

Events

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Nammu Haada brings North Karnataka’s hidden soundscape to Kochi Biennale

Young musicians carry North Karnataka’s grandmother songs to the Kochi Biennale on Feb. 8 at Bastion Bungalow.

This has finished · 8 February 2026

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Dates 8 February 2026
Times 8:00 PM
Part of Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2025–26

Where

St. Francis CSI Church
Church · Saint Francis Church Road, Fort Kochi

Drawn from OpenStreetMap, by its contributors.

You've just missed it — take it home anyway

The 2025–26 Biennale ended on 31 March 2026. The next is expected around December 2027. We made a book of all 72 exhibits, venue by venue, with the photographs — 76 pages, 9 MB.

"Nammu Haada" means "Our Songs" in Kannada. It is a folk music performance at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. It brings the sound worlds of North Karnataka's Deccan plateau to Fort Kochi.

In the semi-arid landscape of North Karnataka, women have sung for centuries. They sang at births and deaths, during harvest and migration, in moments of devotion and quiet dissent. These songs have never fit neatly into religious or classical categories. They have simply been life itself, passed mouth-to-mouth across generations.



On Feb. 8, 2026, at 8 p.m., these voices will travel 900 kilometers to Fort Kochi's Dutch-era Bastion Bungalow. They are carried by an ensemble of young musicians who refuse to let them fade.

What is "Nammu Haada"?

"Nammu Haada" is a folk music performance. It brings the sound worlds of North Karnataka's Deccan plateau to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. This is not polished concert hall fare. These are domestic songs and life-cycle songs. They were sung while grinding grain, rocking babies to sleep, or mourning the dead.

These songs lived in kitchens and fields, not archives.

The region they come from has been shaped by centuries of movement, exchange, and resistance. Lingayat and Sufi traditions intersect here. Vachana poetry, the radical 12th-century verses of Basavanna that waged war against untouchability, mingles with bhakti devotion and pastoral

melodies. It is a syncretic musical landscape. A single song might carry traces of agrarian labour, caste-based occupations, and seasonal migrations all at once.

The present day head post office of Fort Kochi has a story. Portuguese mail from Goa, Diu and Daman, and Malaysia came to Fort Kochi for sorting and dispatch. Their head post office was attached to the San Antonio Monastery east of St. Francis Church, where the present day head post office now stands. The mail ship, well protected, would leave for Fort Kochi once in three months. The arrival of the mail ship from Europe was a great event in Fort Kochi.

Kalaburgi Kala Mandali: Young Voices, Ancient Knowledge

The performance is led by **Kalaburgi Kala Mandali**, an ensemble of young musicians from across Kalaburgi district. They are part of the Urban Folk Project. They got here through patient, sustained practice. The Mandali did not come from a workshop or a grant cycle. They formed through years of listening, training, and collective work.

Their mission is to build a home for oral histories that have largely stayed outside recorded and written archives.

Shilpa Mudbi: A Decade of Listening

Shilpa Mudbi is a vocalist, theatre practitioner, and co-founder of the Urban Folk Project. She is central to the performance. Shilpa's path to folk music is deeply personal. She was born in Bangalore but rooted in Mudbi, a village in northernmost Karnataka. She learned many of these songs from her grandmother Gundamma.

When Gundamma passed, Shilpa made a choice: move to Kalaburgi and dedicate herself to the region's vanishing folk forms. For over a decade, her work has focused on the folk traditions of North Karnataka. She pays particular attention to voice, labour, caste, and how these songs are passed down. She has collected over 60 songs, including "sobane" (wedding songs), "jogula" (lullabies), work songs, and mourning songs. Her

practice prioritizes ethical process, working with people, and continuity over taking from communities.

> **“If I do not have a great relationship with the artists I’ve learned from, I do not have the confidence to practice their art.”— Shilpa Mudbi**

This is not preservation for preservation’s sake. It is about relationships between teacher and student, past and present, margin and mainstream.

Why This Matters at Kochi Biennale

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale has always been a space where unexpected encounters happen. Contemporary art meets Kerala’s layered history of trade, migration, and cultural exchange. “Nammu Haada” extends that conversation geographically. It pulls in the sound world of a region most visitors have never heard.

The venue itself matters. Bastion Bungalow was built in 1667. It was originally a Dutch colonial residence. Now it hosts many of the Biennale’s performance programmes. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2025–2026 schedule lists Bastion Bungalow as a venue for performance programmes.

There is something fitting about songs of labour and resistance filling a space built by empire.

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Fort KochiBastion Bungalow
Historic building
Head Post Office, Kochi
Post office