories, courtesy of my grandparents' nightly bedtime tales, I have been enamored with the idea of sharing them. Yet, as I've grown older, I have found that some characters are often left out - their stories forgotten or forbidden.

In this curation, I hope to unveil these accounts. Each performance chronicles the story of a powerful Indian heroine from history or mythology, as I craft a choreography to detail the essence of their being, their contributions and their personalities.

In Sanskrit, *Nari Shakti* means woman power. With Kathak as my medium of expression, I revel in the power latent in the stories of historical figures, stories of theological goddesses, and stories of myself.





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# DHOLIDA: GANGUBAI KATHIAWADI

2022 witnessed the first overt attempt to share the hushed story of Gangubai Kathiawadi, a sex-worker who played a revolutionary role as an Indian social activist in the film: Gangubai. Inspired by Sanjay Leela Bhansali's narrative and film-making prowess, I was intrigued to learn more about Gangubai's story.

A victim of human trafficking, Gangubai was forced into prostitution at a brothel in Mumbai's Red Light District: Kamathipura. With time, Gangubai fought to retrieve the agency that was snatched away from her, and became a powerful, elected leader in Kamathipura. She cared for women with similar experiences as hers, advocating for the rights of sex-workers, their children and eunuchs through her political, capital and social presence. Fighting bravely against adversity, she became my personal inspiration.



The performance is inspired by the trademark song of the film, wherein women of the brothel come together in solidarity with their leader, celebrating their bodies, their choices and the independence they boldly fought to acquire.

The circular formations in the performance signify the shackles of patriarchy imposed on Gangubai and her community. Eventually, she breaks through the circles, liberating herself and others.

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# LUKKA CHUPPI: LATA MANGESHKAR



In my 12 years of training as Kathak dancer, I fostered an intimate relationship with Indian Classical music. Naturally, Lata Mangeshkar, an icon of traditional Indian music and cinema, was a strong influence in her journey.



As the eldest of 5 siblings, Lata became the sole breadwinner after her father's demise at age 13. Born out of necessity, her musical career spanned almost 8 decades. She earned numerous awards, most notably Padma Bhushan and Bharat Ratna, the highest national honor for an Indian citizen.



This performance honors Lata Mangeshkar's legacy with her renowned song, *Lukka Chuppi*, which shares the tragic story of a mother unable to find her son. The choreography sheds light on the choices of motherhood, as well as its enduring hardships.

Playing dual roles of son and mother caught in an eternal game of *lukka chuppi* (hide and seek), I hope to express the unbreakable bond between them.

# FEMINIST DIVINITY: DURGA MAA

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Growing up in India, I was always exposed to the vast theology of Hinduism. Fascinated by mythology, I was particularly curious about Durga Maa, who as a Goddess possessed in equal parts love and fierce protection.

This song is originally composed by Guru Narendra Krishna. Specifically, its lyrics speak to Durga Maa's purpose of creation: Maysashur Mardani. Legends state that Durga Maa was a culmination of the 3 powers powers of the universe: creation, preservation and destruction.

This performance demonstrates Durga Maa's battle to defeat the demon Mahishasura, a powerful feat only she could accomplish. Worshipped as the protector of mankind from evil, Durga Maa is a warrior.



In this character, I present the duality of femininity: simultaneously peaceful yet powerful, gentle yet fierce.

While canonical mythological literature typically showcase one-dimensional female characters, this piece hopes to explore Durga Maa's dynamic and multi-layered nature to unveil the feminist aspects of the Hinduism.

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# BHARAT KI BETI: INDIA'S DAUGHTER, GUNJAN SAXENA

My great-grandmother never completed her education. My grandmother was forbidden to pursue her dream career in medicine. My mother is a pioneer of the finance world, in the first generation of working women in her extended family. I am ambitious, as I aspire to pursue education at university, and make a change to the world.

This performance, *Bharat ki Beti*, *India's Daughter*, aims to explore the evolving role of Indian women in society. Increasingly liberated and empowered, each has a story to share.

The piece is inspired by Gunjan Saxena, one of the first women to join the Indian Air Force (IAF) as a pilot. The soundtrack is part of the biopic that presented Gunjan's story and reflects pride and love for her as a Daughter of India, and an incredible asset in our defense forces.



Gunjan Saxena is a testimonial for ambitious Indian girls. She persisted through recruitment hurdles and continued to face challenges as a minority in her workplace. Ultimately, she achieved what she set out to.

At the intersection of patriotism and feminism, this performance commemorates the powerful women that have served their country, united by their devotion to  
India. **05**



# MEET OUR TEAM

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## LEAD DANCER

Anaya Sheth

## CHOREOGRAPHY & MUSIC

Guru Narendra Krishna Gangani

## HOST MC

Shilpa Mehta

## FAMILY

Nipa & Utpal Sheth

Aryaa Sheth

Aruna & Late Hemendra Sheth

Indumati & Srikant Vasa

Nisha, Sandeep & Rhea Mehta

Ushma, Avinash & Shaurya Sule

## PLANNING & CONCEPT

Nisha Mehta

Vijay Dalwani

Kedar Bhagat

Nipa Sheth

Aryaa Sheth

## COSTUMES

Deepika Shroff

## MUSICIANS

Guru Narendra Krishna Gangani

Anurita Anupam Rai

Nitin Shinde

Manoj Ram Prasad

Rahul Kathak

Ajay Kumar



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SEPTEMBER 26TH, 2023

**VENUE:**

National Center for  
Performing Arts (NCPA),  
Nariman Point,  
Mumbai, 400021

**TIME:**

5:30 PM onwards