The Villu Paatu continues to have a fan following, although scattered, thanks to its performers who capture the attention of the listeners with their unique presentation skills, writes Anushree Madhavan

A time when popular folk art forms are losing sheen and popularity in many parts, there are still groups which perform the art to let youngsters know about it and keep it alive among them. The Villu Paatu or the Bow Song is one such traditional folk art form that still commands a decent following due to its attention-grabbing jingles punctuated with dialogues and songs.

Coimbatoreans got to watch a Villu Paatu performance this week by a troupe comprising members of Kuvvunar Subbu Arumugam’s family at the ongoing Navarathri function at Isha Yoga.

“Villu Paatu is an ancient way of storytelling through songs. Through songs we impart knowledge on various stories and also give mes- sage. Villu Paatu is a form of imparting knowledge in an interesting way,” says Bhurathi Thirumagan, daughter of Subbu Arumugam, who is also the lead singer in the troupe. The toughest message can also be simplified and conveyed to the listeners.

She says, the art form which originated thousands of years ago, could be considered the ‘Mother of all folk arts’. The troupe used the Villu used by their father for about 50 years. “The string is made of cow’s rib and it has never broken till today,” she adds with pride.

Villu Paatu originated during the times of the kings. A king who had done many misdeeds was asked by his minister to sing a song in the middle of a forest using his bows and arrows to pay for his sins. “Hence the name, Villu Paatu (Villu means bow in Tamil),” explains Bhurathi.

During a Villu Paatu performance, one member of the troupe would listen in specially and ask questions in between. There is an impression in people’s mind that folk art belongs to villages, which has to change,” she avers.

While all the temples in South India are promoting this folk music, the music sabhas and big organisations think twice before calling a folk artist in her opinion.

Presently, there are about 100 Villu Paatu artists in Tirunelveli and Nagercoil, where the art form is said to have originated. But as the awareness is less they are not recognised. Bhurathi does not want Villu Paatu to be taken up in movies to create awareness. “The purity of this form will be lost,” she signs off.

**NAVARATHRI CELEBRATIONS**

As a part of the Navarathri celebrations Isha Yoga Centre has organised different programmes since October 7. Dance shows, recitals, folk performances, theatre and other events are being conducted on each day. Isha Yoga is also conducting a crafts exhibition called ‘Hands of Grace’, which displays a unique craft exhibition featuring traditional handicrafts from across India. The exhibition, which is on till October 13 has around 50 craft groups showcasing items including furniture, interior décor, garments, organic body care products, stone and metal crafts, accessories, and gift items. A food mela also has been organised, according to a press release.